

PIERCE COUNTY AUDIT - NOVEMBER 2005 REPORT BY ZUCKER SYSTEMS

A. OVERVIEW

This report is based on a review of a variety of reports sent to Zucker Systems during the month of October.

B. OCTOBER FAST FORWARD NEWSLETTER

The article by Tiffany Speir of the Master Builders Association confirms the excellent positive involvement of the Master Builders in this important Fast Forward effort.

Gordon Aleshire's comments were also a good reminder that the improvement efforts are taking place even during the time of high workload and new policy and code changes. PALS staff is to be complimented on this effort.

C. OCTOBER 15 ALESHIRE UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2004 ZUCKER SYSTEMS AUDIT

This is a useful summary of progress on all of the recommendations. My comments on a few items include:

Recommendation 16: We would be available for additional discussion on the topic of application completeness. Item 6 in the County Development Regulations, Title 18.40.020, PCC says that "Proposed applications shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and applicable development regulations." We believe that it is not reasonable to make this finding during the application intake and if properly done would further add to the delay and counter wait times. Trying to do this at the counter is simply a duplication of the review the planners will need to undertake as they review the project.

Recommendation 23: The department indicates that it has had a policy for comprehensive first time reviews. However, the lack of enforcement of this policy was an issue from the customers. Unless the department creates a monitoring system for ensuring first time review, it is likely to remain an issue. We feel this item should not be marked as "completed."

Recommendation 34: We continue to feel that all phone calls should be received the same day received. In the information age, customers are overall expecting faster turnaround from organizations.

Recommendation 35: While we understand that some aspects of improving the phone system could be expensive, these improvements can substantially increase customer service and should receive a higher priority.

Recommendation 55: The report indicates that while the Policy and Interpretation Documents for Planning have been started, they have not been completed. Given the hiring of consultants and new staff, it is essential that this work be completed in order to assist in training and consistency of decisions.

Recommendation 96: The Lobby Service Attendant is even more important today than it will be once counter wait times are reduced. We suggest that this recommendation be implemented today, at least for the next 90 days.

Recommendation 101: The statistics for the department indicate that the phone system continues to be a problem. Additional staffing to answer the phones should be given a higher priority.

Recommendation 176: If necessary, fees should be increased in order to meet the 21 day timeline.

Recommendation 180: It should be a relatively easy matter for Public Works to accept credit cards and this recommendation should proceed.

Recommendation 182: Removing the need for notarization for Public Works Sewers should be relatively easy to accomplish and will assist the customer. This recommendation should proceed.

D. BUSINESS PLAN SUMMARY

This is an excellent document and we are supportive of the directions outlined.

E. THE REQUIRED PRE-REVIEW MODEL

We find this draft confusing but will hold our detailed comments until the work of the counter committee is further along. The document as drafted gives us the impression that there may be too many reviews by too many people. In the audit, we indicated that some of the counter reviews were being duplicated when the project actually meets the plan checker, engineer or planner. Any system should attempt to eliminate as much of this duplicate review as possible.

If this system is used it should be restricted to the larger jobs only.

F. EXCESS FUNDS ISSUES

I favor using excess funds to:

- a. Any funds that may be needed to get the reporting functions fully operational. This item was not listed on the options for the \$150,000 but having the reporting function fully operational is a key item for the future.
- b. Work on the counter wait times,
- c. Enhance the phone system, and
- d. Support the Fire Prevention Bureau needs.

G. NOVEMBER 7, 2005 FAST FORWARD REPORT

Setting the Bar, Page 3

Developing the data for the number of applications per month that approved staffing levels could review without creating additional backlog is extremely important. It would be unfortunate if the backlog is eliminated by the end of the year and then begins to build again. I do note on page 6 that the chart shows that the Building Division's full staff can only process 650 permits per month. The chart shows that the lowest number of permits received per month has been 702 with the highest of 989. October was 762. If this data is correct, it would imply that once the consultants are no longer being used, that the building backlog will return.

I also noted the comment that getting the reporting functions fully operational is a challenge. I raised the question in Item F a. above if any funds are needed for this effort.

Implementation Report, Page 4

I concur that PALS staff is to be complimented on its hard work. I suggest that as soon as the backlog is eliminated, that some form of recognition or celebration be undertaken.

Building Division

I notice that review times are being reported as averages. Has consideration been given to reporting data as medians or better yet, percent of applications meeting the agreed review times?

Development Engineering

The chart shows a backlog of 76 applications but the text says that 210 applications were not completed on time. I thought backlog was being defined as any application

not meeting the timelines. Has the definition changed or is there a problem with the data?

Development Center

I continue to believe that the data for wait times should not use averages. Better statistics would be to use medians and also the percent of wait times that meet the target.