



PROJECT

FAST FORWARD

Planning and Land Services Wrap Up Report on Audit Recommendations January 2009

This detailed report closes the implementation phase of the 2004 Audit of the Development Permitting Process and the two subsequent audits from Zucker Systems.

A stakeholders group was established in 2005 to monitor and assist in the implementation process. The group was named the PALS Audit Oversight Committee (AOC). The majority of recommendations were implemented as suggested in the audit. Others were modified with concurrence of the AOC to avoid changing preferred business practices.

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 Audits.
- This 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 Oversight Committee for the time they devoted to the process over the last three years. Last, our thanks to the County Council and the County Executive for their guidance and support through this process.

In the remaining pages we list each recommendation. We have tried to briefly touch on how the recommendations were dealt with. Recommendations were implemented to the extent we could. While the implementation phase may be done we continue to meet with stakeholders and look for improvement.

Respectfully Submitted

Evaluation of the Development Permitting Process

Delivered November 2004

Comments provided and or collated by:

Gordon L. Aleshire, PALS Assistant Director – Building Official

1. Recommendation: The report should be distributed to the focus groups and relevant staff and generally made available to the public for review and input.

A copy of the Audit was sent to interested stakeholder, business, and community members and placed on the County Webpage within 30 days of receiving it.

2. Recommendation: The Audit Committee, County Council, County Executive, and relevant department heads should review this study and agree on an implementation plan, which should include:

- An agreed-upon timetable and work program
- Costs estimates and method of funding

A plan was presented and adopted by the County Council in March 2005. Except for the reduction of backlog, it did not contain a time table as suggested in the audit. The plan included the establishment of a PALS Audit Oversight Committee made up of PALS staff, stakeholder, business, and community members. This committee was to help PALS with specific implementation strategies and well as prioritize which recommendations to address first.

3. Recommendation: As part of the implementation plan, the County Executive, County Council, PALS and related departments should consider including the 11 implementation items outlined below.

Several of the eleven recommendations proposed in item 3 for this short term plan were implemented. Others were delayed pending funding or other resource needs. A summary follows:

1. Close the phones and public access to PALS every Friday for several months. Make these informal dress days and even consider the possibility of free pizza. During these Fridays all PALS staff including Advance Planning and other department staff located within PALS should focus on cleaning up backlogged permits, starting with the oldest first.

While we did not close public access we did create some block time when we did not answer phones. The backlog was a priority of 2005 and was reduced from 1200 to zero by the end of that year. Since then backlog has been kept below 100.

2. On an interim basis, say for three or four months, transfer four staff from Advance Planning to work on clearing up backlogged cases.

Some reallocation of staff has been done over the last 4 years to address work volumes.

3. Allow all staff that is willing to work paid overtime (not-comp time) up to ten hours per week for two weeks in a row with one-week normal time until the backlog is gone.

Overtime was used to help reduce the backlog.

4. Public Works to reallocate existing staff to:

- Clear up any backlog of cases in Traffic and Sewer and begin to meet the recommended new performance standards.
- Allocate several engineers on a temporary basis to work with PALS Development Engineering to clear up the backlog of cases.

Public Works was able to meet new performance measures. No reallocation of engineers was implemented.

5. Each division or section should give highest priority to the work that they do for another division or section. Normally each division or section, as might be expected, gives priority to the key items they are responsible for. However, under this approach the entire system can break down for the customer. Each division or section needs to see the other divisions or sections as their customers.

This option was not adopted. Applications were reviewed in order of application date. With the priority on backlog this issue took care of itself.

6. Hire the recommended Assistant Operations Director as soon as possible. Until this is completed as well as during a transition period, reassign one or two management level “can do” managers to PALS from other County functions to assist with the implementation.

A second Assistant Director was added in 2006. Since then one position is now vacant.

7. Fill all vacant and newly authorized positions as soon as possible. The County’s Human Resources Department may need to take a different approach in this regard. An open and fast recruiting and hiring process will be essential.

Twenty additional staff positions were recommended by the Audit to meet staffing to work load ratios. The ratios were developed in conjunction with performance measures on permit review and other customer service goals. The positions were authorized and hired over a 3 year period.

2005 – 7 positions

2006 – 6 positions

2007 – 7 positions

Other positions were added during the same time period to address other program needs. Programs such as the Directions Package of critical area regulations and the NPEDS surface water regulations.

In late 2007 and through 2008 the downturn in the housing market resulted in lower revenue for the Department. As a result there are currently 38 fewer positions than were authorized in the 2008 budget.

8. Hire outside consultants to help clear up the backlog. Initially, and as a minimum, this should include two consultants each for Building, Development Engineering, Current Planning and Resource Management. We suggest an initial budget allocation of \$400,000.

An initial allocation of \$700,000 was provided. Consultants were hired and were helpful in reducing the backlog. The Department spent \$400,000 on outsourcing plan reviews and overtime to eliminate the backlog.

9. Consider hiring a consultant to assist with and monitor implementation.

This was not implemented. Staff was able with help from a stakeholders group to monitor the implementation process.

10. Begin a homeowners and small business night to receive and process selected small types of permits.

This was not implemented. We did start a monthly workshop aimed at infrequent users. It has been difficult to reach this group of customers but we continue to offer it.

11. Ask Public Works, Health and Fire to assign staff as necessary to both clear up their portion of the backlog as well as staff to the new performance levels.

PALS, Public Works, Health and Fire worked together to eliminate the backlog by the end of 2005.

4. Recommendation: The policy maker interviews, focus group comments, and scores and survey responses should be shared with staff for the purpose of discussing the various recommendations in this report and brainstorming additional ideas to answer customer concerns.

The recommendation was to share the report with staff for the purpose of brainstorming ideas and to answer customer concerns. We have done this through various stakeholder meetings and will continue to do so.

5. Recommendation: The County should adopt the following over-riding mission and goals and understanding to guide the improvement efforts for the development permitting process.

- The process should be a process, not a growth policy or anti-growth policy.
- The process should be a partnership between the applicant, government and citizens.
- The process should be customer focused and easily understood by all customers, whether a homeowner, a builder, a community member or a policy maker.
- While staff has certain regulatory roles, the emphasis should be on problem solving for both the applicant and citizens while always focusing on building a better Pierce County.
- It is recognized that a poor development permitting process can result in higher-end product costs, decreased development quality, impact on citizens' quality of life, and lost business for both new and existing businesses.
- The County's economic development approach or directives should be recognized as public policy deserving special attention and priority in the development permitting process.

Items in the proposed mission statement are implied in our current statement. The mission statement is reviewed annually.

6. Recommendation: The County should adopt the following guidelines for the development permitting system.

- Performance measures with time targets should be set for all reviews and approvals.
- The goal should be clarity and consistency of all reviews.
- Project managers should be appointed for all projects that require review by more than one division or section.
- Permit Coordinators should monitor all timelines and the work of project managers.
- Comprehensive first-time reviews should be the norm and monitored by supervisors.
- Clear educational material should be available for the public.
- Extensive training should be completed by all staff.
- The adequate number of trained staff should be available to carry out the activities.
- Good managers are essential to manage the overall system.

The elements proposed were and remain current goals in our ongoing development of the permit system or process. As we worked through recommendation #117 regarding lobby wait times, these items were part of our review.

7. Recommendation: Management and supervision issues within PALS should be addressed by:

- Creating a new Assistant Director position and reorganizing the Department.
- Broadening the definition of which positions are considered Senior Management.
- Conducting 360-degree evaluations for all managers and supervisors.
- Developing a management and supervisor training program.

The Building Official was re-classed into the new Assistant Director position, however, the reorganization was deemed unnecessary. The 360 degree evaluation was accomplished through our 2nd employee opinion survey. We continue to work with Human Resources for management and supervisory training.

Issues Impacting All Functions

Comments provided and or collated by:

Gordon L. Aleshire, PALS Assistant Director – Building Official

8. Recommendation: The various development and permitting functions should calculate their backlog of cases.

The number of backlogged applications was calculated in November of 2004. We continue to report backlog on a monthly basis. Reports from each reviewing Section are posted on the Department's web page.

9. Recommendation: The County should initially allocate \$400,000 for consultants to work on the backlog but monitor progress on a monthly basis.

The County Council allocated \$700,000 of which we spent \$ 400,000 on outsourcing plan reviews and overtime to eliminate the backlog.

10. Recommendation: PALS fees and budgets should follow the following guidelines:

- The development and permitting activities should be 100% fee supported.
- Any excess fees should not go to the General Fund but should go into a reserve account for any downturn in development activity.
- Staffing levels and related budgets should correspond to workload. However, this will require a better way to calculate workload and staffing demands.
- Over time it may be appropriate to add the 8% external overhead to the fee structure. However, given the current need to improve PALS productivity and needed fee increases, any attempt to capture this 8% should be delayed until performance meets industry expectations.

The 2006, 2007, and 2008 budget processes were completed. There is no recommendation to change the budget process or funding priorities. The Master Builders Association asked for a fee study in 2008 but none was authorized. Council did request PALS to develop a fee policy in 2008. See page 62 of this report for the results of that work.

11. Recommendation: Cost for PALS needed upgraded and expanded facilities should be absorbed by the General Fund until PALS service levels meet industry expectations.

Facility upgrades were funded by PALS' under expenditures in 2005. Decisions about the funding sources in 2006 and 2007 were made as part of the budget process.

12. Recommendation: The County should consider changes to the budget document as outlined above.

The budget document is reviewed annually as part of the budget process. There were minor changes in the 2006 document. No fee policy changes have been made.

13. Recommendation: The County Executive and County Council should discuss the desirability of annually adopting an Advance Planning work program.

The Advance Planning work program is reviewed by the Planning Commission and County Council before it is implemented.

14. Recommendation: PALS should conduct a study to determine if the code enforcement functions should all be centralized in the Code Enforcement Section.

An initial study of County regulations has been done to see if there were any legal constraints. No restraints were found and PALS continues to look for opportunities to consolidate. In addition, to the legal analysis, a Feasibility Study was completed which supports consolidation of some of the enforcement functions within the department. Some consolidation has occurred but not to a fully centralized Section.

15. Recommendation: Section 6 of Chapter 18.40.020B, PCC should be modified to simply determine if the proposed use is an allowed use in the Comprehensive Plan.

Determining if the proposed use is allowed under the Comprehensive Plan, is a critical part of the intake process. Training on the Plan and continued use of Submittal Standards (a permit checklist) helps streamline this determination during the permit application intake process.

16. Recommendation: The County ordinance should specify that for purposes of completeness related to vesting of regulations, all applications that are accepted for processing, both building and planning, are declared complete.

All applications accepted by PALS meet this standard. It is unclear why the audit thought there was a difference with planning applications.

17. Recommendation: PALS and the County should give high priority to integrating the staff time system with the payroll system and incorporating this into PALS Plus.

We have not pursued this recommendation. PALS will continue to look at integrating staff time cards with the payroll system and PALS Plus.

18. Recommendation: PALS should work to resolve the data questions raised in this report.

PALS has addressed the issues raised. Inconsistent data entry is also addressed in the ongoing training plan on the new permit system. The use of drop down selections rather than a 2 or 4 letter code is expected to address the inconsistency issue.

19. Recommendation: Properly sized and standard facilities should be made available to PALS. The County should retain a qualified space expert to conduct a study and recommend options to relieve the existing overcrowded workspace conditions.

Erickson McGovern Architects was hired to do a space study. The final report was submitted in August 2005. We have reviewed the draft and adopted some of the recommendations. The final workstations were purchased at the end of 2007 and are now installed.

20. Recommendation: PALS overtime budget for 2005 should be increased to \$100,000.

The County Council addressed this issue as part of item #9 with an initial allocation. Overtime is addressed as part of the annual budget too.

21. Recommendation: PALS should adopt overtime rules.

The Department's informal overtime policy follows the general points outlined in this recommendation.

