

# project **FAST FORWARD**

A NEWSLETTER OF PIERCE COUNTY PLANNING AND LAND SERVICES

MARCH 2005

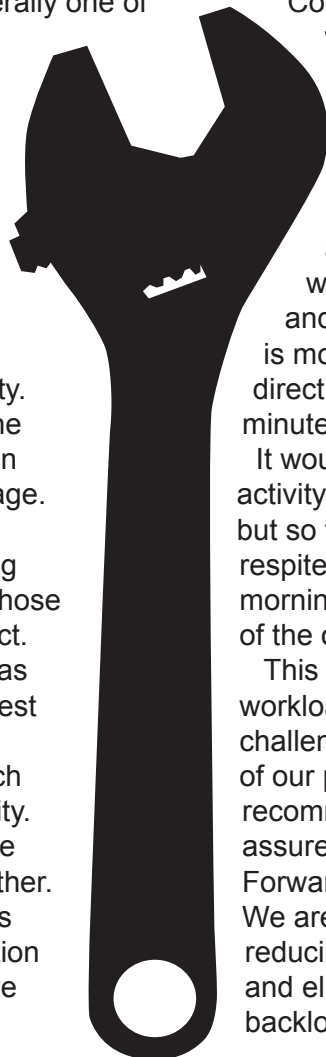
## Busiest February Ever Creates Additional Demand

### Weather, Rates, and Deadlines Contribute to Wave of Activity

February of 2005 was the busiest February on record and the second busiest month in the last seven years. Generally one of the slowest months of the year, the previous highest February recorded 1700 permit applications. During this last month, we received 2,970.

An intersection of three conditions contributed to this outsized wave of activity. The main cause was the March 1 implementation of the Directions Package. Hundreds of permit applicants were working hard to submit before those changes went into effect.

The second cause was the continued low interest rates and the threat of rising future rates, which always increases activity. The third cause was the unseasonably fair weather. Spring arrived early this year, and the construction season appears to have arrived along with it.



### Additional Challenges Won't Sway Team from Objectives

The results included \$567,000 more revenue than anticipated, which goes directly into the County general fund, as well as extra hours, and weekend shifts from our dedicated staff.

Our customers' patience was challenged as well. An average February lobby wait has been two hours and 21 minutes, which is moving in the opposite direction of our goal of sixty minute lobby waits.

It would help if this wave of activity were followed by calm, but so far, we haven't had any respite. On March 1, the early morning customer line went out of the office.

This dramatically increased workload creates an additional challenge in the implementation of our performance audit recommendations. Rest assured that Project Fast Forward is still alive and well. We are still committed to reducing the lobby wait time and eliminating the permit backlog by the end of 2005.

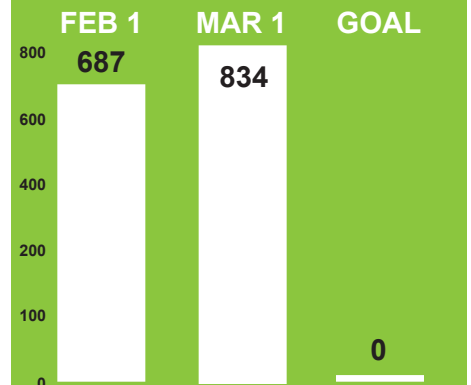


Low interest rates and Directions Package deadlines created an unusually busy February.

### LOBBY WAIT TIMES



### CURRENT PERMIT BACKLOG



# Involving Local Communities

## King and Clark Counties Share Permitting Experience

Pierce County's permitting situation is not unique. Nearly all local Northwest governments are struggling with the situation of more permits than they can timely process. Much like Pierce County, King and Clark Counties have



Pierce County Planning and Land Services is working hard to speed up the permitting process.

To learn more about Project Fast Forward, or to apply for a permit online, visit us at [www.piercecountywa.org/pals](http://www.piercecountywa.org/pals).

You may also stop by our offices at  
2401 So. 35th Street  
Tacoma, WA 98409-7490

been working through performance audits and improvement plans. We invited representatives from these counties to learn from their successes and speed up our own improvement process.

Marlia Jenkins, Program Development Manager from Clark County, already has two years of performance audit improvements under her belt. She reviewed the history of how their audit began and the progress they've made. Here are a few of the lessons they've learned:

- **You can't manage what you can't measure.** It's important to measure success (and failure) and report the information to the public.
- **Make the change matter.** It is easy to nibble around the edges and avoid real change. The most direct route is by changing significant operations.
- **What have you done for me lately?** Improvements can't stop. Good organizations constantly strive to make things better and better.

We also spent some time with Chris Ricketts and James Chan from King County to review their implementation of Project Managers. A project manager acts as a County's single point of contact, keeping customers of large projects informed every step of the way. A similar program is in consideration for Pierce County.

We'll continue to explore the successes of other counties, so that our Project Fast Forward decisions are as informed and efficient as possible.

## LUACs Give Local Citizens a Voice in the Process

As a portion of our audit addresses our interaction with Land Use Advisory Commissions, we're working hard to keep those lines of communication open.

Land Use Advisory Commissions provide a forum where citizens from a local community can address land use issues that impact their neighborhoods. The commissions are composed solely of citizen members, who not only represent their communities, but also provide valuable feedback on both the permitting process and on area planning.

On February 24, we met with representatives from all of the seven commissions for a working lunch. We discussed the LUAC related recommendations included in the audit, which focus on support and communication issues between PALS and the LUACs.

We're excited about the increased involvement of citizen-run commissions. We're here to serve our communities, so we want to hear from them as much as possible. These groups are sure to provide us with suggestions that will improve our services.

