

# Operations and Service Levels Work Flow Study for Planning and Building Services Department

## Richmond, California

*By*

Zucker Systems  
Paul Zucker, President  
Mark Persico, Senior Associate  
Scott Troyer, Senior Associate  
Mac Birch, Kendig Keast Collaborative



1545 Hotel Circle South, Suite 300  
San Diego, CA 92108  
(619) 260-2680  
[www.zuckersystems.com](http://www.zuckersystems.com)  
[paul@zuckersystems.com](mailto:paul@zuckersystems.com)

December 2006

DRAFT 12/5/06

## Table of Contents

<b>I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. BACKGROUND .....	1
B. KEY PRIORITY AREAS .....	1
1. PROCESSING TIMELINES .....	1
2. PERMITTING SYSTEM AND TECHNOLOGY.....	2
3. BUILDING DIVISION PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT .....	3
4. CURRENT PLANNING PROCESSES .....	3
5. GENERAL PLAN.....	4
6. PLANNING MANAGEMENT .....	4
7. PLANNING WORK PROGRAM .....	5
<b>II. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE.....	7
C. METHODOLOGY.....	7
D. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	9
<b>III. ISSUES RELATED TO ENTIRE PLANNING AND BUILDING SERVICES DEPARTMENT .....</b>	<b>17</b>
A. COMMUNICATION.....	17
B. OFFICE SPACE.....	19
C. BUDGETS, REVENUES AND FEES .....	22
<b>IV. TECHNOLOGY .....</b>	<b>25</b>
A. INTRODUCTION .....	25
B. GENERAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS ENVIRONMENT .....	25
C. OBSERVATIONS AND ISSUES.....	26
<b>V. BUILDING DIVISION .....</b>	<b>31</b>
A. PROFILE .....	31
B. POSITIVE FINDINGS .....	35

C. PHILOSOPHY ..... 35

D. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES ..... 40

E. FEES..... 45

F. PROCESSING ISSUES..... 49

G. OTHER PROCESSING ISSUES ..... 57

H. FIRE REVIEW ..... 58

I. BUILDING INSPECTIONS..... 60

J. SPECIAL PROGRAMS ..... 64

**VI. PLANNING DIVISION ..... 65**

A. PROFILE ..... 65

B. POLICY ISSUES..... 68

C. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES ..... 75

D. PROCESS ISSUES ..... 80

**List of Figures**

Figure 1 Methodology Overview ..... 8

Figure 2 Existing Office Space – Partial Drawing ..... 21

Figure 3 Office Space Design Option..... 21

Figure 4 Building Division Staff..... 33

Figure 5 Organizational Chart for the Planning Division..... 67

Figure 6 Revised Application Filing and Review Flow Chart..... 84

**List of Tables**

Table 1 Table of Recommendations ..... 10

Table 2 Planning and Building Services Department Budget ..... 23

Table 3 Web Site Features ..... 29

Table 4 Building Division Staff..... 32

Table 5 Building Permit History ..... 34

Table 6 Total Permit History ..... 34

Table 7 Selected Permit History ..... 35

Table 8 Recommended Processing Times ..... 55

Table 9 Positions and Responsibilities for Planning Division..... 66

Table 10 Planning Permit History FY 2003-04 – FY 2005-06..... 68

Table 11 Permit Processing Times Years 2003 – 2006 ..... 88

Table 12 Total Hours Required for Planning Case Processing and Staff Required .... 89

# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. BACKGROUND

This study was initiated by the Building and Planning Services Department. Its objective is to analyze current operation and service levels and to recommend changes that will improve customer service and efficiency.

## B. KEY PRIORITY AREAS

This report includes 127 recommendations for improving Richmond's Planning and Building Services Department. While all the recommendations are important, we believe there are seven key areas or groupings that need the highest priority as follows:

### 1. PROCESSING TIMELINES

#### Findings

Customers complain about long processing timelines for both building and planning applications. Neither the Building nor Planning Divisions have good records relating to actual timelines, and the systems and processes are not being monitored as they relate to timelines.

The Building Division has set plan check standards of two weeks for major tenant improvement, and residential additions and alterations; and 3.5 weeks for new construction, but these timelines are seldom if ever achieved. In reviewing data dated from 11/15/06 processing time varied from nine weeks being the shortest to 35 weeks the longest. As of 6/22/06 the oldest plan waiting for review was submitted eight weeks earlier.

The Planning Division has not set performance standards for timelines. From 2003 to 2006 average processing time for variances was 97 days, design review took 107 days, conditional use permits took 108 days and tentative maps averaged 143 days. More reasonable industry standard timelines for these projects would be 30 to 45 days.

#### Recommendations

Recommendations for the Building Division function include:

- Establishing performance standards for all reviewing partners, Recommendation 43
- Setting new plan review targets, Recommendation 44
- Monitoring staff performance, Recommendation 45
- Supervising the plan review engineers, Recommendation 46
- Tracking processing times, Recommendation 47
- Using stand-by consulting plan checkers to meet timelines, Recommendation 19 and 20
- Create separate processing lines for quick transactions and over the counter permits, Recommendation 38

Recommendations for the Planning Division functions include:

- Setting performance standards to hear 95% of DRB cases in 30 days and 95% of conditional use permits, variances and tentative maps in 45 days. Recommendations 124 and 125
- Scheduling Planning Commission and DRB items to meet timelines, Recommendation 92

## 2. PERMITTING SYSTEM AND TECHNOLOGY

### Findings

The SAP technology software being used City-wide has proven to be totally ineffective in handling both Building and Planning application processing needs. It accommodates only very basic function of permit issuance, plan review tracking and inspections. For example, we found it impossible to even determine the number of annual building permits by type. The system lacks e-government applications, cannot accommodate field computers, and GIS access is difficult.

### Recommendations

Working in cooperation with the IT Department we will be conducting a needs assessment along with recommendations for vendor selection as a supplement to this current report.

Other technology recommendations include:

- Hiring technical support staff for the Planning and Building Services Department, Recommendation 15
- Using digital imaging capabilities, Recommendation 16

- Expanding the web site, Recommendation 17
- Integrating e-government into the new permit system, Recommendation 25
- Having the Fire Department adopt the same permitting platform as Planning and Building Services, Recommendation 59

### **3. BUILDING DIVISION PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT**

#### **Findings**

The Building Division must strengthen management and oversight of its functions. There are no supervisors to manage the day-to-day plan check and inspection function. The Chief Building Official has been directly managing all of these functions. The Division must establish clearer processes and procedures. It is not meeting reasonable timelines, and lacks good staff training. Since the Division doesn't know how many projects it processes by type or how long each takes, there is no way to set appropriate staffing levels.

#### **Recommendations**

- Add a supervisor for plan review, Recommendation 46
- Fill the Supervising Building Inspector position, Recommendation 50
- Hold regular staff meetings to eliminate inconsistencies, Recommendation 74
- Create an building inspection handbook, Recommendation 29
- Create processing procedures for permit issuance, Recommendation 32
- Create a single application form, Recommendation 40

### **4. CURRENT PLANNING PROCESSES**

#### **Findings**

The lack of appropriate current planning processes and staff training have led to long timelines and inconsistency in decisions.

#### **Recommendations**

The report includes numerous process recommendations. Key recommendations include:

- Increasing Administrative Design Review thresholds, Recommendation 83
- Making design guidelines more specific, Recommendation 85

- Completing a planning policy manual, Recommendation 91
- Assign planners to conduct CEQA review, Recommendation 106
- Principal Planner to serve as chair of TRC meetings, Recommendation 115.
- Having senior staff from other departments attend the TRC meeting, Recommendation 116
- Authorize TRC staff representatives to make decisions for their respective departments, Recommendation 117

## 5. GENERAL PLAN

### Findings

The General Plan updating process is one of the most expensive and important planning projects that the City is undertaking. An effort of this magnitude requires considerable work and leadership by Planning staff. While it is still early in the process, as currently organized, we believe additional management focus and effort is needed.

### Recommendations

We suggest:

- Strengthening the staffing and leadership being given to the General Plan through hiring a seasoned contract planner to lead this effort, Recommendation 75
- Identifying priority sites in the City for development as part of the General Plan, Recommendation 76
- Analyze priority locations as a joint effort of the Planning and Redevelopment Departments, Recommendation 77
- Analyze priority locations in the General Plan program Environmental Impact Report, Recommendation 78

## 6. PLANNING MANAGEMENT

### Findings

There is a lack of clarity of responsibilities between the Director and the two Principal Planners. This has led to a lack of aggressiveness by the two Principal Planners in managing their functions. Additionally, it has the potential to overload the Director



with operational activities versus the important strategic and tactical activities that should be his priority.

### **Recommendations**

- The roles of the Planning Department's management team should be clarified, Recommendation 91
- Mid-management should manage their functions, Recommendation 93
- The Current Principal Planner should not directly handle cases, Recommendation 95

## **7. PLANNING WORK PROGRAM**

### **Findings**

There is no fully developed work program for Advance Planning projects. In the absence of a work program, neither the public nor the Council understands what projects the department is working on. As suggested by one staff member; "We are very good at identifying issues, but we cannot follow through to solve them."

### **Recommendations**

A complete annual work program containing project goals, timelines and milestones along with resource allocation should be developed. The work program should be reviewed and approved by the City Manager and presented to the City Council for information. Recommendation 102.

Additionally, the Department's objectives outlined in the annual budget objectives should be consistent with the Department's work program, Recommendation 103.

**Draft 12/5/06**

## II. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

### A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This study was initiated by the Planning and Building Services Department. Its objective is to analyze current operation and service levels and to recommend changes that will improve customer service and efficiency.