22. Recommendation: Management throughout PALS should maintain their commitment to the PALS on PALS action plans. The Human Resource facilitator and the PALS facilitators should provide additional candid feedback to management.

The department is fully committed to following through on this process. A second employee survey was done in 2006. Follow up meetings in all sections were held to work on areas of concern by staff.

23. Recommendation: First-time plan reviews should be comprehensive. New items should not be added on subsequent checks unless project changes dictate new conditions. This standard should apply to all departments involved in development or permitting.

This has always been a standard for the department.

24. Recommendation: PALS should develop a public information program.

PALS continues to meet with stake holders in various forms. We publish monthly productivity reports to the web page and through various email distribution lists.

25. Recommendation: PALS management should review sick leave data and monitor usage as appropriate.

A report from Human Resources (HR) on sick leave data were reviewed early in 2005. Supervisors are continuing to watch for inconsistencies.

26. Recommendation: Install and implement a Field Inspector's Hand-Held Computer System that is compatible with the new permit system.

The permit system is designed with field operations in mind. The Fire Marshal has an operational field system in PALS Plus. PALS has much of the hardware needed to deploy. Additional hardware such as car mounting hardware for the laptops will be included as a supplemental budget request in 2010.

27. Recommendation: PALS should make clear to staff the advantages of Quick View and provide additional training as necessary.

Training is offered on an as needed basis. It is a key component of the permit system.

28. Recommendation: PALS should work with GIS staff to solve any concerns in relation to the addressing function.

PALS has an ongoing coordination with the GIS department.

29. Recommendation: Following discussion with the industry, the County should consider requiring electronic final plat submittal.

There is some electronic plan submittal being done now. Making this mandatory would require a significant hardware upgrade that is not supported by our business model.

30. Recommendation: Install and use an optical imaging system to allow storage and ready retrieval of plans and documents.

PALS Plus allows for the storage of plans and documents.

31. Recommendation: The County should continue to support PALS Plus with, at a minimum, the expenditures shown in Table 21.

The project budget was extended to June of 2006 and the remaining hardware was purchased. The 2 developer users that were recommended were changed to Department Information Specialists (DITS). One was deleted in the 2008 budget.

**Table 21
PALS+ Schedule and Budget**

Development Milestones	Was	Now
Online Permit information Internet, Requirement gathering starts		
User Developers Testing, testing starts		
Deng Testing, testing starts		
Production phase 1, deliver	Dec 2003	June 2004
Phase 2 Bldg, Requirements gathering starts	Dec 2003	June 2004
IVR PASS conversion	Dec 2003	July 2004
Phase 3 Fire, Requirements gathering starts	March 2004	Sept 2004
Phase 4 Planning, Requirements gathering starts	March 2004	Jan 2005
Phase 5 Resource Mgt, Requirements gathering starts	June 2004	April 2005
Phase 6 Utilities, Requirements gathering starts	Sept 2004	July 2005
Phase 6 Health ?, Requirements gathering starts	Sept 2004	?
Estimated Expenditures for 2004		
Contract Programmer	\$120,000	
Cash Register	\$10,000	
Plotter	\$10,000	
Backfill 2 User Developers for third year	\$170,000	
Total	\$310,000	

32. Recommendation: PALS management should prepare detailed specifications for data entry and management reports for PALS Plus.

The programming for Pals Plus addresses the points raised in this recommendation. Management reports are available and data entry help screens are built in.

33. Recommendation: PALS should establish cost estimate for PALS Plus improvements and incorporate these into future budget requests. High Priority items listed in Table 22 should be added to future budgets.

PALS plus and other computer needs have continued to be part of our annual budget requests. Until 2008, we continued to replace 1/3 of our computers annually. With the downturn in permit revenue replacement is being deferred. Other items in Table 22 remain goals for the future.

**Table 22
PALS+ Wish List**

High Priority
Budget item to replace 1/3 of the computers each year with allocations for server upgrades and other misc. items.
Additional IT support staff
Expand types of permits/services that can be done on the Internet (base plan permits, time extensions etc.).
Modify PALS+ to make it functional in the field when no connection is available (field use).
Incorporate file/plan check in/out into PALS+.
Wireless access to our network for staff in the permit lobby with tablet PC's they can bring with them when called to the counter.
Wireless access in the lobby for our customers (security must be addressed).
Timecard integration into PALS+
Medium Priority
Imaging system to store paper submittals (integrated with PALS+).
Integrate the cash register with PALS+
Permit kiosks in Lowe's/Home Depot to get permits that are available online and other info.
Integrate PALS+ with Groupwise (our e-mail and calendar software).
Low Priority
Convert PALS+ to a web-browser based application.
Establish a preferred customer system with benefits.
Enhance the inspection scheduling system.
Internet access to getting in line at the permit counter.

34. Recommendation: All development and permitting departments and divisions should adopt a policy that all phone calls be returned the same day received.

The department has had a policy of returning phone calls within 24 hours since the mid 1990s. The department has decided to stay with this policy and to look at ways to monitor how successful we are. Many staff have this requirement as part of their annual performance appraisal.

35. Recommendation: All development and permitting departments and divisions should install a modern phone features for good customer service.

The Information Technology Department made an upgrade in late 2007 when a second Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) phone was added to the Development Center Queue - making a total of two.

Equipment and software (Nortel Contact Center) that will allow additional advanced call features has been delivered and installed. It lets callers know that "they are caller number ##" OR announce their estimated wait time.

Software was purchased to enhance our voice response in PASS and to do call-out to permit holders regarding the status of their permits. Some programmatic enhancements have been done to the PASS voice response system also.

36. Recommendation: Continue to expand the E-Government Service to allow applicants to apply for permits and submit plans through the Internet.

This topic is one that we continue to work towards. It was on hold while the PALS Plus team completed programming the initial conversion. We are currently working on incorporating the cash register into PALS Plus. There are several enhancements to PALS Plus that have been prioritized for the next phase. As we can, web services will be folded into this process.

Building Safety Division

Comments provided by:

Mike Noot, Plan Review Supervisor and

Steve Widener, Building Inspector Supervisor

37. Recommendation: Adjust budget to allow for specific equipment for Building Inspectors.

PALS budget has always had provisions for small equipment such as tape measures, levels, screwdrivers, gauges, calculators, coveralls, and similar equipment.

38. Recommendation: The Building Division should develop an information Bulletin.

Almost sixty (60) bulletins are available online and in the lobby. The proposed selling of a manual was deemed unnecessary because all bulletins are available in the lobby.

39. Recommendation: Add two additional building inspectors and monitor performance to determine if additional position is required.

Two inspectors have been added. Productivity is measured by performance standards outlined in the budget.

40. Recommendation: Add one additional plans examiner or consultant and monitor performance to determine if this is sufficient.

One additional Plans Examiner was hired in June of 2005. That position was lost in the 2008 budget and we currently have a vacant position. Performance continues to be monitored.

41. Recommendation: The Building Division should develop an expanded training program as outlined in this report.

Expanded training plan established. First round of classes was in October of 2005. The Division continues to press training as our budget allows.

42. Recommendation: Notify applicants of plan corrections or approvals by telephone, postcards or email. In all cases, document that the notice has been sent.

Applicant notification has been in place for some time. The suggestion of a postcard notice was not implemented. The additional cost and time for mailings did not seem practical.

We reviewed this proposal and determined that our current method of contact was adequate. Commercial reviews with corrections are always sent to the applicant in writing. An entry is placed in the plan review comment portion of the permit system. Residential reviews are often communicated by phone. Complicated reviews may get a letter. An entry is placed in the plan review comment portion of the permit system.

43. Recommendation: Convene meetings between the Building Inspectors, Supervisor, and Management to resolve concerns that are affecting Pierce County teamwork and morale. If the issues cannot be resolved, a professional facilitator should be used.

A series of meetings was concluded in late 2006. A new method of making decisions was adopted. As a result this Section is operating in a more open environment and morale and teamwork appear much improved.

44. Recommendation: Implement a Building Permit Card to be required to be posted on each job site.

The inspection report used by the division serves as a building card. It contains additional information not usually found on a building card. The inspection report will continue to be our only form of a building card.

45. Recommendation: Add a position of Civil Engineer III to the Building Inspection Division staff.

Engineer CE II has been hired as a structural plans examiner.

46. Recommendation: Establish turnaround time goals for Plan Check as shown in Table 27.

The recommended performance measures with the exception of commercial plan review are adopted for 2007. Commercial review will stay at 28 days.

47. Recommendation: When it is determined that established goals for Building Plan Check cannot be met, send plans to qualified plan check consultants.

Current policy always allowed this as a customer option.

48. Recommendation: Hire qualified consultants to clear up the backlog of building permits.

Kolke Consulting Group is under contract for building code reviews.

49. Recommendation: Have plans checked by consultants reviewed for quality control by the Supervising Plans Examiner, not the Plans Examiners.

The Plans examiner supervisor is in charge of the QC of plan reviews by Kolke.

50. Recommendation: The need for geotechnical reports should be made by building plan checkers.

This recommendation will not be completed as recommended. The need for a geotechnical report is made by the Development Review Engineer in critical areas where their regulations require it. Plans examiners also may require a geotechnical report when site conditions trigger a review under the building code.

51. Recommendation: Development Engineering should communicate comments on geotechnical reviews directly to the applicant.

Each reviewing Section in PALS does communicate directly with the applicant.

52. Recommendation: Adjust process of using consultants for Plan Check by having the consultant hired directly by the County.

Kolke Consulting Group is under contract for building code reviews. Prior to 2005 we allowed applicants to use third party reviewers at their own expense.

53. Recommendation: The ISO evaluation should be reviewed with appropriate changes made to obtain a better score in the next review.

Insurance Companies of America (ISO) Audit was completed in 2007 and resulted in a rating of 3. This was an improvement from our previous score of 4. A rating of 1 is the best that a jurisdiction can get. There are a couple of jurisdictions in Washington that received a 2 but there are none with a rating of 1.

This was our third audit by the State since the program started in 1997.

Current Planning

Comments provided by Vicki Diamond, Current Planning Supervisor

The Current Planning section actively worked on implementing the recommendations from all three Zucker Systems Reports. Implementation of most of the recommendations has had a positive impact on the performance of the Current Planning Section. Of note is the project manager program, the new case planner area assignments, and the assessment and reduction of backlog. Some new procedures have been generated and implemented in the first half of 2008. Current Planning continues to monitor the success of the programs and alter as necessary to the benefit of the applicants and the County as a whole.

54. Recommendation: PALS should establish a team approach between Current and Advance Planning for the development of major policies, ordinances and plans.

Chip Vincent, former Principle Planner for Advance Planning and Vicki Diamond, Supervisor of Current Planning reported to the Oversight Committee the efforts that were made to coordinate staff in preparation of new code or code amendments. This is an ongoing effort made by both Sections and includes coordination with the Development Center. Current Planning has transferred staff on a temporary basis to assist Advance Planning with Code Amendment, Comprehensive Plan Amendments, and Shoreline Master Plan and Shoreline Regulations update. Advance Planning is also rotating staff to the Development Center.

55. Recommendation: Current Planning should prepare a well indexed policy and procedures manual.

The index for our Section Policy Manual has been completed. The index will require continual updating as policies are developed or codified. The Procedure Manual has also been drafted. It contains job descriptions, and Current Planner staff standards (general procedures, staff report guidelines, etc).

56. Recommendation: The Planner III currently acting as the Environmental Coordinator and most of its functions should be transferred to Current Planning.

The responsibilities of the Environmental Coordinator, EC, as described by the Zucker report, include oversight of SEPA determinations, signature authority on SEPA determinations, and Forest Practice decisions. Current Planning staff is responsible for ensuring projects comply with State (SEPA) and County (Title18D) environmental regulations and Resource Management staff are responsible for ensuring projects comply with the County Forest Practice (Title 18H) regulations. The EC reports directly to the Designated Environmental Official for Pierce County (Supervisor of Resource Management).

In the Early 1990's Pierce County had both Resource Management Planners who were responsible for implementation of SEPA and environmental regulations and Current Planners who were responsible for implementation of land use regulations. The segregation of planners proved to be inefficient; consequently, in the mid 90's the responsibilities of the planners were merged to include both environmental and land use reviews. The residual of this merge is the EC is responsible to ensure compliance with environmental regulations that are processed by Current Planning staff. This process results in a check and balance for environmental review.

57. Recommendation: Two new Planner III positions and one new Planner II position should be added to Current Planning.

Current Planning was fully staffed, with the exception of the Supervisory Administrative Assistant position. Due to the down turn in the economy and the related budget reductions, the Section is expected to lose staff.

58. Recommendation: A Planner III should be assigned to the Tech Support team. Planner III Should Lead Current Planning's Tech Support

Current Planning has assigned a Technical Support Planner as an acting lead. The responsibilities include those of a technical support planner with additional supervisor support under the guidance of a Project Manager. The functions and responsibilities of the lead position have been clearly established and the success of the program is monitored by the Project Manager.

59. Recommendation: Current Planning should be organized into four teams each headed by a Planner III.

This recommendation was implemented January 1, 2007, and altered on September 11, 2007. Marcia Greeson, Project Manager, supervises teams 1, 2 and Technical Support. Sam Yekalam, Project Manager, supervises teams 3 & 4 and the Office Assistants. The teams are comprised of three case planners and they process cases for specific geographic areas and advisory commissions.

60. Recommendation: A comprehensive project manager approach to project review should be implemented.

Four project managers have been hired, two in Planning and two in Development Engineering. The Program differs from the recommendation and was supported by PALS Oversight Committee. Current Planning believes the Project Manager program to be a great success, a benefit to the section supervisor, the case planners, and project applicants. The program continues to grow and fluctuate as issues arise and solutions are identified.

61. Recommendation: The project managers review the application as part of the intake process during a scheduled submittal appointment. If the application is accepted, it should be deemed complete for vesting propose.

The two Current Planning Project Managers will continue to review all final plats for compliance with submittal standards at time of application. In 2009 they will include review of all Preliminary Plats for compliance with submittal standards at time of application. Case Planners review some shoreline and short plat applications through the pre-application meeting process. All remaining application types will be reviewed for compliance with submittal standards at the time of application by the Planner of the Day (POD) or Technical Support Planner. In 2009 a more formal process and industry notice for Project Manager review will be sent. The additional responsibilities will be monitored if staffing changes.

62. Recommendation: The following changes should be incorporated into the Notice of Application (NOA) process:

- Community group such as LUACS should be sent NOA and encouraged to comment early in the process.
- The case planner should be responsible for preparing the final NOA.
- NOA should be distributed as quickly as possible after the application is submitted, not more than three days.

Land Use Advisory Commissions, LUACs, are sent the Notice of Application, NOA, for all projects within their respective community plan areas, and encouraged to comment early in the process. Case Planners prepare the NOA and it is distributed within a week of the application submittal and acceptance.

63. Recommendation: Current Planning should establish a new procedure for all Hearing Examiner cases and any complex administrative cases. There should be a meeting between the applicant and various representatives from PALS and/or other agencies to discuss the proposed project 20 working days after the NOA is mailed.

The following procedure will be implemented in early 2009 for all preliminary plat applications:

- Letter sent within 28 days of the issuance of the Notice of Application;
 - Introduce Project Manager and provide a brief description of their job and responsibilities
 - Provide the option of meeting with any and all reviewers to discuss their initial reviews or specific requirements.

- Inform the applicant that comments will be forthcoming from the staff reviewing the proposal.

This program may be expanded dependent on the workload of the Project Managers to include additional land use types as the benefits of the program are documented.

64. Recommendation: Within 28 days of the NOA, a written summary of the meeting, any comments received outside the meeting and all requests for additional information should be mailed to the applicant.

We believe the intent of the recommendation is to provide an assessment of submitted application material and relate what is missing, inaccurate, or unacceptable. The Project Manager's program, as expanded, provides the applicants of final plats and preliminary plats with an introductory letter within 28 days of the issuance of the NOA (described in recommendation #63). The applicant, through the Project Manager, will have the choice of meeting with any and all reviewers to discuss their initial reviews. This program may be expanded dependent on the workload of the Project Managers to include additional land use types as the benefits of the program are documented and when the tracking program in PALS Plus is provided.

65. Recommendation: The Project Manager Planner should act on behalf of the applicant and monitor the timelines of other divisions, sections and agencies and if necessary, act to resolve conflicts between the applicant and other divisions and sections.

Final plat applications have been monitored since January 1, 2006. Preliminary Plats will be monitored in 2008. The success of the monitoring program is dependent on the development of a monitoring system. Until a monitoring system is developed, the Project Manager will rely on the Case Planners for notification of processing issues and timeliness of reviews.

66. Recommendation: Current Planning should keep the LUACS informed and encourage them to comment during all steps of the process, and not only on the draft report to the Hearing Examiner.

The Oversight Subcommittee proposed a draft policy on early participation. The LUAC body reviewed the policy and determined not all applications warranted early participation. A new LUAC policy has been drafted and is ready for review and comment. Early in 2008 a committee was set up which consisted of Land Use Advisory Chairpersons, PALS staff, representatives from the MBA and the Audubon Society. A work program was prepared by the Committee addressing the communication needs between the processing of applications, the LUACs and PALS staff and the continuing education and involvement of the community. The implementation of the work program was phased from 2008 through the first quarter of 2010.

67. Recommendation: County Council should determine the level of staff support it desires for the LUCA function and staff as appropriate.

The County Council does determine the level of support every budget cycle.

68. Recommendation: The Project Manager Planner should review for planning issues that related to any final plats and/or building permits.

The Zucker report inter-changed the following titles: Project Managers with Case Planners in this recommendation. The Case Planners currently review all associated Building Permits that accompany land use actions with the exception of plats. Case Planners do not have the ability to review all residential Building Permits that are submitted once a plat is approved. Technical Support Planners will continue to review all applications within recorded plats, as well as Building Permits accepted on approved land use cases for compliance with any conditions of approval. Case Planners have additional constraints on their time that prohibit reviewing all Building Permits. The constraints include public hearings, site visits, case review, and meetings inside and outside of the office.

69. Recommendation: Pierce County should implement a traffic impact fee that would allow projects to pay a fee in lieu of preparing a TIA and negotiating appropriate mitigation.

This recommendation was fully implemented with the adoption of an impact fee ordinance in 2007.

70. Recommendation: The tech support planner, not a case planner, should perform SEPA review for those projects that do not require a discretionary permit.

Current Planning did not implement this recommendation. Counter coverage is the first priority of Technical Support. They would not be able to support counter coverage and complete the suggested review/site visits for SEPA determinations.

71. Recommendation: LUACs and other identified Community groups should be considered parties of record and be sent copies of the environmental documents.

The Advisory Commissions are already considered a party of record on all the cases they hear. As a result, they receive the decision from the Hearing Examiner.

LUACs and other identified Community groups shall be considered parties of record and be sent copies of the environmental checklist for comment for all applications heard by the Advisory Commissions.

- The chairperson or designee receives the Environmental Checklist along with the NOA at the start of the application process.
- The SEPA determination is provided to the Chairperson or designee during the comment period.
- The SEPA determinations are posted on the Web for review. The determinations that are associated with the project that goes to a public hearing remain on the Web until the order is issued by the Hearing Examiner. The determinations that are associated with a project that require an administrative will be posted for 60 days.

72. Recommendation: PALS should consider requiring Pre-application/Pre-development Meetings for all applications that require a hearing or SEPA review.

Pre-application/Pre-development Process:

Prior to submitting an application for a discretionary permit or building permit, the applicant has the option of requesting a pre-application meeting for a new discretionary permit or pre-development meeting for minor discretionary permit or building permit. Figure 15 (on page 133 of the audit) delineates this procedure. Each step of the process is numbered and used as a reference in the discussion that follows.

Presently the Pre-application/Pre-development Meeting process is an option offered to the applicant. Some applicants use it, while others think it is unnecessary. We strongly support this process as it gives the applicant a detailed understanding of what is expected from him, what is needed to succeed in the process and what can be expected from the County. If this process were mandatory for all applications needing a hearing or SEPA review, the applicant would know what special studies were required prior to submitting the application. Preparation of the studies could begin immediately, and if completed prior to application submittal, could influence the final design of the project prior to its submittal. Even if some or all of the studies were not completed until after the application was submitted, the time it takes to complete the review of the project could be reduced by 28 days since the applicant would know in advance which studies are needed.

Current Planning implemented this recommendation in two ways. The Project Managers are currently verifying submittal standards for final plats, and will be verifying submittal standards for preliminary plats starting in 2009. The Case Planners will schedule and conduct a pre-application meeting for shoreline application that require a hearing and for short plat applications. The intent is to determine compliance with Submittal Standards and to ensure quality of the application material.

73. Recommendation: The Pre-application/Pre-development Meeting process should be restructured. Changes should include the following:

- The project manager who will process the application should lead the meeting when it is a discretionary application (minor or major).
- Meetings should not take more than 45 minutes for staff comments. If there is standard information that applies to all applications, written handouts should be prepared and given to the applicant.
- The first person to discuss outstanding issues should be the project manager/planner.
- The next person or persons to talk are people with “project killer” issues. The applicant can then request that the meeting be continued to resolve the problem(s) or request to hear the other comments.
- If there are no “project killer” issues the next person to speak is the representative from Development Engineering, followed by the representative from Resource Management. Representatives from Health, Fire, Building etc. follow in a specified order.
- All staff should stay in the meeting, unless they have no comments, until everyone has spoken and the applicant’s questions are answered. Total time for meeting should be one hour.

The formal pre-development meeting procedure has not been changed, but the suggestions from the Zucker recommendations are currently used as a guide for pre-development meetings.

74. Recommendation: The Development Center should make an effort to decrease non-fee supported administrative work for the case planners. A screening process should be developed by the Development Center to minimize the number of informational calls, e-mails, and meetings reaching the case planners.

Current Planning has generated a list of ideas to implement this recommendation. They involve multiple departments and have budget impacts. The ideas will be further explored through various staff and stakeholder meetings. This is one of several recommendations that is an ongoing process.

75. Recommendation: Current Planning should complete an accurate assessment of the backlog of cases.

The assessment was completed in November of 2004. A program was implemented to manage Current Planning case load and to ensure timely review all applications.

76. Recommendation: The performance measures identified in Table 38 should be adopted by Current Planning. We have adopted the 5 items as follows:

- 1) Phone calls returned same day;
- 2) First response to applicant in 20 working days;
- 3) Processing time for land use applications and AUP w/SEPA is 45 days;
- 4) Hearing Officer w/o SEPA or LUAC 90 working days, Hearing Officer with SEPA or LUAC 105 working days, Hearing Officer with SEPA and LUAC 120 working days,
- 5) Other Administrative Assignments 15 days, staff reports with conditions to interested parties 5 working days before hearing.

77. Recommendation: The qualitative indicators identified below should be incorporated into Current Planning's work effort.

- Develop an ongoing effort to streamline application processes.
- Create a more unified approach for communication between Current Planning, outside agencies and in-house sections and departments.
- Develop and implement the project manager approach to handling planning applications.
- Establish a system of early integration of the public into the review process.

The qualitative indicators have been incorporated into Current Planning's work program.

78. Recommendation: PALS should establish a mandatory program of planner rotation.

Current Planning has implemented a variation of the recommendation.