. Specific areas for examination included:

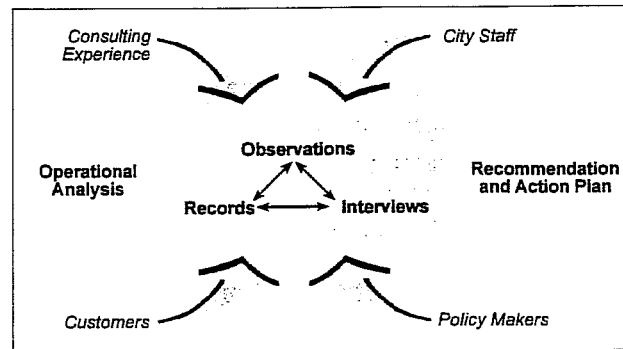
- Analyses of entitlement and permitting process
- Best practices for record keeping and documentation
- Lobby and work space configurations
- Personnel and equipment needs
- Automated record keeping and management support
- Link between operations, financial reporting and revenue data

The RFP for the study was issued February 9, 2006. Interviews were held April 17. Zucker Systems was selected for the contract with a contract dated May 17, 2006. Zucker Systems staff spent time in Richmond in June and July.

### C. METHODOLOGY

Zucker Systems used a proprietary well-tested, integrated methodology for this study, as shown in Figure 1 below. We brought our extensive experience to the study, worked closely with City staff, and solicited input and observations from customers and policy makers. The methodology is built on interrelating records, observations, and interviews. Each is necessary for valid studies. National research has shown that any of these three if relied upon exclusively can be subject to substantial error. For example, record systems are often found to be as high as 50% in error, or the wrong information are measured. To ensure accuracy, used observations and interviews to verify records. And records and interviews were used to verify observations. Likewise records and observations were used to verify interviews. Each group of participants shown in Figure 1 was an important part of the process.

**Figure 1  
Methodology Overview**



Specific activities conducted for this study included the following:

**Customer Input**

- Two customer focus groups of 20 participants total
- A mail survey to 509 planning review applicants
- A mail survey to 559 building permit applicants

**Policy Maker Input**

- Interviews with two City Councilmembers
- Meeting with chairman of the Planning Commission
- Meeting with chairman of the Design Review Board

**Staff Input**

- Meeting with City Manager
- Group meetings with twenty-nine managers and staff, each of who also completed a short anonymous questionnaire
- A long employee questionnaire completed by 11 staff members
- Individual interviews with people listed in Appendix A of this report
- Various meetings with Building and Planning staff to discuss issues and processes

**Meetings, Observations and Research**

- Review of the planning and permitting systems
- Review of forms, handouts, policies, files, and ordinances

- Observation of staff at work
- Observation of activity at the public counters and reception areas
- Tour of City offices
- Observation of a Design Review Board meeting
- Review of tape of Planning Commission meeting
- Attended Planning Division staff meeting
- Review of a draft of this report by the Planning and Building Services Director

### D. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment found many exemplary features within the Planning and Building Services Department as well as a number of areas where improvement is possible.

#### Areas of Strength

Specific strengths include:

- A Director who is visionary and has the ability to bring people together
- Building, Fire and Planning functions share the same lobby
- Master Cards and Visa may be used for application payments
- There is a good GIS system in place
- The Planning staff is committed to making a difference in the City

#### Opportunities for Improvement

Problem areas and opportunities for improvement are described throughout this report. What we consider to be seven key areas for improvement, or themes, are discussed in the Executive Summary, the first chapter in this report.

Table 1 summarizes the 127 recommendations and opportunities for improvement made throughout this study. To assist the reader, each summarized recommendation is cross-referenced to the page on which the supporting text appears. Although all of these recommendations are important, each was given a priority number in order to assist the City with implementation. There are 39 recommendations ranked as priority Number One, 73 Priority Number Two recommendations, and 15 Priority Number Three recommendations. We assume that existing staff will implement many of the recommendations and the cost, except for new staffing, generally should be recovered through greater efficiency.

To further help the City and departments with implementation, we have also coded all the recommendations. "Phase One Actions" are recommendations which we believe

should be completed within the first nine months. "Phase Two Actions" should be completed within 18 months.

There are 101 Phase One Action recommendations (implementation within nine months). Some of these are given priority 1, 2 or 3. However, that does not mean that only the priority 1 recommendations should be addressed. There are 26 Phase Two Action recommendations (implementation within 18 months). The Departments should develop a detailed implementation plan with time targets for these recommendations.

For each recommendation, we also indicate a Responsible Party for implementation.

While the above priorities and action schedules should help the City with its implementation plan, it's essential to initially focus on the seven key priorities discussed in the Executive Summary.

**Table 1**  
**Table of Recommendations**

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
1.	Develop and agree on an implementation plan	City Manager and Director of Planning and Building Services	15	1	X	
<b>ISSUES IMPACTING ALL FUNCTIONS</b>						
2.	Reprint and standardize business cards	Supervising Office Assistant	17	3	X	
3.	Freely hand out business cards	Division Managers	17	2	X	
4.	Create comprehensive email lists	Supervising Office Assistant	17	2	X	
5.	Establish customer focus groups	Director of Planning and Building Services Department	18	2		X
6.	Develop customer survey forms	Supervising Office Assistant	18	3		X
7.	Hold periodic meetings with customer groups	Director of Planning and Building Services	18	2		X
8.	All staff to answer phones at least half day	Division managers	18	2	X	
9.	Return all phone calls before end of the day	Division managers	19	2	X	
10.	Update voice mail system on a regular basis	Supervising Office Assistant	19	2	X	
11.	Consider short term office changes	Director of Planning and Building Services	21	2	X	
12.	Incorporate one-stop-shop concepts in new office space	City Manager and Director of Planning and Building Services	22	2		X
13.	Develop reserve fund for Planning and Building Services	Finance Department	22	2		X
<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>						

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
14.	Conduct needs analysis for permitting system	Planning and Building Services Department and IT	27	1	X	
15.	Hire technical support staff for Planning and Building Services	City Council, City Manager and HR	28	1	X	
16.	Use digital imaging capabilities	Supervising Office Assistant	28	1	X	
17.	Expand web site	Supervising Office Assistant And Planning Technician	29	2	X	
<b>BUILDING DIVISION</b>						
18.	Establish a works in progress monitoring report	Chief Building Official	39	1		X
19.	Establish contracts for outside plan review	Chief Building Official	39	1	X	
20.	Use outside plan review to meet performance standards	Chief Building Official	39	1	X	
21.	Conduct cost benefit analysis for electronic archival system	Supervising Office Assistant	41	2	X	
22.	Create a new Board of Appeals	City Council and Chief Building Official	41	3		X
23.	Require technical staff to become certified	Chief Building Official	42	2		X
24.	Establish performance based pay	Human Resources	42	2		X
25.	Develop a Building Division website	Supervising Office Assistant	43	2		X
26.	Develop master plan files	Plan Check Engineer	43	3		X
27.	Do a thorough plan review on the current master file plans	Plan Check Engineer	43	3	X	
28.	Use plan review checklists	Plan Check Engineer	43	2	X	
29.	Create an inspection handbook	Building Inspector Supervisor	44	1	X	
30.	Create training committee	Chief Building Official	44	2	X	
31.	Create a training officer	Chief Building Official	44	2	X	
32.	Create processing procedures for permit issuance	Chief Building Official	44	1	X	
33.	Develop customer handouts	Chief Building Official	45	2	X	
34.	Change current fee methodology	Chief Building Official	49	2		X
35.	Hire a part time receptionist	Director of Planning and Building Services	51	2	X	
36.	Make service hours the same as office hours	Director of Planning and Building Services	51	3	X	
37.	Revise the data entry for the permit system and produce monthly management reports	Chief Building Official and IT	52	2	X	
38.	Separate processing line for quick transactions and over the counter permits	Chief Building Official	52	1	X	
39.	Use appointment system for plan intake	Supervising Office Assistant	52	3	X	
40.	Create a single application form	Supervising Office Assistant	53	1	X	
41.	Develop plan submittal completeness checklist	Plan Check Engineer	53	2	X	
42.	Create a shared Excel plan review log	Supervising Office Assistant	54	2	X	
43.	Establish performance standards for all review partners	Director of Planning and Building Services Dept	54	1	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
44.	Set new building plan review targets	Chief Building Official	55	1	X	
45.	Monitor staff performance	Chief Building Official	55	1	X	
46.	Supervise plan review engineers	Supervising Building Inspector	56	1	X	
47.	Track processing times	Supervising Building Inspector	56	1	X	
48.	Implement a performance based fee system	Director of Planning and Building Services	56	2	X	
49.	Create plan review check lists with customized corrections	Chief Building Official	56	2	X	
50.	Fill Supervising Building Inspector position	Chief Building Official and Human Resources	57	1	X	
51.	Provide back up for civil engineering review	Public Works	57	2	X	
52.	Install a phone call management system	Supervising Office Assistant and IT	57	2	X	
53.	Develop an electronic time card system	Supervising Office Assistant and IT	58	3		X
54.	Cross-train clerical staff and permit technicians	Supervising Office Assistant	58	2	X	
55.	Train clerical for simple plan intake	Supervising Office Assistant	58	2	X	
<b>FIRE REVIEW</b>						
56.	Create a permit specialist position to support the Fire intake	Fire Department and Human Resources	59	3		X
57.	Bring Fire fees to full cost recovery	Fire Department and Finance Department	59	2	X	
58.	Incorporate a Fire review fee into the entitlement process	Fire Department and Finance Department	59	3		X
59.	Fire to adopt same permitting platform as other departments	Fire Department	59	1		X
60.	Fire billing system to interface with the Finance system	Fire Department and IT	59	2		X
61.	Software to allow Fire Prevention access to GIS	Fire Department and IT	60	2		X
62.	Fire Protection Engineers to replace the line staff	Fire Department and Human Resources	60	2		X
63.	Contract with third party fire plan review service	Fire Department	60	2	X	
64.	Create training program for Fire Prevention Bureau	Fire Department	60	2	X	
<b>BUILDING INSPECTIONS</b>						
65.	Staff for next day inspections 95% of the time	Chief Building Official	61	1	X	
66.	Automate inspection request system	Chief Building Official and IT	61	2		X
67.	Consolidate office inspection records	Building Inspector Supervisor	61	2	X	
68.	Provide Building Inspector storage to transport supplies	Building Inspector Supervisor	62	3	X	
69.	Purchase electrical testing equipment	Supervising Office Assistant	62	3	X	
70.	Implement performance based fees	Supervising Office Assistant IT and Finance Department	62	2		X
71.	Provide clerical support from 7:30 to 8:00	Supervising Office Assistant	63	3	X	