In lieu of the mandatory rotation, Advance Planning and Case Planners provide assistance at the Development Center as Planner of the Day (POD). This meets the intent of providing regulatory implementation experience to the Planners in Advance Planning. Additionally, it frees up the Case Planners time to provide assistance to Advance Planning regarding the development/ review of proposed regulations. Due to the reduction in staffing in Advance Planning, some of the Current Planning staff has been temporarily assigned to assist in the development of regulatory amendments,

comprehensive plan amendments and the drafting of the new Shoreline Master Plan and Shoreline Regulations.

79. Recommendation: Advance Planning should assign a liaison person to assure correct implementation of new community plans by the Development Review Counter and Current Planning.

Advance Planners have a mandatory rotation in the POD duties. This enables them to see how the regulations are implemented and provide assistance and training as necessary.

80. Recommendation: PALS should modify Current Planning's existing office space in order to provide a private office for its supervisor.

Completed in Early '05

81. Recommendation: Current Planning should establish a training program for LUAC members.

Completed "introduction" training for new members on June 19 2007, and completed "Continuing Education" training for all members on October 16, 2007. The training program is a fluid document that changes as new regulations, policies, and procedures are developed.

The section is committed to completing a **minimum** of two continuing education training sessions annually. Topics to be covered are dependent on the interests of the Advisory Commission members and identified needs as determined by the section supervisor. New member training will be provided as the need arises with a minimum of once a year. The goal is to have all new members trained prior to them having voting privileges. Starting in 2009, there will also be an additional training program for Land Use Advisory Chairpersons.

82. Recommendation: A timeline should be established for updating the Subdivision Ordinance and appropriate staff should be assigned to completing the task.

The Subdivision Code was updated with an effective date of November 1, 2005

Development Center

Comments by Carol Johnson, Development Center Supervisor

All three Audits focused a great deal on improving customer service and reducing lobby wait times. A “20 Minute Team” was formed which developed a revised permit in-take process that has resulted in reduced lobby wait times. The term “revised permit in-take process” is referred to many times in subsequent recommendations. On page 58 of this report an explanation of the term can be reviewed.

83. Recommendation: Management and supervisors should foster more open communication between and among staff members, management and supervisors. Management and supervisors at all levels must articulate reasons for making decisions, unless the decision involves personnel issues.

Meeting minutes of regular meetings between managers, supervisor and staff members are posted on the PALS internal website. Staff can review minutes of other sections.

84. Recommendation: Facilitated retreats should be held between management, supervisors and staff to clear the air and begin to build trust. Careful attention should be given to developing an agenda that allows everyone to be heard and have their issues aired.

There is one Department retreat each year that focuses on current issues while including an element of fun. Additionally, the Department has had two employee opinion surveys with follow up focus groups. There are two monthly meetings that came out of that effort. One is SCORE and the other is a supervisor meeting.

85. Recommendation: The Permit Coordinator position should be eliminated and the duties of scheduling pre-filing and pre-application meetings should be distributed to the Current Planning Manager and the Building Official based upon permit type.

The position was eliminated. Duties of pre-filing and predevelopment are distributed to Current Planning Section and Building Division respectively.

86. Recommendation: The Development Center Supervisor should have basic administrative responsibility over the members of the Technical Support unit. Performance evaluations and workload monitoring should be completed by the manager of the parent division or section.

The Development Center restructured the Technical Support function by having the support staff report directly to the Sections they represent. Our solution differs from the recommendation. After review by the Oversight Committee this was determined to be the best solution.

87 . Recommendation: The Development Center Supervisor should conduct routine sessions to critique operations of the Development Center with participants from each stakeholder function.

Division and Section Supervisors are meeting regularly to review intake and distribution of applications. Additionally, ongoing monthly workshops are held and open to the public.

88 . Recommendation: Staff meetings and management meetings should be conducted with a specific focused agenda. The agenda should have time allotted (2-5 minutes) for each participant to update the rest of the group on projects or programs that are important for others to know. This may include new processes, procedures, or programs, or specific projects that are important for the group to be up to date on. A portion of the staff meeting should be devoted to a training topic.

Have been using meeting agendas for some time, also publishing meeting minutes.

89 . Recommendation: Each division or section should examine its permit categories with the goal of eliminating/consolidating 25% of the permit types.

This is part of the PALS Plus conversion project. Where appropriate this is being done.

90 . Recommendation: Advance Planning should take the lead in streamlining and simplifying the noticing requirements in Section 18.80.020, PCC. These changes shall be done in consultation with all affected PALS divisions and sections.

We customized our notification requirements to match that of the State RCW and WAC and ESHB 1724 back in 1995.

91 . Recommendation: The Advance Planning Director, Development Center Supervisor, and Development Center Operations Supervisor should meet monthly to discuss the impacts and effects of current regulations and explore methods of revising and streamlining codes.

This is and has been an ongoing goal of PALS. There is no set schedule for a comprehensive overhaul.

92. Recommendation: Advance Planning should meet and confer with the Development Center Supervisor and Center Operations Supervisor as codes are being developed to evaluate the impact on operations.

Completed with recommendation #54. Additionally, Current Planning provides training on implementation of new regulations.

93. Recommendation: Each division or section should create clear written thresholds for project review. The thresholds should set standards and if projects are below the threshold, they are not reviewed.

Building Division and Development Engineering have developed written guidelines. Current Planning and Resource Management rely on information in Pierce County Code and then identified on a site by looking at critical indicators in the GIS system.

94. Recommendation: Whenever possible, standard details should be developed by all divisions or sections within PALS and those details should be available on the PALS website, thereby allowing builders to submit more complete plans.

This is an ongoing project. Handouts are updated with regulation changes and are available on our web page.

95. Recommendation: Development Engineering should exempt detached garages under 1000 square feet and additions to single family homes less than 750 square feet from their review. Instead Development Engineering should create standard details for infiltration trenches and other issues. These standard details shall be attached to the plans and field verified.

This recommendation has not been completed. This recommendation was forwarded to the Water Program Division for possible inclusion in the new Stormwater Management and Site Development Manual.

96. Recommendation: A Lobby Service Attendant position should be reinstated and the position should be staffed by a Permit Technician.

Completed under the revised permit in-take process outlined on page 56 of this document. A staff person is assigned to help with the permit application drop off or KIOSK.

97. Recommendation: A wireless router should be installed in the Development Center lobby to allow lobby attendants access to the County network. Access has been provided since March of 2005.

98. Recommendation: Make all of PALS a wireless hotspot through the installation of wireless routers and allow the public to access the internet using the County website as a gateway.

Public access has been provided since March of 2005.

99. Recommendation: Install LCD computer monitors in all workstations at the public counter and within the lobby.

Completed April 2005.

100. Recommendation: The programmers should continue to work collaboratively with the end users to assure that the system meets their needs. Also, for issues of critical importance, such as property alerts, pop-up windows should be used as much as possible.

Programmers work from a list of requested changes that is prioritized by a focus group called SCORE. This has allowed the most important issues to be addressed first.

101. Recommendation: Two Permit Technicians per day should be assigned to the phone room, and the phone stations should be staffed during all hours that PALS is open.

This recommendation was based on having 15 permit technicians and 4 office assistants. Currently we have authorization for 15 permit technicians and 3 office assistants. One permit technician and 1 office assistant position is vacant. We will continue to use one person on phones and look for phone system enhancements to help with incoming calls.

102. Recommendation: Permit Technicians, both new and current, should be given proper and continuous training and support. This includes training on new systems, responsibilities, new codes, and ordinances.

With each phase of PALS Plus that is released the staff is getting training. Additional training will follow as new features are added.

103. Recommendation: PALS should allocate funds to allow up to 1/3 of the appropriate staff to attend ICC certified training courses.

Completed – 2 staff attend yearly Permit Technician conferences as budget allows.

104. Recommendation: All Office Assistants should be given adequate training on the overall operations of the Development Center including its structure. Office Assistants should also possess a basic understanding of building and land use permits and customer service philosophy and techniques.

Completed – a training manual has been created toward this effort.

105. Recommendation: A list of over-the-counter permits should be adopted. The list should contain specific projects that can be approved by either a Permit Technician and/or Technical Support staff in a single visit to the Development Center.

Minor residential plumbing and mechanical permits are available over the counter (OTC). In late 2008 an OTC procedure for commercial tenant space remodel was introduced. It continues to be refined and has been welcomed by applicants.

106. Recommendation: One Permit Technician shall be dedicated to Application and Block Appointments.

This recommendation proposed for 6 suggested Service Categories.

- Categories 1 & 2 – Application and Block Appointments
- Categories 3 & 4 – Information Only and Quick Permits
- Category 5 – Make Application
- Category 6 – Technical Support

Combining these categories with the average customer volume a staffing model was developed and expanded on in recommendations 105 through 110. With input from the Oversight Committee our revised permit in-take process made the recommendations no longer apply to the process.

At the time of the Audit we had service lines as described above. Staffing was shifted depending on the work load each day. Our intake/information process has created 3 service categories:

- Commercial application appointments
- KIOSK – A drop off service for most application types
- Combined make application and information

Service Categories 1 & 2 (Application and Block Appointments)

Only commercial building permits are done by appointment. The option exists for an appointment for any large or complex application.

107. *Recommendation:* Customers seeking appointments should be seen within two business days for the “Application and Blocks Appointments.”

An appointment schedule is available for commercial applications only. We are currently meeting the 2 day target.

Service Categories 3 & 4 (Information Only and Quick Permits)

By combining make application, quick permits and information we have more staff available. Customers are seen in the order of their arrival. Quick permits are still handled in a timely manner.

108. *Recommendation:* Three Permit Technicians should be dedicated to handling requests for Information Only and for LSA/Quick Permits.
Service Category 5 Make Application

The revised permit in-take process has reduced the wait time of information and quick permit customers. See recommendation 105 for further explanation.

109. *Recommendation:* Three Permit Technicians should be dedicated to the “Make Application” category of service.

The revised permit in-take process has reduced the wait time of make-application customers. See recommendation 105 for further explanation.

110. *Recommendation:* Customers seeking appointments should be scheduled within two working days for “Making Applications.”
Service Category 6 Technical Support

The revised permit in-take process has eliminated the need for an appointment for the Make Application customer. Lobby wait times for the Make Application customer is routinely less than 1 hour.

111. *Recommendation:* At least five workstations should be dedicated to the Technical Support Group. All of these stations should be staffed during all hours that the Development Center is open. Additionally, when the five workstations are full and waiting times exceed 20 minutes, technical support staff should assist customers at their own desks.

Completed under the revised permit in-take process and lobby remodel.

112. Recommendation: When a customer for a land use application enters the Development Center, they should be directed to the PALS counter for assistance by a Current Planner.

After being checked by the Current Planning staff, applicants who are ready to submit should be directed to the next available Permit Technician in the Development Center for application intake and processing.

Completed under the revised permit in-take process outlined on page 56 of this document. See recommendation 105 for further explanation.

113. Recommendation: Customers submitting applications for major land use and planning permits at Current Planning should receive priority for actual submission of the application through a Permit Technician.

Completed under the revised permit in-take process outlined on page 56 of this document. See recommendation 105 for further explanation.

114. Recommendation: The first priority of Technical Support staff members should be customers of the Development Center. Appropriate changes should be made to Technical Support staff review caseloads so they can adequately perform the counter service.

A policy and staffing model was created with performance measures for each Section or Division in PALS. Lobby support is a primary responsibility for those assigned this role. The Department policy states, "The level of Technical Support for PALS assumes that the first assigned person will respond to the counter within five (5) minutes of request. And, that the second assigned person will respond to the counter within fifteen (15) minutes of request."

115. Recommendation: A project manager system should be adopted so that all projects taken in over the counter are assigned a project manager. Applicants should be notified within 24 hours of the application being received, the project manager's name and contact information.

As noted in recommendation #60, four project managers have been hired, two in Planning and two in Development Engineering. The Program differs slightly from the recommendation and was supported by PALS Oversight Committee. See recommendation #60 for further explanation.

116. Recommendation: Advance Planning and Current Planning shall be responsible for assuring that the Codes in the Development Center and the case files are complete.

There are now complete copies of codes in the Development Center. Some of the codes are accessed on the Intranet and some in hard copy.

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

A new permit intake process has been defined. The main thrust of the new process is to allow an applicant to drop off any kind of application and we will determine if it is complete later. By state law we must do so within 28 days. Our target to make this determination will be in the 3 to 5 day range.

By providing this additional level of service we can give customers the choice of dropping off or waiting for a technician to help them. And we can do so within 20 minutes. Additionally, we will expand our outreach efforts to help people successfully drop off applications without waiting. An expanded outline of the revised process is on page 56 of this document as part of the Lobby Wait Study update.

118. Recommendation: 90% of all requests for information and “quick processing” should be completed within an average of 30 minutes from the time the transaction starts.

Limiting time with customers is difficult. Even so, it is being included under the revised permit in-take process and Permit Techs are encourage to be mindful of time.

119. Recommendation: 90% of all scheduled appointments should be concluded within 90 minutes from the time they start.

This is an adopted service level for appointments.

120. Recommendation: All customers requesting an appointment should be seen within 48 hours of making the request.

Only commercial building permits are taken in by appointment. Our service target is to see them within 48 hours (excluding weekends). At times, application volumes can exceed the staffing available and scheduling can exceed the 48 hours.

121. *Recommendation:* 75% of a Technical Support staff member's time should be dedicated to the Development Center. The Development Center should be the first priority for members of the Technical Support unit. Back up as necessary should be supplied by each technical division or section.

[As detailed under recommendation #114 our service targets for Tech Support response addresses this issue.](#)

122. *Recommendation:* The Receptionist should be relocated out of the lobby hallway and given a workstation that allows the person to assist the customers as they enter the Center.

[Completed](#)

123. *Recommendation:* Implement the counter redesign plan proposed by staff that would create a minimum of ten sit-down workstations.

[Completed](#)

124. *Recommendation:* Relocate the Development Center Supervisor's office into the two vacant offices adjacent and down the hall and expand the counter by creating three to four additional workstations.

[Completed](#)

125. *Recommendation:* During peak times staff should use their desks as a method of assisting customers so that no customer has to wait more than 20 minutes for service.

[Completed](#)

126. *Recommendation:* The cashier station and the reception stations should be merged and located near the point where customers enter and exit the Development Center.

[Completed](#)

127. *Recommendation:* Properly train the cashier and receptionists in this new workstation to provide basic customer information and direction.

[Completed](#)

128. *Recommendation:* Hire an additional office assistant to perform the administrative duties currently handled by the cashier and train this position as a back-up to the receptionist and cashier.

A second office assistant position was created and filled. Presently the position is vacant.

129. *Recommendation:* Two new Permit Technician positions shall be added to the Development Center, thereby increasing staffing from 11 to 13.

Completed, there are presently 15 Permit Technician positions.

130. *Recommendation:* Remove the cardboard “STOP” sign at the entrance to the Development Center.

Completed

131. *Recommendation:* All handout materials should be reviewed and revised with the overarching goal that the material be clear and concise. When possible, the number of steps and processes should be kept to a minimum and plain simple language should be used. Finally, the material should not exceed two or three pages in length, unless absolutely necessary.

Ongoing

132. *Recommendation:* An afternoon call-in system be implemented that would allow 25 customers per day to be scheduled for a specific appointment time the following day.

This has not been implemented. The only appointments are for commercial building permits.

Development Engineering

Comments by Mitchell Brells, Supervisor Development Engineering

133. *Recommendation:* Create a policy to provide a staffing impact analysis on each staff report accompanying proposals for any new regulations.

It already is the Department's policy to perform a staffing impact analysis for any new regulations. These recommendations accompany any legislation as well as supplemental budget requests as part of the annual budget process.

134. *Recommendation:* Add a position titled Civil Engineer III.

This item has been completed. As of today Development Engineering has three Civil Engineer 3 positions. Two of these positions supervise the Area Reviewers and have project management responsibilities. The other position supervises the Single Family Review and Enforcement Work Unit.

135. *Recommendation:* Assign the lead for final plat processing to Development Engineering

This recommendation was deleted from the final Audit.

136. *Recommendation:* Development Engineering to furnish data for a monthly PALS report.

This item has been completed. On a monthly basis our Section's report is updated and put on the County web page. This report provides a significant amount of detail on our timeliness, current workload, and backlog. We are proud of our report and believe that it is very accurate and not prone to misinterpretation. We have not been providing information on issues within the report and believe that our industry-wide mailings provide better communication with our customers.

137. *Recommendation:* Consolidate engineering permit fee categories and propose fees per acre or square footage to streamline the process.

This item has been completed. The following applications/fees have been consolidated:

Abbreviated Plan (PWSA) Combinations:

1. PWSA + Landslide Hazard Area Geotechnical Assessment (PWLG)
2. PWSA + Shoreline Hazard Area Geotechnical Assessment (PWER)

3. PWSA + (PWER) + (PWLG)
4. Residential Site Development (PWSR) Combinations:
5. PWSR + Storm Drainage Infiltration (PWIF)
6. PWSR + Shoreline Hazard Area Geotechnical Assessment (PWLG)
7. PWSR + Erosion Hazard Area Geotechnical Assessment (PWER)
8. PWSR + (PWLG) + (PWER)

SYNOPSIS:

Consolidating the above construction type Site Development Permit applications will reduce the amount of permits to track which will save time with the total review process and save time in calculating permit fees by the Permit Technicians. We also believe that the public will like this as well since it will be fewer applications for them to track. We envision in time that other types of applications will also be combined if this change proves to be a real time saver.

138. *Recommendation:* Add one Civil Engineer II and One Engineering Technician III Inspector for the Site Development Engineering Enforcement program.

Budget positions for this recommendation were created in the 2007 budget process. We have been successful in filling the inspector position but have not been able to fill the Civil Engineer 2 position. This is due in part to a chronic shortage of qualified applicants and the current slump in permit revenue over the last quarter of 2007 and first quarter of 2008.

139. *Recommendation:* PALS should study if Development Engineering enforcement functions should be moved to Code Enforcement.

This recommendation is complete. A decision was reached earlier in 2007 that one of the Development Engineering inspectors would be moved to Code Enforcement. This has not occurred yet as there currently is a hiring freeze due to revenue issues. It was decided that the Civil Engineer 2 side of the enforcement process would remain in the Development Engineering Section.

140. Recommendation: Create a job class title of Surveyor and place the two staff performing Survey responsibilities in that classification.

This recommendation is complete. While we did not create a “surveyor” classification, their positions were reclassified to Civil Engineer. This was completed after an analysis of their duties and responsibilities was performed by the Human Resource Department.

141. Recommendation: Establish a weekly in-house training program for all Civil Engineers and Inspectors who review plan submittals.

This item is completed. While we do not train on a weekly basis, we do train every two weeks.

142. Recommendation: Publish a manual that lists and describes requirements for information needed with a permit application and include requirements in a submittal checklist.

This item is completed.

143. Recommendation: The checklist used in Development Engineering should be revised for clarity and brevity.

This item has been completed.

144. Recommendation: Development Engineering should prepare and print an official list of permits that are exempt from their review and submit it to the Permit Counter.

This recommendation is complete. A copy of this list has been included in the manual that was created to address recommendation #142.

145. Recommendation: Development Engineering should review all building permit categories such as office-to-office, construction in existing buildings, and any similar activities and exempt the need for their review.

This recommendation is complete. Three additional permit types were added to the list created in recommendation 144 above. These permits are commercial interior remodels (BPCO), commercial canopy (BPCO), and commercial decks (BPCO).

146. Recommendation: Applications for which Development Engineering is the lead, or when they are commenting on a Building Permit application, should be distributed to Development Engineering either the same day received or at the latest the next day.

This recommendation is completed.

Actions: The following steps have been implemented by Development Engineering to accomplish this recommendation:

Problems with workflow have been mostly evident with land use applications. A more streamlined process for preliminary plats was established since this recommendation was made. Now, once the Current Planning OA receives the application package from the Development Center, a copy of the plan is given to the development engineering office assistant. A file is then created, the application/project is entered into the permitting database (PALS Plus), and the file is delivered to the area engineer. The area engineer is then able to start on the review as soon as possible. Prior, this routing was made only after a standard "Notice of Application" or NOA was completed, which was included with the submittal package. Preparation of the NOA can take some time for the Office Assistants to complete, especially given other priority work tasks; really it was not necessary for the area engineer to have the NOA to begin the review.

Development Engineering is now "statused" in PALS Plus on all commercial building permits for purposes of determining Traffic Impact Fees, know as TIF. This happens on the day the project is taken in at the development center. Typically, development engineering will enter an approval for the building permit when the associated site development permit is approved.

147. Recommendation: When Traffic Engineering comments are sent to Development Engineering, copies should be sent directly to the applicant and the project managers.

This recommendation is complete. It is standard procedure for Traffic Engineering to cc: the applicant and the Development Engineer that is reviewing the project.

148. Recommendation: Create a quality control program to assure consistency and good work by all Civil Engineers reviewing plans.

This recommendation is complete.

Actions: The following steps have been implemented by Development Engineering to accomplish this recommendation:

Creation of Area Review Supervisor Positions: There are now two “Area Review Supervisors”; some of the tasks accomplished by these supervisors include working with and “spot-checking” the area reviewers as recommended. Other tasks include creation of policies, interpretation of regulations, and assistance with complicated aspects of plan review, all of which enhance department quality control and consistency.

Regular, interactive staff meetings: A staff meeting is held for the review engineers every two weeks. At the meeting the Development Engineering Manager relates pertinent issues, new policies and policy changes, etc. to the engineers. Each engineer also has the opportunity to bring up questions and/or code interpretations as they apply to projects they are reviewing. Minutes from the meetings (especially the issues discussed and administration code interpretations) are placed in a searchable Adobe document and placed on the county intranet, where it is available not only to development engineering but other county departments. The primary reason for holding these meetings and documenting the decisions made is to improve consistency and accuracy in plan review.

Specify periodic times when Area Review Supervisors work directly with Plan Review Engineers.

In order to help ensure that regular interaction does happen and to further increase consistency amongst reviewers, supervisors will set a specific time to meet with each reviewer every six months. Prior to the meeting, the supervisor will have selected a given project under review and gone over the redlined plans and return letter. The purpose of the meeting is to identify any areas of inconsistency regarding the review, and to help determine where future training is needed. This is in addition to the standard annual performance review, as well as day to day project related coordination described above under “Creation of Area Review Supervisor Positions”. (Note; this Action item is related to Recommendation 141: “Establish a weekly in-house training program for all Civil Engineers and Inspectors who review plan submittals.”)

149. Recommendation: Adopt a goal to complete 95% of the first Development Engineering plan review within 20 working days and corrections within ten working days. If they cannot be completed on time, have the work done by consultants.

This recommendation is complete. The stated goal has been adopted and in place even before the Department was audited. As discussed below outsourcing has been ineffective to date.

Actions: The following steps have been implemented by Development Engineering to accomplish this recommendation:

As stated in the October 2006 Zucker follow up study, Development Engineering has adopted the stated goal; in calendar days the goals are 30 days for first submittals and 14 days for resubmittals. There are three reviewing work units within Development Engineering: Area Review, Plat Review, and Single Family Review. The recommendation

stipulates that work not completed on time should be done by consultants; this is applicable only to the Area Review work unit.