#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
72.	Expedite plan review revisions once construction has started	Chief Building Official	63	2	X	
73.	Assign inspector to a training committee	Building Inspection Supervisor	63	2	X	
74.	Regular staff meeting to discuss inconsistencies among inspectors	Building Inspection Supervisor	63	1	X	
<b>PLANNING DIVISION – POLICY ISSUES</b>						
75.	Strengthen staffing and leadership for General Plan	Planning and Building Services Director	69	1	X	
76.	Identify priority sites in General Plan	Planning and Building Services Director	69	1		X
77.	Jointly work on priority sites	Planning and Building Services Director and Redevelopment	69	1		X
78.	Analyze priority sites in program Environmental Impact Report	Planning and Building Services Director and MIG	69	1		X
79.	Monitor staff time in Plan Van	Both Principal Planners	70	3	X	
80.	Reexamine all Specific Plans	Planning and Building Services Director and MIG	70	2		X
81.	Planning and building staff to work on Green Building standards	Principal Planner and Chief Building Official	70	2		X
82.	Staff training for historic preservation	Consultant	71	2	X	
83.	Increase Administrative Design Review thresholds	City Council and Current Planning Principal Planner	71	1	X	
84.	Approve conditional use and variance requests before the DRB sees project	Current Planning Principal Planner, Planning Commission and DRB	72	2	X	
85.	Make design guidelines more specific	Current Planning Principal Planner and DRB	72	1	X	
86.	Work with DRB to address concerns	Current Planning Principal Planner and DRB	73	2	X	
87.	Provide training for DRB members	Current Planning Principal Planner and DRB	73	2	X	
88.	Provide DRB members updates on DRB projects	Current Planning Principal Planner and DRB	73	3	X	
89.	Assign subdivision map review from DRC to TRC	Current Planning Principal Planner and DRC	74	2	X	
90.	Replace DRC with agenda review process	Planning and Building Services Director and Planning Commission	74	2	X	
91.	Complete planning policy manual	Current Planning Principal Planner	74	1	X	
92.	Schedule Planning Commission and DRB items to meet timelines	Current Planning Principal Planner	75	1	X	
<b>PLANNING DIVISION – ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES</b>						
93.	Clarify roles of management team	Planning and Building Services Director	76	1	X	
94.	Mid-management team to manage their functions	Planning and Building Services Director and mid managers	76	1	X	
95.	Current Principal Planner should not handle cases	Current Planning Principal	76	1	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
96.	Hold monthly staff meetings for entire department	Planning and Building Services Director	77	2	X	
97.	Expand management team meeting	Planning and Building Services Director	77	2	X	
98.	Limit management meetings to one hour	Planning and Building Services Director	77	2	X	
99.	Develop additional cooperation between Planning and Redevelopment	Planning and Building Services Director and Redevelopment	78	2	X	
100.	Quarterly meetings with Planning and Redevelopment staff	Planning and Building Services Director and Redevelopment	78	2	X	
101.	Establish assignment ground rules for planners	Both Principal Planners	79	2	X	
102.	Develop Advance Planning work program	Advance Planning Principal Planner	79	1	X	
103.	Work program and budget objectives to be consistent	Advance Planning Principal Planner	80	1	X	
<b>PLANNING DIVISION - PROCESS ISSUES</b>						
104.	Replace nine brochures with two	Current Planning Principal Planner	80	2	X	
105.	Display brochures in public counter area and on Internet	Current Planning Principal Planner	80	2	X	
106.	Planning staff to conduct CEQA review	Current Planning Principal Planner	81	1	X	
107.	Train staff in crime prevention though environmental design (CPTED)	Police Department	82	2	X	
108.	CPTED staff to be part of design review process	Current Planning Principal Planner and Police Department	82	2	X	
109.	Create developer's handbook for grading and public improvements	City Engineer	82	2	X	
110.	Assign back-up planner of the day	Current Planning Principal Planner	83	2	X	
111.	Planners to accept only applications with sufficient data for processing	Current Planning Principal Planner	83	2	X	
112.	New cases to planners in two days	Current Planning Principal Planner	83	2	X	
113.	Route plans automatically to Technical Review Committee (TRC)	Current Planning Principal Planner	85	2	X	
114.	Draft complete/incomplete letter within two days of TRC meeting	Current Planning Principal Planner	85	2	X	
115.	The Principal Planner for Current Planning should chair the TRC meetings	Current Planning Principal Planner	85	1	X	
116.	Senior staff to attend TRC meeting	All departments	85	1	X	
117.	TRC staff authorized to make decisions	All departments	86	1	X	
118.	Project planner and applicant to attend TRC meeting	Current Planning Principal Planner	86	2	X	
119.	Reevaluate TRC departments and add Police	Current Planning Principal Planner	86	2	X	
120.	Planning Commission and DRB minutes available at next meeting	Administrative Secretary and Office Specialist	86	2	X	
121.	Revise planner review of building plan checks	Current Planning Principal Planner	87	2	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
122.	Forward Planning Commission and DRB resolutions to Public Works	Administrative Secretary and Office Specialist	87	2	X	
123.	Planners to review C of O in two days	Current Planning Principal Planner	87	2	X	
124.	Hear 95% of DRB requests in 30 days.	Current Planning Principal Planner	88	1	X	
125.	Hear 95% of Conditional use permits, variances and tentative maps in 45 days	Current Planning Principal Planner	88	1	X	
126.	Develop standard conditions of approval and standard report formats	Current Planning Principal Planner	89	2	X	
127.	Planners to daily record their time	Current Planning Principal Planner	90	2	X	

Before the City begins implementing this study, we suggest that it take the following action.

**1. Recommendation: The City Manager and the Director of the Planning and Building Services Department should review the study and agree on an implementation plan, which should include:**

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

The Planning and Building Services Department already has many important tasks they are undertaking and may find the 127 recommendations overwhelming. However, as improvements take place and staff becomes empowered to change, the City may be surprised at how fast implementation can occur.

**Draft 12/5/06**

### III. ISSUES RELATED TO ENTIRE PLANNING AND BUILDING SERVICES DEPARTMENT

#### A. COMMUNICATION

##### **Business Cards**

Visitors coming to the Department want to know who they talked to and how to contact them if they have follow-up questions. However, not all staff business cards contain an e-mail address or staff's direct phone number. All cards should be reprinted and standardized to include the individual e-mail address and direct phone number. This will make it easier for the public to contact the correct planner without having to go through the switchboard or listening through the various menus on the phone tree.

- 2. Recommendation: Business cards should be reprinted and standardized to include e-mail and the direct phone number.**

Since the public often doesn't remember who they talked to in the office, all staff should be instructed to feely hand out their business card. No customer should leave the office without having one or more business cards.

- 3. Recommendation: All staff should make certain that customers leave this office having received a business card from the person(s) they talked to.**

##### **Customer Communication**

There are customer concerns related to having good communications with the Planning and Building Services Department. Customers want advance notice of any proposed changes in policies and procedures and also want their opinions considered on these matters. One good way to increase communication is through the use of email. The Department should prepare and continually update a comprehensive list of all architects, landscape architects, attorneys, developers, engineers, plumbers, electricians, etc who are active in the City. Emails can be sent to the appropriate list to solicit review on new ideas or alert the customers about changes.

- 4. Recommendation: Create comprehensive email list of customers to be used in improving communication.**

## Customer Input and Feedback

The Planning and Building Services Department has no established functioning customer focus groups to partner with. Likewise, it does not have a customer satisfaction survey and hence has no established forum to obtain customer advice. In order to function in a facilitative capacity it is imperative to form partnerships with industry and customers to determine proper policies, procedure and processing timelines that meet customer's needs. It is also useful to periodically have meetings with selected customer groups. The email lists can also be helpful in establishing these meetings. The following three recommendations should be considered 12 months after this reports initial recommendations have been completed.

- 5. *Recommendation:* Establish customer focus groups to provide guidance in establishing processing procedures and timelines to facilitate the construction process. The Chamber of Commerce, construction trade organizations and a committee with a cross-section of the community are examples of acceptable focus groups.**
  
- 6. *Recommendation:* Develop customer survey forms for intake, permit issuance, plan review and inspections. Provide customer access to survey forms in the office, over the Internet and by mail or email based on completion of plan review, permit issuance, and inspection processes.**
  
- 7. *Recommendation:* Periodic meetings should be held with selected customer groups to solicit ideas for improvement and to discuss any pending policy or procedure changes.**

## Telephones

Customers complain that it is difficult to call the Planning and Building Services Department and talk with a person. The norm is to be routed to voice mail. However, many times the mail boxes are full or staff simply does not return phone calls. This is poor public service and creates frustration for the customers. We recommend a system where staff is required to answer their phones at least half the workday, and all phone calls are returned the same day received. Another way to envision this is: no one goes home at night until they have returned all their phone calls.

- 8. *Recommendation:* All staff should be required to answer their phones at least half the day.**

9. **Recommendation:** Staff should return all phone calls before leaving for the day.

Overall the Department's voice mail system is fairly good, but there are a few guidelines and recommendations we would suggest.

- All staff voice mail greetings should be professional. Currently, there is at least one staff member with an inappropriate greeting for a business office.
- The names of staff who have left the Department should be removed from the system. There is one name still in the system even though they left several months ago.
- Make sure that callers can get to an operator by pressing "0" at any time. When we were testing the system several times we received a message that said "You cannot be transferred to the operator at this time."