From October 1st 2006 to October 1st 2007, the area reviewers met their goal an average of 31% of the time. Currently there are 10 reviewers and two supervisors in this work unit, with 1 vacancy. Of these, 4 reviewers are relatively new to development engineering. The October 2006 Zucker follow up listed turnover, hiring, changing job specifications, and use of consultants as specific topics under "Engineering Issues". Despite substantial efforts, hiring, training and retaining staff continues to be a struggle. There has been a substantial effort to attract review engineers; besides advertisements in the usual publications and on the county website, several internet sites were utilized, as well as the Association of Retired Seattle City Employees newsletter. In an effort to meet the timeliness goal, some projects were passed to engineers in other County departments, who reviewed them on an overtime basis. Additionally, some projects were reviewed by third party consulting engineers. Ultimately, completion of reviews by others outside development engineering (particularly the third party consultants) proved inefficient and did not save the applicants appreciable time. (See Recommendation #153 for a more complete description of efforts made to reduce backlog through the use of third party consultant plan reviewers.)

As of October 2007, the Area Review work unit is near full staff, while there has been a slowdown of new submittals. It is expected that as newer staff members become more proficient, the on-time percentage will continue to improve. Fully staffed and trained and without working overtime or outsourcing, it is estimated this work unit can process 195 applications per month; during this time period the applications ranged from 257 to 156 per month.

150. *Recommendation:* The CE III should monitor progress on all plan submittals and assist with problems where needed.

This recommendation is complete.

151. *Recommendation:* Public Works counter function currently located in the Development Center should remain in the Center or moved along with PALS should a new center be created.

The Public Works function has remained part of the Development Center operations.

152. *Recommendation:* Send all but 50 plans waiting for review to qualified consultants hired by the County for review.

This recommendation was completed in 2005.

153. Recommendation: Continually monitor plan review productivity and send all plans that cannot meet the performance timelines to qualified consultants for review.

To date we have been unsuccessful in completely fulfilling this recommendation. While we do now regularly monitor projects and are proactive about troubleshooting problems, we have found that outsourcing attempts have been in many cases counterproductive. Quality of review when outsourcing has been the main obstacle in completing this recommendation. We have found that any time savings up front in getting reviews completed caused problems during construction, or at the time of final approval. Essentially delays were pushed to a later part of a project.

While we have not as of yet been successful in completely meeting this recommendation we are continuing to examine ways to resolve outsourcing related quality issues.

154. Recommendation: Implement a separate system for plan review of abbreviated and minor plans.

This recommendation is completed. Abbreviated and minor plans are now reviewed by Civil Engineer 1 staff in the Area Review Work Unit or by Civil Engineer 1 staff in the Single Family Review Work Unit.

155. Recommendation: Have small and standard plan corrections verified by Field Inspectors while on job site.

This recommendation will not be completed as written, however the intent has been met.

We find that it would not be acceptable to implement this recommendation as written. Construction documents and reports must be prepared under a licensed engineer's direct supervision. It is unacceptable for staff to modify an engineer's plans or reports without his/her review and approval.

While we do find the recommendation unacceptable, we have implemented the spirit of the recommendation. Our Area Review Engineers and Single Family Review Engineers do call/or email to obtain approval from the responsible design engineer to make minor changes on their plans. We believe this meets the spirit of the recommendation as it can eliminate the time lost in requiring another resubmittal.

156. Recommendation: Use preprinted postcards, phone, or e-mail to notify applicants of actions regarding plan reviews. Document that notices are sent in the computerized permit system.

This recommendation will not be completed.

We believe our current system is consistent and effective and doesn't require any changes.

Zucker indicates that the process of applicant notification appears to be inconsistent and requests changes.

When the plan review is complete Development Engineering sends a letter to the applicant indicating that the plans have been reviewed and what further action is necessary to get the plans approved. An entry is made into PALS Plus and a copy of the letter is placed in the system. The same is true for subsequent reviews. The reviewers also respond with phone and/or e-mail if requested.

When the project is approved and the permit is issued the reviewer sends a letter notifying the applicant and a copy of the approved plans. This letter also explains what is necessary for final approval and need for maintenance guarantees. If the applicant requests they make pick these items up instead of receiving them in the mail.

157. Recommendation: The County Engineer should delegate signature authority to PALS Development Engineering supervisor.

This recommendation was deleted in the final Audit.

158. Recommendation: Development Engineering Inspectors should meet with Public Works staff to review and approve improvements to be maintained by the County. (Priority 3)

This recommendation has been completed.

The Development Engineering Inspection Team has had numerous meetings over the last couple of years with representatives from the various Public Works organizations that we coordinate with (i.e. Maintenance Engineering, Water Programs and Traffic) in order to work out issues concerning the final inspection approval and acceptance of public improvements.

We have established procedures for coordinating with each affected Public Works Section prior to granting final inspection approvals, and we believe that these procedures adequately address the concerns conveyed in Zucker Recommendations 158 & 159.

The process we have agreed upon is that Development Engineering will notify the affected Public Works sections when we have a public project approaching final approval and the Development Engineering inspector will provide his preliminary punch list. Each Public Works section will have 14 days to visit the project and respond with any additional requirements to be met prior to final. The Development Engineering inspector will review this input and incorporate all valid requirements into his official punch list to be provided to the proponent on or before day 15. If the Development Engineering inspector finds that some requirements proposed by a Public Works section are not appropriate or valid, the inspector must respond in writing to the Public Works section explaining why the item or items can not be included in the final punch list.

159. *Recommendation:* Use a sign-off form to be signed by Public Works Staff. Agreement for acceptance to be maintained in Development Engineering files.

This recommendation has been completed. The Development Engineering Inspection Team has had numerous meetings over the last couple of years with representatives from the various Public Works organizations that we coordinate with (i.e. Maintenance Engineering, Water Programs and Traffic) in order to work out issues concerning the final inspection approval and acceptance of public improvements.

We have established procedures for coordinating with each affected Public Works Section prior to granting final inspection approvals, and we believe that these procedures adequately address the concerns conveyed in Zucker Recommendations 158 & 159.

We have a form for this purpose entitled "Pierce County Public Improvements Inspection Report". While it has a section for public works input and signature, public works representatives seldom sign this form in person. Normally documentation of the correspondence between Public Works Sections and the Development Engineering inspector is attached to this form and the form is signed off by the Development Engineering inspector when all valid requirements have been met.

This process has worked better for both us and the affected Public Works sections because it captures all of their input in their own words and does not require that we schedule meetings in the field for every project when it can be difficult for both us and them to come up with a mutually workable meeting time. While this process does not require us to meet in the field, we are always available to meet with Public Works representatives and often do so to review special cases.

The Development Engineering Inspection Team is committed to providing a quality product and working effectively with the Public Works sections who will maintain the improvements we permit and approve. We recognize that effective coordination requires ongoing effort and cooperation and we will continue to work to improve these processes and relationships.

160. *Recommendation:* Add one Engineering Technician III position for inspections.

This recommendation was completed in 2007.

161. *Recommendation:* Add three Civil Engineer I positions.

This recommendation has not been completed.

These positions were never created through the budget process. Currently, with the downturn in the industry and economy these positions are not needed.

Resource Management

Comments from Kathleen Larrabee, Supervisor Resource management

162. Recommendation: Resource Management should prepare a policy handbook. Whenever there is an interpretation of an exiting rule or policy change, it should be recorded in the handbook for reference by the staff.

- We have created the Policy handbook and are maintaining it. Policies are added as they are written on an ongoing basis.

This Recommendation was expanded in the Follow Up Study to say: “The old policy files should be reviewed and sorted. For historical reference policies that are outdated and are no longer being applied should be put in a separate handbook identified as previous policies. The remaining policies can either be rewritten in the new format or renumbered and put in the policy handbook as presently written. A good index of all the policies should be prepared. An effort should be made to convert policies to ordinances whenever feasible.”

- Our historical policy books have been organized and labeled as “previous policies”. Those that are still applicable will be added to our current Policy Handbook. An index has been created.
- We are currently working with our Deputy Prosecuting Attorney to determine which policies should be written into Code.

163. Recommendation: Resource Management should develop a training program. One of the program’s objectives should be staff training and consistent interpretation of Resource’s ordinances.

- We have an established training program for new employees.
- We have staff training at staff meetings as necessary.
- We routinely discuss Code interpretation at staff meetings and when necessary, policies are created and placed in the Policy Handbook.

164. Recommendation: The following changes to Resource Management should occur:

- The SEPA function, the Planner III and office assistant that handles the review, should be transferred to Current Planning. (See Chapter VII)
- Resource Management should have teams of professionals each headed by a Level III technical specialist.
- A full time biologist should be added and assigned to the Development Center and adequate space provided.

- **Enforcement of wetland regulations should be assigned to Code Enforcement with Resource Management’s technical assistance.**
- The first recommendation has been rejected. See the explanation for recommendation #56.
- Resource Management now has two EB3s, each of which has a team of biologists they supervise.
- The County has been unsuccessful in finding a qualified biologist willing to work exclusively at the Biologist of the Day desk. All of the biologists interviewed desired some amount of field work.
- Now that we have doubled the size of our staff, the BOD duty is not as onerous as it was.
- An Environmental Biologist was added to the Code Enforcement section this past year. She has done an excellent job of meeting the Council goal of doing initial site visits on sites of alleged violation within 7 days.

165. Recommendation: Resource Management, while recognizing that all Pierce County wetlands probably never will be mapped, should try to improve the existing wetland indicator database.

This Recommendation was changed in the Follow Up Study to say: “Unless a grant or some other funding source became available, we do not recommend additional work on this recommendation”. No funding has been made available.

166. Recommendation: Outside consultants or additional temporary part time or full-time biologists should be retained to eliminate the backlog of wetland applications.

- We began outsourcing Monitoring Reports in 2005, and continued to do so until that budget was frozen.
- We got to zero backlog in 2005 and in 2007 on all wetland and fish/wildlife applications. We have maintained a low percentage of backlogged cases.

167. Recommendation: Resource Management should add one additional biologist to assume the BOD responsibility and to assist in the additional Forest Practice applications.

We have not filled a BOD position as noted in recommendation 164. Now that we have doubled the size of our staff, the BOD duty is not as onerous as it once was.

- We did hire a Forest Practices Planner. We have been monitoring workload since we took over Class IV General Forest Practices on March 1, 2007 in order to determine if additional staff is necessary. We suspect that an additional planner may be needed, but have not requested one due to the downturn in the economy.

168. Recommendation: Resource Management should adopt the performance measures shown in Table 61.

Qualitative indicators to be added to the above performance measures should include the following items:

- Develop an ongoing effort to eliminate the backlog of existing work
- Create a more unified approach for implementation of the regulations.
- Establish a system of early response regarding wetland identification into the review process.

New performance measures were based on new staffing. We will continue to use existing standards until staffing is provided. Resource Management has lost nearly half of its biology staff.

169. Recommendation: The qualitative indicators identified above should be incorporated into Resource Management's work effort.

- Backlog was reduced to zero in 2005 and 2007 and has been maintained at low levels since then. However, the 95% efficiency standard is not being met.
- As long as there is room in the Code for interpretation, there will never be 100% consistency among staff. It is somewhat desirable to have language which can be interpreted in various ways because this allows us some flexibility in implementing and enforcing the Code. We strive for consistency and discuss any issues of inconsistency at weekly staff meetings.
- Early notification of potential wetland or fish and wildlife issues has been provided by the County for many years. Landowners can learn of such issues in at least three different ways: they can request an updated CARLS, they can speak with a Biologist of the Day, or they can meet with a Permit Technician.
- There will always be instances where a landowner may fail to receive notice until later in the application process because there will always be parcels that contain no mapped indicators. We recommend to property owners seeking information to have property evaluated if there is any possibility of a wetland.
- Resolution of this issue would require staff dedicated to evaluating each project site that does not otherwise have mapped wetland or fish and wildlife indicators.
- We now allow staff-review of sites without a parent permit. Prior to this, applicants needed a building permit, site development permit or a land use permit in order to apply for staff review of wetlands.

170. Recommendation: A program should be established for implementation of mitigation programs using funds from called bonds. Until the bond funds are utilized, the money should be kept in a dedicated account for said purpose.

- We have begun conversations with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office. What we know so far is that bond amounts would have to be significantly increased (up to 300%) in order to pay prevailing wages to have the uncompleted work done. We have also been advised that such a program should apply to all PALS' bonds, not just Resource Management.

171. Recommendation: Resource Management should consider establishing a pre-design site assessment for a fee.

- A new fee was adopted in the 2008 budget to allow us to perform this kind of assessment.

172. Recommendation: The County Prosecuting Attorney and Resource Management should develop standard procedures and related documents for permanent protection of easements.

This Recommendation was changed in the Follow Up Study to say: "If the County Attorney concurs with the position that the creation of a permanent protection easement is not necessary, then this recommendation does not need to be implemented."

- We are working with the Prosecuting Attorney's office on this recommendation.

173. Recommendation: The County should establish a fee(s) for monitoring wetland mitigation program. They should also establish a program to cover the full cost of pursuing wetland violations.

- Our current fees for mitigation plan review are adequate to cover our review of monitoring plans.
- Resource Management resists charging double fees to violators. It is still the case that some individuals inadvertently violate the code. We view this as a deterrent to compliance rather than to violations. The object of our enforcement effort is to protect and or restore sensitive areas not to collect fines.
- *In the Follow Up Study, it is recommended that: "Out of concern for the small applicant perhaps the double fee could be waved for single family homes if an application was submitted in a timely manner (30 days or less)." This reduces some of our concerns, but does not totally alleviate them.*

Other Departments

This report does not include recommendations for other Departments. Those recommendations include:

Fire Marshal

Recommendation #174.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

Recommendations #175 through #177.

Public Works – Sewer

Recommendations #175 through #177.

Public Works – Transportation

Recommendations #175 through #177.

Evaluation of the Development Permitting Process

Follow Up Audit

Delivered October 2006

Comments provided and or collated by:

Gordon L. Aleshire, PALS Assistant Director – Building Official

Carol Johnson, Development Center Supervisor

- 1. Recommendation: The County should become much more creative in solving the engineering problems. The first step should be to explore options 1 to 5 below. Lacking success, option 6 should be pursued.**

Turnover The first item to address in turnover is salaries. We would suggest substantial increases in salaries. The Human Resources Department should also conduct a detailed analysis of the turnover issue. Finally, engineers should be given the opportunity to periodically rotate between capital projects and development review. This would require cooperation between Public Works and PALS.

The salary portion of this recommendation is in process. An across the board 5% increase for all engineers in the County was approved in 2007. To attract and retain engineers, salaries within Development Engineering need to be competitive with the private side.

The rotation portion of this recommendation is in process. Discussions with Public Works have occurred but a methodology for performing the rotation has not been implemented.

Hiring A few years ago, one of our clients had 30 vacant planner positions which they said they could not fill. We suggested that they needed to totally change their standard Human Resources (HR) rules, regulations and procedures. The County Administrator agreed and demanded a different HR approach. We personally returned from a national conference with 25 applications from candidates, many of who were hired. Over a short period of time all 30 positions were filled. All of our clients are having trouble hiring engineers as well as planners, however we believe hiring engineers is the most difficult. We can't guarantee that the County's changing its HR approach will be successful. But, it is obvious that the current system must be improved. The County should also make it easier to hire part time employees. More and more people are looking for life style jobs where they can work 20 or 30 hours per week. Zucker Systems has built its entire hiring and employment system around this principle.

This portion of the recommendation has been completed. We do fill some of our review engineer needs by hiring part time staff. We currently have a part time review engineer that also is a teacher. We have hired retired engineers with some success. We would be willing to offer other flexible options for work hours as may be requested.

Changing Job Specifications It could be useful to examine the County's engineering work in some detail to see if non-licensed engineers, or people with other types of backgrounds could be trained to do some of the engineering tasks. In a sense this could be considered "home growing" some of the County's staff.

This recommendation has been completed. We have revised the minimum qualifications for engineers such that engineering technicians that would like to pursue an engineering career can do so without having the engineering degree or EIT that was previously required. We have found that some of our technicians have the experience, ability, and drive to handle the engineering reviews

Consultants We are strong advocates of using consultants to supplement staff. However, even in using consultants more creativity is needed. First of all, some of the consultants themselves also have problems hiring engineers. Staff complain about the poor quality of many consultants' work. The simple answer to this is not to hire these consultants again. The other complaint is that consultants don't understand the County policies and systems. This can be overcome by developing good policies and procedures, training the consultants and developing long term relations. The other value in consultants is that their use can be expanded or reduced depending on work load. This could be extremely important if development activity continues to drop. Another approach for consulting is to look to retired engineers who would like to continue some part time work.

This recommendation will not be completed. We have attempted to use consultants and the outcome has been poor. See the comments for recommendation #153 on page 42.

Self Certification Self certification of engineers is used in different parts of the country. Some communities simply accept the private engineers stamp on a project. We do not favor this system as it lacks third party review and we know that a relatively high percent of private engineering does not meet an acceptable standard. This has been proven many times over in Pierce County. The other approach is one being used in King County as well as other places. Under this approach the applicant selects a private engineer to complete all the engineering and engineering review. The completed review is then given to the County for a final check. Some communities only allow pre-certified engineers to perform this function. While this form of self certification is better than the first, we see no reason why these same engineers shouldn't be hired directly by the County rather than hired directly by the private party.

This recommendation will not be completed. We have found the current "standard of practice" in the consulting engineer community to be unacceptable in meeting the County's regulations.

Create An Independent Engineering Office This may seem like a radical idea but it has been used by some communities for functions like information technology. Under this approach an independent non-profit corporation is formed that would have one client, Pierce County. This function would provide engineers and engineering services for both PALS and Public Works. Salaries would likely need to exceed those of the private sector.

This recommendation has not been started. This is a bigger picture solution that will require extensive work to implement.

2. Recommendation: Current Planning should continue to attempt to fill two vacant positions but keep the third position vacant to see how the number of development applications changes in 2007.

All positions have been filled.

3. Recommendation: Changes to the counter operation should be made and systems should be in place for a few months before a detailed analysis is possible. If counter wait times do not begin to meet the standard, either additional staffing or additional changes to the system will be in order.

A revised permit in-take process was implemented in September 2006. Counter wait times dropped significantly. Additional changes are being proposed. See discussion starting on page 57 of this report.

4. Recommendation: Staffing levels for Development Engineering should be set at the 33 proposed in the budget or, as an option, staffing could remain at the current level of 30 with the hiring of additional consultants.

Staffing in Development Engineering has increased to a high of 39 staff due to new regulations and other initiatives. Use of consultants continues to be challenging in this discipline.

5. Recommendation: Since the workloads are dropping in other divisions of PALS, we recommend that the workload in the Resource Management Division be carefully monitored for any sign of dropping and that all vacant positions be reevaluated prior to filling.

No additional positions have been filled. We are managing staff levels to incoming revenue.

6. Recommendation: The possible changes to the monthly reports as outlined on page 22 of the Follow Up Audit should be reviewed.

Most of the recommendations have been implemented in the monthly report. As we work on enhancements to PALS Plus we continue to improve them.

7. Recommendation: Priority should continue to be given to completion of PALS+ conversion for sewers and implementing the Impact Fees.

This phase of the PALS Plus project is completed.

8. Recommendation: Completing an automated monitoring reporting system for the monthly reports should receive a high priority.

Reporting continues to be a high priority. As we work on enhancements to PALS Plus we continue to improve them.

9. Recommendation: The dedicated three PALS+ staff positions should be retained at least through fiscal year 2007 and possibly longer. Work should include completing the monthly reports, the enhancement projects, staff time keeping simplification and workload recording.

One of the three positions was cut in the 2008 budget.

10. Recommendation: The standard for receptionist wait times should be set at no more than 3 or 4 minutes. If wait times are longer additional receptionist back up staff should be available. If problems persist, it may be appropriate to re-examine the function to see if too much is being asked of the receptionist.

A second office assistant position was approved to improve wait times. Presently, one of the positions is vacant and in a frozen status. A Permit Technician acts as a back up when needed at the front counter.

11. Recommendation: A larger customer tracking screen should be installed in the lobby so it is visible from across the lobby.

Completed

12. Recommendation: Triage Technicians should work with the customers at their desk.

The Triage Technician works with the customer in the Development Center lobby. This method allows the Triage Technician to work with multiple customers simultaneously.

13. Recommendation: All customers regardless of type of service requested should meet with the permit technician at their work station.

The Triage Technician works with the customer in the Development Center lobby. This method allows the Triage Technician to work with multiple customers simultaneously.

14. Recommendation: The same Permit Technician that reviews an application for completeness should also enter the permit into PALS+. These two separate steps should be recombined and handled by the technician while the applicant is there waiting.

The revised permit in-take process provides the flexibility for the Permit Technician to both triage and process the application when customer volumes are low.

15. Recommendation: Two Technicians should be assigned to appointments and appointments should be limited to 90 minutes.

The revised intake process limits appointments to commercial building permits. Appointment times are able to stay very close to the suggested 90 minutes.

16. Recommendation: Systems and procedures should be in place so that appointments can be scheduled no longer than five days in advance.

Completed

17. Recommendation: The amount of time taken in accepting applications should be decreased. Recommendations 93, 94 and 95 of the 2004 audit should be implemented.

The revised permit intake process is shorter. With the addition of a drop off KIOSK there is no need to wait.

18. Recommendation: The Counter should work with staff training and systems to achieve the transaction goals shown in Table 18.

The revised intake process has addressed this issue. Transaction goals are being met.

19. *Recommendation:* A cashier should be available at all times and a back up should also be available.

Completed

20. *Recommendation:* PALS should explore the potential for using a portion of the Public Works counter for fast track transactions.

With additional workspace in the lobby this has been addressed.

21. *Recommendation:* PALS should examine if additional permits can be issued over the counter.

This continues to be a goal. Currently our mix of over the counter and on-line applications seems to be working.

22. *Recommendation:* Assign two Permit Technicians to answering phones ASAP.

Additional phone monitoring software allows supervisor to watch wait time and reallocate someone to answer.

Lobby Wait Study

Delivered June 2007

Comments provided and or collated by:

Gordon L. Aleshire, PALS Assistant Director – Building Official

Carol Johnson, Development Center Supervisor

The PALS Oversight Committee met last year to look at a proposed action plan for the revised permit intake process. The Lobby Wait study 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 (but perhaps 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. Still others may wish to have a prescribed list from us or a written idea of the time we expect to take reviewing their application.

To come up with a system capable of meeting the needs of individual customers, we considered the different types of customers and their needs. Then we created a system that responds best to customer needs while respecting the boundaries of resources, laws and policies we have.

The revised process will use the following avenues:

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 stausing 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.

Possible Staffing Model

Fifteen Permit Technicians will provide all of the services in rotation. There are still two vacancies.

- Drop Box 1
- Drop Box processing 1
- Commercial Appointment 1
- Next Available and Information 5
- OTC 1
- Phone 1
- Out (sick – vacation) 2
- LSA 1
- Addressing 1
- Lead 1

PALS Plus

There are significant issues with PALS Plus depending on how we decide to handle the Drop Box. Since we need to track the completeness check and the 28-day time limit, we will need to make changes to the permit system.

Lobby Wait Study Recommendations

The recommendations from this last study are incorporated in the preceding outline. Some additional comments are included with the specific recommendations.

1. Recommendation: Customer service should be viewed as having the following four goals:

- 1. Meeting with 95% of customers in 20 minutes or less.**
- 2. Reducing the number of repeat customer visits.**
- 3. Reducing the total customer transaction time in the Development Center.**
- 4. Increasing consistency of the reviews.**

The outline of the revised permit process was developed with these goals in mind.