10. **Recommendation:** The voice mail system should be updated based upon the points made above.

## B. OFFICE SPACE

There are a number of good office space features for the Planning and Building Services Department and the development functions including having building, planning, fire, business licenses and cashier all located in proximity to the reception area. However, as the functions moved into the current temporary office spaces a number of problems were created.

We understand that the offices will move in three or four years back to the central area and perhaps into City Hall. As such, it is not clear how much remodeling is possible during this interim period. Modest improvements, however, could include:

- The offices for the two Principal Planners are located behind the Building counter and totally separated from the planners they supervise. The Principal Planners are on the other side of the lobby from their staff. When they want to see their staff or staff needs to see them they need to walk across the lobby and through two doors which have security controls. This arrangement makes supervision problematic. We are not suggesting that management needs to monitor staff by directly observing them, but the distance, particularly given the close interaction between mid-management and staff, makes routine supervision difficult. There appears to be a simple solution to the problem, which is converting the planning conference room into two offices. The Principal Planners former offices would then be converted to a conference room.

- Adding a receptionist area near the entry door. The receptionist would serve both the Building and Planning counter. The function could be staffed by a technician or clerk who would also have other responsibilities. Figure 3 shows how a receptionist function could be added to the building counter. One of the building clerks could take on a dual function. Another option would be to examine if the Business License Clerk duties could incorporate the receptionist function.
- Developing a system to have building staff closer to the Building counter would require a more extensive space analysis than is possible in this study, but might be considered. It would likely impact other departments.
- Signage could be improved as related to the Building and Planning functions, both on the exterior of the building and within the lobby area. Signs on the exterior of the building are very misleading. It indicates the location of the engineering function, but once inside the door the location is not obvious. The sign also says that the counter hours are 8 am to 4:30 pm but the counter is not actually open all of these hours.
- A hand-out rack for all Planning and Building materials is lacking.
- Increase the public's use of the lobby computer by having better signage for the computer and a short "How To Use" guide. While we were on site, this computer did not work.
- Another inefficiency we noted are the two narrow corridors that the planners work stations open onto: instead of having one larger central corridor there are two narrow corridors. Additionally, because the workstations don't open onto a common walkway the planners cannot easily interact with each other. If the workstations facing the window are flipped to face inward, there would be a much wider central walkway. This creates a better path of travel and should lead to more collaboration among staff.

A portion of the existing office space is shown in Figure 2. Design options are illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 2  
Existing Office Space – Partial Drawing

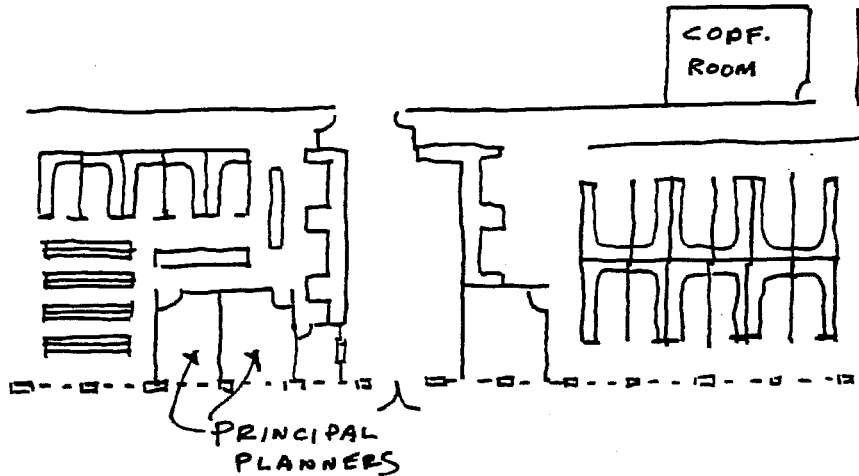
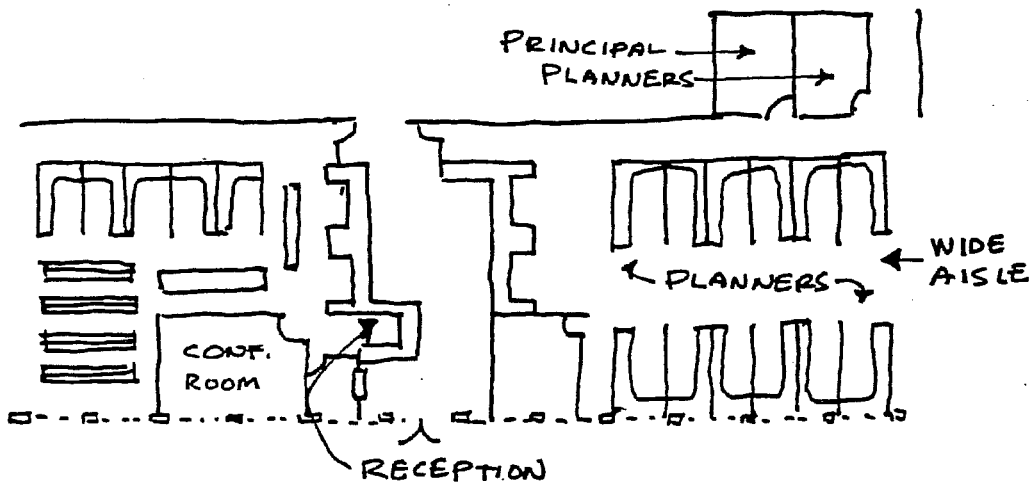


Figure 3  
Office Space Design Option



- 11. Recommendation:** The Planning and Building Services Director should consider the office space ideas outlined above.

For the long term and in the new office, the City should consider space configurations that provide for a so called "one-stop-shop". Under this alternative, all departments that work with development are co-located to the extent possible and with integrated public counters. This would include part or all of building, planning, business licenses, fire, redevelopment and engineering. Ideally, these functions are all located on one level.

- 12. Recommendation:** In future space planning, the City should incorporate one-stop-shop concepts.

### C. BUDGETS, REVENUES AND FEES

#### Revenue Fund

Currently there is a special revenue fund for the Building Division and another for the Planning Division. Building fees exceed the Building Division's budget but Planning fees are less than the Planning budget and the budget needs to be supplemented by the General Fund. The two funds are soon to be combined. After being combined, there will be a balance of roughly 1.6 million dollars. Any excess revenues do not go into the General Fund but rather are carried over to the next year.

We advocate combining the two funds and carrying any excess funds over to the next year as a good approach. However, unless Planning fees are raised there may not be a carry over. Ideally, there should be a balance retained in the revenue fund to support the Planning and Building Services Department should there be a down turn in activity. We believe that building a reserve is legal in California so long as it is not excessive. For example, Arizona allows a reserve equal to nine months of budget which we feel is reasonable. The proposed Planning budget for 2006/2007 is \$4,922,550 and the Building budget is \$5,587,784. Together they total \$10,510,334. However, some of these expenditures are one-time expenditures including \$100,000 Historic Preservation, \$250,000 for the General Plan project, and assuming only half of the EIR funds are needed in the time of a slow down \$746,700, and \$470,000 for outside plan checkers. Deducting these amounts would bring the total to \$8,943,634. Nine months of this amount would total \$6,707,725. Based on this analysis, the City should consider building a reserve fund of \$5,000,000. This could be built by collecting excess revenue of \$500,000 per year over a ten year time span.

- 13. Recommendation:** The City should develop a reserve fund to support the building and planning function in a time of slow development activity.

**Budgets**

The adopted budget for 2005/2006 and the proposed budget for 2006/2007 is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2  
Planning and Building Services Department Budget**

<b>Planning Division Revenue</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Adopted 2005/2006</b>	<b>Proposed 2006/2007</b>
Cost Recovery	Fees Including EIRs	2,496,095	3,531,359
General Fund	Advance Planning	853,587	503,081
General Plan	Pt. Molate	1,200,000	-
Carryover *		-	888,110
<b>Total Revenue</b>		<b>\$4,549,682</b>	<b>\$4,922,550</b>

\* From \$5 fee override for General Plan

<b>Planning Division Expenditures</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Adopted 2005/2006</b>	<b>Proposed 2006/2007</b>
Personal Services		1,706,905	1,982,419
Contractual Services	General Plan	1,400,000	250,000
	Historic Preservation	-	100,000
	EIRs	950,000	1,493,400
Other Operating Expenses		194,266	316,921
Capital Outlay		8,000	8,000
Allocated Costs		290,511	771,810
<b>Total Budget</b>		<b>\$4,549,682</b>	<b>\$4,922,550</b>

<b>Building Division Revenue</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Adopted 2005/2006</b>	<b>Proposed 2006/2007</b>
Building Division Regulation	Fees	4,174,265	4,174,265
Code Compliance	Cost Recovery	-	118,519
Rental Inspection	Cost Recovery	-	552,000
Chevron Inspection	Cost Recovery	-	743,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>		<b>\$4,174,265</b>	<b>\$5,587,784</b>

Table 2 Continued

<b>Building Division Expenditures</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Adopted 2005/2006</b>	<b>Proposed 2006/2007</b>
Personnel Services		2,677,682	3,344,361
Contractual Services	Rental Inspections	-	300,000
	Chevron Inspections	-	100,000
	Outside Plan Checkers	60,000	470,600
Other Operating Expenses		287,540	383,959
Capital Outlay		9,800	136,000
Allocated Costs		189,266	541,427
<b>Total Expenditures</b>		<b>\$3,224,288</b>	<b>\$5,276,347</b>

## IV. TECHNOLOGY

### A. INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the Planning and Building Services Department's use of information technology to support day-to-day and strategic decision-making. This analysis is relatively brief because an ongoing detailed analysis of permitting software needs is being conducted as an adjunct to this study.

### B. GENERAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS ENVIRONMENT

#### General Information Systems

The City of Richmond's current City-wide information systems infrastructure can be categorized as being substantially up-to-date. It is maintained by the Computer Information Technology (IT) Department, which reports to the Finance Director and serves the information systems needs of all City departments and functions.

The IT Department operates a fiber optic and copper TCP/IP network for all City offices and emergency services at six major and 38 minor facility locations. It operates multiple servers for LAN file management, email distribution, and various SQL Server database applications. Network bandwidth and server capacity is deemed by staff to be sufficient for current needs, and the staff continuously monitors data flow volumes to enhance capacity as needed. Since all information requirements of the City of Richmond, including Public Safety, are accommodated on the IT Department's gigabit fiber optic backbone network, data security is given the highest levels of priority.

The IT Department collaborates with all departments throughout the City for selection, procurement, and maintenance of software and hardware. The Department also conducts system requirements consulting and small-scale special purpose applications development, as required by the various departments it serves.

Equipment is purchased rather than leased and the IT Department generally maintains a three-year or shorter desktop PC replacement cycle. The City has been using equipment supplied by Dell for the past seven years and has standardized on that brand. Desktop PCs used by the Planning and Building Services Department are typically installed with XP Professional and the Microsoft Office suite.

#### Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Software

The centerpiece of Richmond's information system applications is the SAP enterprise Resource Planning system, which was installed in early 2000 to serve all City

financial activities and related business functions. The SAP system does not include a specific permitting/inspection module; instead, SAP's Sales and Distribution Module was adapted to accommodate the Planning and Building Services Department's permitting requirements. In recent years there has been major disappointment among many departments, including Planning, in the current SAP implementation. A recent needs assessment analysis study proposes possible replacement or upgrading/overhauling SAP to meet City requirements. More detail on this study, as it relates to Planning, is presented later in this Chapter.

### **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

The Information Technology Department includes a well-qualified Geographic Information Systems Administrator (a former ESRI employee) who supports all GIS activities in the City. This person provides a comprehensive array of GIS-based mapping and support services. Additionally, there are several experienced GIS users in other City departments that utilize GIS.

Richmond has standardized on GIS products provided by the Environmental Science and Research Institute (ESRI), which is the U.S. leading vendor of GIS software. The City uses a variety of ESRI products, of which ArcMap is the main product. Currently Richmond owns 10 ArcMap licenses that are shared among approximately 50 GIS users.

The GIS Administrator has provided all City departments, including Planning and Building Services, with a parcel lookup application, known as "ParcelQuest," that is used to determine property ownership and other specific land information. Also, there is a browser-based application used for parcel viewing and zoning district mapping. In total, the GIS Administrator supports approximately 200 mapping datasets that include: aerial photos, street centerlines, parcels, zoning district boundaries, General Plan land use designations, utilities and infrastructure, and street sign locations.

## **C. OBSERVATIONS AND ISSUES**

### **The Use of SAP for Permitting**

The City's massive SAP enterprise software installation is in need of major adjustment or complete replacement. A needs assessment study contracted by City with the Government Finance Officers Association is recommending the immediate consideration of alternatives. One of SAP's recognized issues is its weakness in handling the functions routinely found in special-purpose permitting software products.

The SAP permitting module, with its emphasis on financial collections, performs an acceptable job of handling permit fees and accounting matters, but it accommodates

only the very basic functions of permit issuance, plan review tracking, and inspections. Additionally, use of the software is reported to be difficult and time consuming. Generation of even the most basic status or summary reports requires special expertise. As a result of these deficiencies in the SAP system, Department staff continues to perform most of its major permit tracking and inspection management functions manually with a contorted system of index cards, paper files, and logbooks.

The Planning and Building Services Director and other key staff members have long understood the need to acquire and implement a more serviceable computerized permitting/inspection system but, until recently, felt stymied by the perception that the IT Department was so strongly committed to SAP that acquiring a stand-alone permitting system from another vendor would be out of the question. In recent months this position has changed:

- Significant City staff cuts in the past two years have resulted in a loss of in-house SAP expertise, particularly within the user departments.
- The scaling-down of City departments has diminished the need for a system that is as massive and expensive to operate as SAP.
- Many other departments have expressed similar discontent in SAP, mainly due to inadequate training at the time of initial installation.

This change in posture opens the way to consideration of acquiring and implementing a full-featured permitting system. This study includes additional provisions to consult with Planning and Information Technology staff members to determine specific system features, needs, and alternative products.

**14. *Recommendation:* The Planning and Building Services Department, with support from IT, should conduct a specific needs analysis for the acquisition and implementation of a new permitting system to replace SAP and the manual tracking systems that are currently in place.**

### Technical Support

Responses to questionnaires and information obtained in interviews expressed no overall dissatisfaction in network reliability, system performance, and Information Technology staff response to computer support requests. This is mainly due to the situation that with the absence of a significant permitting system, the need for technical support is relatively minor. However, if the Planning and Building Services Department installs a new permitting system, technical support requirements will increase. This will be particularly critical during the first year while implementation is taking place.

- 15. Recommendation:** Hire one technical support staff member to assist with Planning and Building Services general automation issues, departmental GIS usage, and future permitting system issues.

### Document Circulation and Management

The City does not currently employ the use of any document management or scanning system for the electronic retention of documents. However, the City Clerk's office is in the initial stages of installing AlphaCorp's "Minute Maker" system for digitizing Commissioner meeting agendas, resolutions, minutes and other routine documents. This is considered as a pilot program, and successful implementation may lead to the deployment of imaging solutions for other departments though not necessarily with the same vendor.

The attachment of e-mail, photos, and digital image documents to a zoning or building permit application record is a fundamental capability of most of the newer permitting system software packages. While such a system is not yet in place, it would be appropriate to make greater use of available document imaging technology—particularly since most of the copy machines used by the Planning and Building Services Department staff have scanning and digital file making capabilities.

- 16. Recommendation:** Make greater use of the digital imaging capabilities of the copy machines that are available to Planning and Building Services Department staff members. Image files would be maintained in appropriate shared network directory locations until a new permitting system is installed.

### Website and E-Government

Websites have become an important part of City departments communicating with their citizens and increasing efficiency of operations. The Planning and Building Services Department maintains a current, attractive, and easy-to-navigate website that contains much of the information needed for conducting routine business. It includes an advanced interactive GIS mapping application for zoning district and basic parcel information lookup. Other features include links to the General Plan, downloadable Acrobat permit application forms, and links to many departmental documents and brochures.

A number of jurisdictions are venturing into e-government, the ability to conduct routine business transactions over the Internet. For Planning and Building Services, this would include many basic, repetitious permit applications, inspection requests, and specific permit approval status reports. Providing these services on the Internet



will ultimately reduce staff load in handling telephone requests and office visits. Investigation of e-government capabilities and opportunities should be included as a part of the ongoing permit system needs analysis study.

Table 3 shows a list of items that we believe should be on the Department's web site and a record of the ones that exist.

**17. Recommendation: The Planning and Building Services Department should expand its web site to include the features listed in Table 3.**

**Table 3  
Web Site Features**

Features	On Richmond's Web Site	
	Yes	No
Overview description of department	✓	
Main phone number	✓	
Automated email contact feature	✓	
Organization chart		✓
Staff names, titles, direct phone lines and email addresses		✓
Pictures of staff		✓
General Plan	✓	
Community Plans	N/A	
Specific Plans	✓	
Ordinances	✓	
Handouts describing processes and applications	✓	
Applications and forms	✓	
Tracking of permits		✓
Various GIS maps including zoning	✓	
E-government application ability		✓
Ordering plans, ordinances, handouts		✓
Use of credit cards		✓
Fees		✓
<b>PLANNING COMMISSION</b>		
General description	✓	
Name of members	✓	
Meeting dates		✓
Agendas	✓	
Staff reports		✓
Minutes	✓	
Email addresses (if members want)		✓
Same information for other boards and committees	✓	

\* partial

**Draft 12/5/06**

## V. BUILDING DIVISION

### A. PROFILE

#### **Authority**

The Building Division is under the direction of the Chief Building Official who reports directly to the Director of Planning and Building Services. The Building Division enforces the following California State Codes:

- 2001 California Building Code based on the 1997 edition of the UBC
- 2001 California Plumbing Code, based on 2000 UPC
- 2001 California Mechanical Code, based on 2000 UMC
- 2001 California Historical Building Code
- 2001 California Fire Code
- 2001 California Code for Building Conservation
- 2004 California Electric Code based on 2002 NEC
- 2005 Building Energy Efficiency Standards

#### **Basic Functions**

The Building Division performs the following basic functions:

- Takes in applications for building permits and issues permits
- Conducts plan check for building, plumbing, mechanical and electrical permits
- Conducts inspections using combination inspections for all construction
- Maintains building permit files
- Issues Certificates of Occupancy
- Investigates code compliance issues
- Supervises the housing inspection program for rental housing
- Conducts special plan reviews and inspection for the Chevron facilities

#### **Organization**

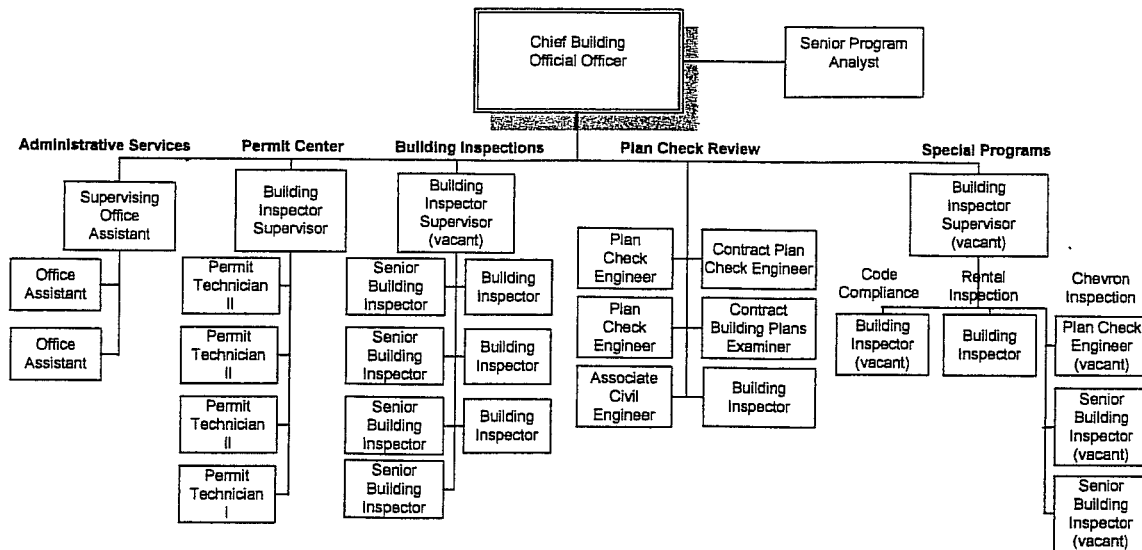
Under the direction of the Chief Building Official there are currently 25 budgeted positions in the 2005/06 budget. The Building Division is going through reorganization and hiring process and as a result some staff positions are vacant.