2. Recommendation: Development Center managers need to review the questionnaire responses with the employees in detail. Particular attention needs to be given to increasing training and more communication about procedures.

Existing policies and procedures have been updated while new training manuals and new policy and procedure manuals are being prepared.

3. Recommendation: The managers of the Technical Support Units should examine and expand their training programs.

Managers keep in communication and are afforded numerous times a year to provide training.

4. Recommendation: All 15 authorized Permit Technician positions should be filled.

All positions are authorized, however there are a couple of positions frozen due to budget pressure.

5. Recommendation: So as not to impact daily staffing, only one Permit Technician should be allowed to take vacation at a time.

We adopted this policy in 2007. With the current volume of customers the policy is to allow two Permit Technicians to take vacation at a time. As volume changes we will adjust in order to maintain service levels.

6. Recommendation: The Lead Permit Technician and Permit Technician Operations Supervisor should spend a quarter to half of each day working with customers in the lobby.

Completed

7. Recommendation: One staff person should be appointed to oversee changes to the Development Center and coordinate implementation of the remaining 2004 performance audit recommendations.

The Assistant Director has been given this responsibility

9. Recommendation: Development Center managers and supervisors should address the concerns outlined below.

- While it is important to solve the 20-minute wait issue, the approach has been to try to solve this at the expense of broader customer service issues. This is counter-productive. Some employees suggest that supervisors are only “fighting fires” rather than looking at long-term goals.

- Staff is confused about the 20 minutes. Some understand that the goal is 20 minutes from the time the customer checks in with the receptionist until they are served. However, others seem to understand that the goal is to take no more than 20 minutes to serve a customer.
- Some staff feels that other staff members are granted privileges that they are not.
- Some supervisors tend to hover and encourage staff to finish with the customers. Staff should be trained on how to handle customers and not be micro-managed.
- Staff feel that written policy and directions are not clear.
- There is a strong staff feeling that more training is needed.
- Additional “people skills” by the managers and supervisors would be helpful.

All seven bulleted items have been addressed individually. The comments collected as part of this updated report were done at a time of transition. Many staff members had not received the training and there was some disconnects. That has been resolved and training and communication continue to be a focus.

9. Recommendation: The Development Center and all PALS divisions should work to negotiate staff meeting times that work well for all functions.

Some improvement has been made. Space for staff meetings is limited and meetings are scheduled to maximize the space while not impacting Development Center operations.

10. Recommendation: The process of providing feedback to the Development Center on issues being missed or interpretations of policy should be continued.

Completed - A system of using an electronic form to notify of missed issues has been implemented.

11. Recommendation: PALS should examine its permit applications to determine if some could be consolidated.

Some consolidation has occurred. Additional consolidation will require software changes.

12. Recommendation: The County should examine transitioning PALS development activities to an enterprise fund and building a substantial reserve for development down cycles.

An initial fee study was completed in August 2008. The report had the following recommendations.

PALS Fee Policy Committee Recommendations

The Committee consisting of industry, environmental, and Pierce County stakeholders arrived by consensus on the following recommendations. FCS Group and The Latimore Company, consultants in this field, provided technical and facilitation assistance.

1. **Fee Recovery:** Fees for discretionary land use, site development, and construction permits should be set to collect 80% of the overall PALS annual budget.¹ Within this:
 - a. Fees should cover 100% of the following:
 - i. Direct labor for processing, plan review, and inspection including Public Works Utility transportation impact analysis and design reviews
 - ii. Associated non-labor, overhead and G&A costs in the PALS budget
 - iii. Countywide indirect cost that supports the PALS operation
 - iv. Appeals filed by the proponent.
 - b. Partially fee funded, with each item revisited for the 2010 budget:
 - i. 15% of Advance Planning annual costs
 - ii. 60% of the cost for Land use hearings, SEPA determinations, LUAC proceedings, and administrative decisions.
 - iii. 40% of the cost to provide general information inquires
 - iv. Appeals by other than the proponent use a flat \$1000 fee (was \$1500)
 - c. Not fee funded (100% general fund):
 - i. Code Enforcement case work.
2. **Deferred Liabilities:** The life cycle of many land use and site development projects spans two or more fiscal years. PALS should begin determining (by some means) the budgeted cost of work remaining at each year-end and develop a fee model that provides revenue when the work is performed.
3. **Reserve:** PALS should establish a reserve to draw from in lean periods to retain the staff needed for the next upsurge. The reserve fund should hold 25% of an average annual revenue budget (~\$4.5MM). During shortfalls, management will also under-run budgets to cover a portion of the shortfall. Triggers will need to be defined for when to begin drawing from the reserve and when to contribute (possibly after 3 contiguous months of rise). Since 1990, Pierce County permit demand spikes in 6 year cycles with dramatic falls to 25% below the long-term average with recovery in about 2 years. Western US trends double these figures (~12 year cycles with 50% declines).

¹ This overall recovery rate averaged 82% over the 10 year period 1998 through 2007.

4. **Flexible Spending Authority:** PALS should have flexible expenditure authority to adjust resources to maintain service levels during rapid increases in revenue.
5. **Training Fund:** One-half percent (½%) of the permit and plan review fee revenue shall be dedicated to professional development.
6. **New Program Funding:** New programs and or regulations added to PALS' responsibilities must be self-supporting in accordance with these fee policies through fees, the general fund, or other funding.
7. **Watershed:** There is a sense shared by the committee that development and hence the PALS budget may not be driven by traditional single-family residential applications in the next market cycle. The committee recommends a strategic study be conducted to plan accordingly.
8. **Transition:** The market is currently in a severe down cycle (exceeding 25%). Deferred liability options, accrual of a reserve, and any fee increases under these fee policies should be phased in so as not to shock the market further at this time.
9. **Next Steps:** Application of these new policies to the current costs of providing these services, transition decisions, creation of procedures to implement the new practices, and adoption of a 2009 fee schedule.

13. Recommendation: PALS various checklists should be reviewed and revised to assist the customer's understanding of what is required to obtain a permit.

Updating has been completed and there is an on-going effort to keep them current.

14. Recommendation: The amount of review that is undertaken before an application is accepted should be modified using the suggestions outlined.

This issue was reviewed with the Oversight Committee. The consensus was that a business model that confirms vesting at time of application is preferred. We have tried to meet both the recommendation and the vesting needs.

15. Recommendation: PALS handouts should be revised based on the above suggestions.

Updating has been completed and there is an on-going effort to keep them current.

16. Recommendation: The measurement systems should be revised as noted below.

- PALS+ calculates **average** wait times, which can be misleading. If feasible, the PALS+ reports should be changed to use median wait times.
- The Technical Support processes should also be measured.
- The PALS+ reports should include the percentage of wait times that meet the 20-minute target. That information is currently hand calculated by staff and included in *Fast Forward* reports.
- Measurements should be developed to calculate the total time from when the customer signs in with the receptionist to the time they are ready to leave the Development Center.

Required revision to PALS Plus to automate this report is on the enhancement list. We currently manually calculate the percentage of customers served.

17. Recommendation: The Submittal Standards form should be improved using the above comments.

Requires PALS Plus enhancement and is currently on the list of proposed changes.

18. Recommendation: A formal training program for Permit Technicians should receive high priority.

A training program is in place with an on-going effort to keep topics current.

19. Recommendation: Systems should be developed to assist Permit Technicians with performance data.

Requires PALS Plus enhancement and is currently on the list of proposed changes.

20. Recommendation: Electronic plan submittals should also be processed electronically internally to the department.

Currently this process is used for some residential review. It is a long term goal to expand the option.

21. Recommendation: PALS should upgrade its website with particular attention given to accepting applications and plans electronically and having Quick View included on the web page.

Web site upgrades are done as programming is available. Critical area data used in Quick View is available now on the web page.

22. Recommendation: All staff should improve the way they memorialize discussions and recommendations in the computer files.

Completed, Technical Support staff are responsible for entering their own comments into Submittal Standards.

23. Recommendation: Permit Technician stations should be formally labeled with first and last names.

Completed

24. Recommendation: All Permit Technicians and Technical Support staff should give their business cards to all customers.

Completed

25. Recommendation: The receptionist function should be improved by telling how long the wait is likely to be and by having a Spanish speaker available somewhere within PALS staff when needed.

The customer is now given an estimate on how long their wait time will be. PALS has created a bank of staff with foreign language abilities who may be called upon to assist with translation when needed.

26. Recommendation: Limit Information customers to 45 minutes per day.

Limiting time with customers is difficult. Even so, it is being included with the revised permit in-take process.

27. Recommendation: “Make App” applications should proceed faster, by either assigning specific staff or giving them more priority.

The revised permit in-take process along with the drop-off option is meeting the intent of this recommendation.

28. Recommendation: Consider allowing up to two applications at the same time for Make Applications but allow more than two on an appointment basis.

The revised permit in-take process has eliminated most appointments. Most multiple application customers are Base Plan applicants. Those applicants are being required to drop off.

29. Recommendation: Give a higher priority to Over The Counter applications.

The revised permit in-take process takes customers in the order of arrival. The drop off option allows them an expedited service.

30. Recommendation: Add the measurement of 20 minutes for applications that go to Development Engineering or Current Planning.

All customers are measured the same.

31. Recommendation: The way applicants are noticed should be changed in an attempt to reduce the high number who come to the Development Center and are turned away because the sign-offs have not been completed.

This recommendation relates to the customer coming to the Development Center to pick up a permit after being notified it has been approved for issue. Upon arrival, the customer learns it has not been approved. Does not happen often enough to change the procedure, involves reminding staff of the current procedure.

32. Recommendation: Whenever possible the same Permit Technician that took in the application should also process it.

The revised permit in-take process has eliminated the hand-off element in the application process.

33. *Recommendation:* Once all Permit Technicians are trained, processing should take place immediately after the application is received

The revised permit in-take process has included this element in the application process.

34. *Recommendation:* Technical Support staff should always sign-off when they have completed meeting with a customer.

Completed

35. *Recommendation:* The priority system for Technical Support should be based on the time any customer is first signed in by the receptionist.

The revised permit in-take process has included this element in the application process.

36. *Recommendation:* Technical Support and the Permit Technicians should meet together with the customer whenever it is logistically feasible and can be handled within reasonable time constraints.

The revised permit in-take process has included this element in the application process.

37. *Recommendation:* Permit Technicians should be furnished better checklists and guidelines on technical support issues along with increased training.

Completed

38. *Recommendation:* The Development Center and the various technical support specialists should agree on a way to reduce the amount of technical support needed before an application is accepted.

Completed

39. *Recommendation:* The Permit Technicians should always work with the customers at their desk, face-to-face.

This is being included in the revised permit in-take process.

40. Recommendation: When possible and without overly slowing down the process, the Permit Technician, Technical Support, and customer should meet together at the Permit Technician's desk.

This is being included in the revised permit in-take process.

41. Recommendation: The Receptionist should be trained to assist in coordinating all the parties together at the same time and setting priorities from the time the customer first signs in with the receptionist. This would include priority for Technical Support as well as the Make App list.

This is being included in the revised permit in-take process.

42. Recommendation: The phones should remain open during the lunch hour.

The new phone system provides for a message if the operator is away for lunch.

43. Recommendation: The telephone operators should give their name to the calling party.

Completed.

44. Recommendation: The long-term goal for the phone system should be to avoid blind transfers.

Blind transfers are discouraged. The phone system provides the ability to be sure someone answers before the transfer is completed.

45. Recommendation: The Planner of the Day and Biologist of the Day phones should be answered for at least three hours per day.

Both telephones are answered during business hours unless staff is assisting a customer at the counter. All calls are returned within 24 hours.

46. Recommendation: PALS should up-grade its phone system with automated features and, based on experience with the system, consider an additional operator for the central phone line.

Completed