Table 4 shows actual current staff positions and classifications and Figure 4 shows the organizational structure. All primary sections (Clerical, Counter, Plan Review, and Inspection) report directly to the Chief Building Official. The two contract personnel are retired employees who have been hired on a part time basis to help in plan review to reduce accumulated workload backlogs.

**Table 4  
Building Division Staff**

Classification	Number Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
Chief Building Official (CBO)	1	Oversees Building Division	Director
<b>Clerical</b>			
Supervising Office Assistant (SOA)	1	Oversees clerical function	CBO
Office Assistant II (OS)	2	Office support (phone, inspections, filing)	SOA
<b>Permit Counter</b>			
Building Inspector Supervisor (BIS)	1 vacant	Supervision of Counter operation	CBO
Permit Technician II (PT)	3	Plan intake and permit issuance	BIS
Permit Technician I (PT)	1	Plan intake and permit issuance	BIS
<b>Plan Review</b>			
Building Inspector	1	Plan review tracking	CBO
Plan Check Engineer (PCE)	2	Com/Indus/Res Building Plan Review	CBO
Civil Engineer	1	Site Review	CBO
Contract Plan Check Engineer (CPCE)	1	Com/Indus/Res Building Plan Review	CBO
Contract Building Plans Examiner (CBPE)	1	Residential Building Plan Review	CBO
<b>Inspections</b>			
Building Inspector Supervisor (BIS)	2	Supervision of inspection service	CBO
Senior Building Inspector (SBI)	4	Inspections	BIS
Building Inspector (BI)	2	Inspections	BIS
<b>Special Programs</b>			
Building Inspector Supervisor (BIS)	1 vacant	Supervision of Special Programs	CBO
<b>Code Compliance</b>			
Building Inspector (BI)	1 vacant	Code compliance inspections	BIS
<b>Rental Program</b>			
Building Inspector (BI)	1 vacant	Rental Program inspections	BIS
<b>Chevron Inspection</b>			
Plan Check Engineer (PCE)	1 vacant	Plan review for Chevron projects	BIS
Senior Building Inspector (SBI)	2 vacant	Inspection for Chevron projects	BIS
<b>Administrative Support</b>			
Senior Program Analyst	1	Division Analyst	CBO

**Figure 4  
Building Division Staff**



**Permit Activity**

Table 5 lists building permit and plan review activity for six years by sector of construction, which was taken from official records. Table 6 lists total permits issued for three years (2000 to 2003). Unfortunately, a new data system was installed in 2003 and the new systems does not provide for the same data.

We had a special computer run completed for Class of Construction using the new system. This data shown in Table 5 for 2003 to 2006 is incomplete. It appears that the Permit Technicians are not properly recording Alt/Repair Dwellings and perhaps some of the other smaller permit categories.

In an attempt to determine if work load is increasing, we constructed Table 7 which only compares categories of permits where the data may be more reliable. We also took the nine month data for 2005/2006 and estimated it for the entire year. Based on this analysis, there has been a substantial increase in development activity over the past three years. However, we suspect that this activity will slow as the construction industry enters a period of decline while the market absorbs excess inventory.

**Table 5  
Building Permit History**

Category	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006 nine months
Public Bldg	1	0	1	1		
Public Bldg Addns	0	0	1			
Bus Bldg	15	7	6	4	12	3
Bus Bldg Addns	2	7	4			
Dwellings	229	137	188	125	194	403
Dwelling Addns	28	71	105			
Duplex	0	2	0		5	
Duplex Addns	0	0	0			
Triplex	1	1	1			
Triplex Addns	0	0	0			
Apartments	13	18	15	2	39	11
Apart Addns	1	0	0			
Condominiums	0	0	0			
Condo Addns	0	0	0			
Alt/Repair Dwellings	1,331	1,338	1,408	2	1	
Alt/Repair Other	187	156	178			
Industrial	4	0	0	1	4	3
Industrial Addns	0	1	4		2	1
Misc.	100	116	161	9	18	4
Misc. Addns	0	2	1	8		
<b>Total Building Permits</b>	<b>1,912</b>	<b>1,856</b>	<b>2,073</b>			
<b>Change From Previous Year</b>		<b>-2.90%</b>	<b>11.70%</b>			
<b>Valuation of Buildings</b>	<b>\$165,213,529</b>	<b>\$107,935,927</b>	<b>\$156,245,837</b>			
<b>Change From Previous Year</b>		<b>-34.70%</b>	<b>44.80%</b>			

**Table 6  
Total Permit History**

Fiscal Year	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
Total Building Permits	1,912	1,856	2,073
Signs	28	47	30
Demolitions	17	17	16
Electrical	1,096	1,070	1,305
Plumbing	1,109	1,037	1,144
Mechanical	673	579	726
Sewer Street Cuts	78	99	89
<b>Total Permits Issued</b>	<b>4,913</b>	<b>4,705</b>	<b>5,383</b>
<b>Change From Previous Year</b>		<b>-4.20%</b>	<b>14.40%</b>

Table 7  
Selected Permit History

Fiscal Year	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006 nine mo.	12 mo. Est.
Public Buildings	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Business Buildings	15	7	6	4	12	3	4
Dwellings	229	137	188	125	194	403	537
Apartments	13	18	15	2	39	11	15
Industrial	4	0	0	1	4	6	8
<b>Total Permits Issued</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>564</b>
<b>Change From Previous Year</b>		<b>-38.20%</b>	<b>29.60%</b>	<b>-36.6</b>	<b>87.2</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>125.5</b>

## B. POSITIVE FINDINGS

The following are positive findings for the Building Division:

- Staff are very dedicated regarding their jobs
- Inspection staff are very well versed in Code requirements
- The Division has combination inspection that operates very efficiently
- Some staff have pursued educational opportunities by attending outside training
- Most staff are friendly and cordial with customers

## C. PHILOSOPHY

The Building Division regulates construction activity relative to compliance with established safety codes, but should also function as a facilitator for construction activity. The construction industry is an important economic engine for Richmond. The Building Division should maintain a quality of service that facilitates the construction industry and operate at sufficient processing speeds to allow the industry to run at full efficiency. The volume of construction projects in Richmond increased significantly over the last few years and the Building Division needed to develop greater production capacity to deal with this increase in activity without being overstaffed. Outside resources such as contract plan review services and bringing back retirees is being utilized to provide greater productivity. Money for utilization of contract services has been increased from \$60,000 for fiscal year 2005/2006 to \$870,600 for fiscal year 2006/2007. Allocation of funds is distributed between three new programs, Code Enforcement \$600, Rental Program \$300,000, Chevron Program \$100,000 and existing Plan Review Services \$470,000. In order for contractual services to be utilized efficiently activities must be closely monitored and rapid

adjustments must be made to maintain established performance targets. If current volumes are too great for staff to maintain targets, projects should be sent out for third party review immediately.

In order to handle workloads, the Building Division must develop up-to-date methods for monitoring backlogs, productivity capacity and timelines. When Zucker Systems was on site the oldest plan review waiting for review was eight weeks despite the Division's review target being three weeks.

The Building Division needs the ability to hire new staff and train them quickly. The current budgetary and hiring process is a very prolonged process and therefore should be rethought and streamlined. Once positions have been budgeted and an individual the selection and hiring process should move rapidly. Some authorizations to hire have taken months to get approved.

Once staff is hired, the Building Division needs a well-developed training program that will allow rapid training of new staff and will ensure existing staff continues operating as efficiently as possible. Currently, the Building Division has no established training program.

Investing in automation is also a must in order to maximize productivity of staff. Currently Richmond's automation systems do not provide adequate tools to track and monitor activities.

In order to obtain construction permits, the Building Division is the last review in what is many times a very long planning and design review process. Applicants need to obtain approvals from internal review functions, (Planning, Fire, Engineering, and sometimes outside agencies such as Health, Water Pollution Control, Sewer/Water Agencies, and Schools). In order for the Building Division to operate at full efficiency they need the cooperation of the other internal review functions. All review functions should form cooperative partnerships, adopt the same review response targets, staff to meet these targets, and create processing teams that work together. Currently in Richmond, the Engineering, Fire and Planning Departments frequently are the bottlenecks that prevent timely permit issuance from occurring.

### **Revenue**

It is important to realize that Building Division fees are a very small part of the total construction cost, but delays in construction schedules are extremely costly to the customer. Low permitting and inspection fees do not equate to lower incurred costs to the industry. Proper staffing must be maintained to ensure rapid response to the construction industry's timetables. Delays in acquisition of staff or other needed resources due to a lack of revenue flow or expenditure of revenue is counter productive. In Richmond the Building Division has not lacked revenue, but there has been reluctance to utilize the revenue to provide better service. In the 2005/2006



budget it appears that sufficient revenue has been received to remedy this situation and if properly utilized service should be greatly improved.

### Staffing

Staffing that is highly responsive and efficient necessitates having a full range of positions that include the generalist to the specialist. Regulatory codes have increased in number and complexity to a point where it is not possible for individuals to be fully proficient in all trades. For simple construction projects such as homes or minor commercial industrial projects, combination plan reviews and inspectors are adequate, but for the more complex projects they are not combined. It is important to have staff that are fully trained in specialized skills that can operate at higher proficiency on more complex projects. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to hire or train inspectors in a specialty, in addition to being combination inspectors. These specialized inspectors can be relied on to perform the more complex sub-trade plan reviews and inspections. If all necessary specialized skills cannot be staffed internally then the Building Division needs to contract them externally until they can be developed internally.

To ensure overall quality of service is maintained, staff should be cross-trained to perform in a variety of functions when absenteeism or workload shifts occur. The Building Division has experienced service delays in plan reviews and inspections due to having too few staff trained to perform these function.

A staffing analysis is necessary to determine if current staffing levels are adequate for workload activity. However, we have been unable to obtain the necessary information to do so. To complete a staffing analysis the following is needed:

- Activity levels (customers processed, inspections completed, permits issued, plan reviews processed) listed by major categories.
- Activity levels need to be tracked by review cycles required. For plan review, processing time per review cycle needs to be tracked. For inspections the number of inspection per category needs to be tracked providing average processing times per category.
- Activity volumes are multiplied by average processing times to determine hours of workload activity.
- Available hours for work are calculated. Total hours minus vacation, holidays, breaks, and sick leave.
- Total hours of work activity are divided by available hours of work to determine staffing positions needed.
- Processing time allocations per staff member is determined. For plan review time, counter time, phones, administration, supervision, etc. For inspections

office time, inspection time, plan review time, etc. For counter duty, off counter duty, support functions, etc.

- Based on processing time allocations of the number of staff positions available to perform functional processing (productive capacity) is tabulated. If analysis is not close to 70% or higher of staffing allocated to a function, the section probably has misallocations of duties. Example, if 4 staff are assigned to a section that has a productive capacity of 70%, the section has 2.8 staff positions available.
- Staffing positions needed are compared to productive staffing available.

Once the Building Division can provide the above measures, a staffing analysis should be done to determine if staffing is appropriate to maintain service targets. Some indicators of problems when analyzing staffing data are as follows:

- In plan review if at least 80% of projects are not approved in the second cycle of review, processing problems exist. These problems can be attributed to incomplete plan reviews in the first cycle, low quality plans being submitted or poor response to requested corrections from designers.
- For inspection, the ratio of inspections to permits issued can indicate problems. This is measured by comparing the required number of inspections per inspection category to the actual number on inspections occurring. If the differential is too great problems in inspection will occur which are typically attributed to many partial inspections being performed, work not ready for inspection, excessive turn down rates, or inspections being requested that are not needed.
- For counter processing the ratio of permits and plan intakes to customers processed should be tracked. If this ratio is too high it is indicative of poor direction being provided to customers or excessive regulatory control.

### Monitoring Workload

Meeting service targets should be controlled by shifting staff assignments to areas of greatest activity and utilizing contract services. Developing a "works in progress liability report" is an excellent way to determine resource allocation. While works in progress liability report requires tracking processing times in progress, it accurately measure backlogs and provide valuable information in making management decisions. The report is generated based on the following:

- Track processing times by project categories
- Assess average processing time per project category for completed projects
- Multiply uncompleted projects in process by average processing times per category

- Subtract number of hours already allocated to projects in process
- The remainder is works in progress liability
- Divide each liability total per section by average daily productive staffing hours available, this produces workload backlog
- If workload backlog exceeds performance targets, shift staffing to area of greatest backlog or send work out to contractual services, immediately

In the absence of a good permitting and data system, other indicators can also be used to monitor activities. For example, simply recording each day or each week the submittal date of the plans being reviewed indicates the nature of the backlog and timeline.

**18. *Recommendation:* Establish a works in progress monitoring systems to determine if performance targets can be met and to make assessment of proper resource allocations**

**19. *Recommendation:* Establish a contract for outside plan review services to provide additional service capacity for high volume periods, thus allowing plan-review timelines to be maintained.**

**20. *Recommendation:* If plan review timelines can not be met through utilization of internal staff, send plans to outside plan review services immediately.**

### Balanced Staffing

In order to allow sharing of resources, well balanced staffing needs to be developed. Well balanced staffing should have clerical, permit specialists/technicians, combination plan reviewers, specialty plan reviewers (structural, architectural, engineering, electrical, plumbing, mechanical), combination inspectors, specialty inspectors, a training officer, supervisors and good managerial oversight. The existing Building Division staff is well balanced in clerical, permit technicians, combination plan reviewers, and combination inspectors. It is lacking in not having a receptionist position, a training officer, limited specialty plan reviewers and specialty inspectors, and there is a lack supervisory oversight of counter operations and plan review.

The following cross training of staff positions is recommended:

- Clerical staff should be fully proficient in receptionist, telephone and filing functions, and should be cross-trained to perform the less complex permit specialist's functions.

- Permit specialists should be fully proficient in plan intake and permit issuance functions and be cross-trained to do all clerical functions, administrative zoning reviews and some simple plan review functions.
- Inspection staff should be fully proficient in performing combination inspections for simpler construction inspections and should have a specialty inspection skill, (building, electrical, plumbing, mechanical) to deal with the more complex inspections. Inspection staff should also be trained to conduct plan review and perform the intake and permit issuance functions of a permit specialist.
- Combination inspectors with a building specialty work well as combination plan reviewers.
- Combination inspectors with a sub-trade inspection specialty work well as specialty sub-trade plan reviewers.
- A training officer should be selected from one of the staff positions based on writing and training skills exhibited.
- Supervisors should have organization skills to deal with day to day operational issues and should be the technical expert of their section.
- Managers should have good analytical skills and poses visionary leadership qualities.

With the above balance in staffing the Building Division will be capable of covering short-term absences or be able reassign staff to other functions when activities diminish or increase.

## D. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

### Archival of Documents

The Building Division has a legal requirement to maintain permits and plans for prolonged periods of time. The storage of these documents in paper is costly, access and management is time consuming, files are lost and documents deteriorate. A variety of long-term storage mediums exists that will preserve files, but rapid low cost retrieval is the key to selecting a document archival system. The best systems currently available store documents in electronic format on optical discs. Documents stored in this fashion are safely preserved and are readily accessible by multiple users simultaneously. For example, the City of San Jose converted paper files to 200 DPI G4 Tiff images, stored them on 9.6 gig discs, and placed them in 3 different Jukeboxes (each having 80 disc capacity) with 4 head readers. This provided almost instantaneous access to all documents from any PC. Images are also accessible over the Internet which greatly cuts down on customer requests for permit searches.

A cost benefit analysis for archival of documents is not easy to accomplish because some of the benefits are externally obtained by customers and difficult to measure, but the basic elements to consider are the following:

- How much staff time is wasted waiting for plans or permit files to be made accessible?
- What types of delays are incurred by customers waiting for plans or permit files to be made available?
- What are the estimated costs incurred by the construction industry in resolving construction problems that are related to delayed access to plans and permit files?
- How many plans or permit files are not available immediately, temporarily misplaced or lost?
- Are the plans and permit documents that are legally required to be maintained deteriorating?
- How much space is allocated to plan and permit file storage and what is the cost of the space?
- How many staff positions are allocated to retrieving plans and permit files and what is the cost?

Other jurisdictions completing a cost benefit analysis have instituted permanent archival systems and are experiencing better operational efficiencies as a result.

**21. Recommendation: The Planning and Building Services Department should conduct a cost benefit analysis for use of an electronic archival system.**

### **Board of Appeals**

Section 105 of the California Building Code requires a Board of Appeals to be formed by individuals who are qualified by experience and training to provide knowledgeable decisions pertaining to building construction issues. The Board is formed to hear and decide appeals of orders, decisions and determinations made by the Building Official relative to the application and interpretation of codes. The Building Official is to be an ex-officio member but does not have a vote on issues before the Board. The Board of Appeals is to be appointed by the governing body and hold office at its pleasure. Richmond utilizes other department heads as board members. These employees of the jurisdiction lack expertise in construction issues and hence are not appropriate Board of Appeals members.

**22. Recommendation: Create a Board of Appeals that complies with Section 105 of the California Building Code.**

### Certification of Staff

One of the best tools to ensure that Building Division staff has learned and maintained their knowledge skills is to require them to become certified in the areas relative to their assigned duties. Based on the staffing assignments in the Building Division, the following are the recommended certifications needed:

Permit Technicians -	Permit Technical Certification
Plan Check Engineer -	Building Plans Examiner Certification
All Inspectors -	Building Inspector Certification
	Plumbing inspector Certification
	Mechanical Inspector Certification
	Electrical Inspector Certification
Specialty Inspectors -	Building Plans Examiner
	Plumbing Plans Examiner
	Mechanical Plans Examiner
	Electrical Plans Examiner

It is also an excellent idea to have a correlation between pay scales and acquired knowledge. An easy way to accomplish this is to provide additional pay for acquisition and maintenance of certificates.

**23. Recommendation:** Require all technical staff to become certified inspectors, plans examiners and permit technicians.

**24. Recommendation:** Establish a performance based pay scale that is tied to the number of certificates acquired.

### Standard Plans

Some designs are routinely built within the community in a repetitive fashion. Many times a plan is required, sometimes with engineering, but are duplicates of earlier approved plans. Some designs such as pools are built by only a few construction firms where they utilize the same plan over and over again. A standardized plan can be submitted by these firms that is reviewed one time, and saved as a master plan for comparison for the next submittal. Creating a master plan file review process for standardized plans will reduce the Building Division's plan review workload. Typical

examples are: retaining walls, fences, block walls, patio covers, trellis, pools, sheds, etc.

**25. Recommendation: Develop master plan files of standard pre-engineered designs for installations that reoccur frequently.**

**26. Recommendation: Develop a master plan file review system for construction firms that do repetitive installations.**

The Building Division already has master plans for homes, which are utilized to reduce design costs for homeowners. However, according to the inspectors interviewed, these plans contain many code problems, which must be corrected in the field. If master plans are utilized it is important to do a complete review on them prior to making them a master plan file.

**27. Recommendation: Do a through plan review on the master file plans already being utilized.**

### **Staff Training**

The enforcement of building codes is extremely technical and requires extensive education of staff. For staff to acquire and maintain the necessary knowledge to perform their assigned duties an ongoing training program must exist within the Building Division. A detailed processing procedures manual, detailed plan submittal check lists, plan review check lists and inspection handbooks are imperative as part of the training program.

Plan review checklists should cover each required plan view and delineate the major associated code requirements. The checklist should be developed in cooperation with the inspection section because one of the primary purposes of plan review is to eliminate inspection problems. Currently in the Building Division, plan review checklists are not uniformly utilized and there is no formal inspection feedback process to ensure completeness of the checklists.

**28. Recommendation: Institutionalize use of plan review checklists and create a formal inspection feedback process to ensure comprehensiveness.**

An inspection handbook should cover every required inspection and delineate the major code requirements associated with each inspection. Such a handbook is extremely valuable in training inspection staff and in maintaining consistency. Currently, according to the inspectors interviewed, there is some inconsistency in

code application among inspectors which could be improved by developing an inspection handbook and using it for training.

**29. Recommendation: Create an inspection handbook and institute regular inspection training.**

To develop and maintain training materials is very time consuming and as a result many jurisdiction do not have them. However, this is short sighted. To ensure training is adequately addressed, training materials should be built into the regular schedule and budget and a staff member should be assigned the task of developing, organizing and presenting the material.

Since the Building Division is a regulatory agency, providing direction to customers can sometimes be perceived as adversarial. Therefore, another key component of staff training should be customer service training.

The Building Division has no formal training program. Staff are self-educated by attending classes they have found on their own or learning on the job by performing assigned duties. The Chief Building Official is very supportive of providing training when requested, but no attempt is made to organize or require training.

**30. Recommendation: Assign a staff member per section to sit on a training committee to research training opportunities for plan review, inspection, permit technicians and clerical staff.**

**31. Recommendation: Create a training officer function that will be assigned the responsibility of overseeing Division training and the development of training material (processing procedures manual, plan review submittal checklists, plan review check lists, inspection handbook, and customer handouts). Once a staffing assessment can be performed the determination can be made as to whether existing staff can be assigned this duty or whether added staff will be needed to fulfill this need.**

The Division does not have a processing and procedures manual that documents proper processing of applications and permits. In order to establish consistent processing all staff needs to be following the same processing procedures.

**32. Recommendation: Create a processing procedures manual for clerical, intake and permit issuance, plan examination, and inspection process.**



## Training for Customers

Efficiency of operation is highly reliant on the way customers interface with the Building Division. The better the customers are trained on what requirements are necessary to comply with regulations, the more cost effective the Division becomes.

Customers often repetitively inquire about similar types of information. The best way to provide information of this type is by developing customer handouts for specific topics that delineate City requirements.

**33. Recommendation: Produce customer handouts for the frequently asked questions, provide direction on proper plan submittal requirements, inspection procedures and provide processing direction. Deploy these handouts on the web site once established and store them on a shared directory with fax back capability.**

## E. FEES

### Methodology

The greatest cost to customers is delays in obtaining service not the cost of permits themselves. Building divisions have an obligation to deploy a fee methodology that promotes rapid turnaround times and efficient customer and staff behavior. In organizations a small percentage of staff or customers can consume disproportionate amounts of time due to dysfunctional or inefficient behavior. This can affect the overall performance of a function. A properly designed fee methodology will segregate the inefficient customers and prevent them from having an adverse effect on the rest. It will also readily identify problematic staff.

Fee structures utilized by many building divisions, including Richmond, are based on valuation, square footage or fixture cost assessments for sub-trade fees. Valuation based fees provide no nexus between costs to provide plan review or inspection services and assessed fees. Incurred cost do not escalate proportionally with increased size and therefore the size of a building has less impact on costs to deliver service than the use that occupies the building or the type of structural system utilized. Fixture based fees usually under-recover on the low end of the scale and over-recover as fixture counts increase. Typical fee structures are not equitable, where one sector is used to subsidize other sectors. Most frequently larger projects subsidize smaller projects and the commercial industrial sector subsidizes the residential sector. This inequity has been determined to be illegal by courts in California. It also has the problem of when volumes shift to the less cost-effective product types there generally is not sufficient revenue to sustain service quality.

Typical fee structures have no accountability built into them. Where a single assessed fee is charged, time of processing is not tracked, and service with no limits is provided. This allows dysfunctional behaviors to exist with no resulting monetary consequences. Some staff will spend an unreasonable amount of time processing work, or customers will consume disproportionate amounts of service relative to assessed fees.

Fixed fee based systems experience the following problems:

- Designers will submit incomplete plans for review in the hope of obtaining a list of corrections that will help them complete a code complying design.
- Longer plan review times and more cycles of review occur.
- More inspections than necessary are requested.
- Contractors will request inspections based on completion schedules rather than completion of work, which results in many incomplete or partial inspections being performed.
- Contractors will request progress inspections to obtain a punch list of corrections to help complete the job and hence the inspector becomes a quality control agent for the builder.
- Inspection workloads can appear to be huge based on the number of inspections requested but in reality can be insignificant amounts of work because many of the inspections have no real substance.
- The better and more efficient construction firms subsidize the less cost efficient firms.

In order to incorporate accountability among staff and customers, a fee structure can be used that assesses fees based on cost of incurred processing time. It also needs to have protective measures built in that prevent excessive fees from being assessed. Actual processing times are tracked, staff performance measured, and standards established on what hours are billable. Proper accountability increases processing efficiencies for both staff and customers. Once staff becomes accustomed to accounting for their time, their efficiencies greatly increase. Once customers have to pay for incurred costs beyond established limits, the quality of plan submittals improve and the number of inspections requested decrease.

### **Basis for Initial Fee Assessment**

Studies of plan review and inspection costs (actual time required to provide service) reveal that there are relationships between different uses and construction types, and costs, but less differential relative to size increases.

Construction types will affect incurred costs relative to construction of new structures but are limited primarily to building shells. Construction types need to be based on actual material used for construction and not type of construction as specified in the Building Code. Type of construction classifications in codes are based on required fire resistive ratings and not actual type of construction.

Use of the building will affect incurred costs for interior improvements. Use is not the same as occupancy classification. Differentiating between occupancy classifications has merit but is not as reliable as utilizing use classifications because size is not as great a determinant as inherent complexity of uses and occupancy classification within a use can change based on size.

### **Established Results of Proposed Fee Methodology**

The proposed fee methodology has three major elements:

1. A fee structure that is based on actual costs to deliver service.
2. Tracking process times for plan review and number of inspection performed.
3. Limiting service to established limits based on initial fee assessed and then assessing additional fees when service provided exceeds established limits.

If this fee methodology is deployed, element 1 provides fiscal stability, element 2 improves internal processing efficiencies and element 3 instills greater discipline in customers. Once deployed the following results will occur:

- Fiscal stability occurs and quality service levels are maintained through fluctuations in service demand and project type shifts.
- Higher efficiencies are experienced in plan review and inspection services.
- The quality of submitted plans increases because designers stop submitting incomplete plans or failing to make requested corrections when additional fees are assessed.
- Many contractors stop calling for incomplete or partial inspections and inspection efficiencies increase.
- Good designers and contractors actually experience reduced fees because the subsidy of the poorer non-cooperative designers and contractors is removed.
- Overall quality of the industry rises due to the need to maintain competitive pricing.
- Higher quality of service levels result due to the ability to offer expedited services that the industry is willing to pay for.

## Description of Fee Methodology

The following is a brief description of a performance based fee methodology. This fee methodology has proven to provide fiscal stability, higher levels of operational efficiency, and much higher customer satisfaction.

- A billable hourly rate is calculated for each service provided that is based on actual costs divided by available productive hours.
- Available productive hours are derived from total annual hours paid for minus vacations, holidays, sick leave, breaks, meetings, and training and then applying a productivity percentage. The productivity that staff can sustain is usually around 75% to 80%.
- The actual cost of a section is derived by tabulating true costs incurred by the section, wages and overhead (rents, mortgages, cars, supplies, benefits, retirement etc.).
- Service hours are tracked and incurred costs are debited against assessed fees once established limits of service are exceeded.
- For plan review the established service level provided is unlimited plan review time in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle and two additional hours in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle for the initial plan review fee. The limits are established based on 80% of customers obtaining plan review approval prior to exceeding two hours in the 2<sup>nd</sup> review cycle. If plan review goes beyond two hours in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle and incurred cost exceeded initial fee assessment, the cost of service beyond the two hours in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle is assessed additional fees.
- For inspection, the service level is limited to the number of inspections covered within the initial fee assessed. The number of inspections covered for each product type is established based on the needs of 80% of customers within each product type. For product types that are predominately one, two or three inspection categories, and have an additional inspection requested by a small percentage of customers, the fee assessed is increased by the percentage of additional inspections required. This allows an additional inspection to be requested without incurring additional cost because the cost is spread over the entire group.
- The billable hourly rate is utilized to derive service limits based on initial fee assessments.

Initial fee assessment is based on the processing time incurred for 80% of customers serviced per identifiable product type. The 80% benchmark may vary per jurisdiction based on the percentage grouping of customer performance, but generally, only 20% of the customer base greatly exceeds incurred costs.

- 34. Recommendation: Consider changing current fee methodology to proposed fee methodology described above.**

## F. PROCESSING ISSUES

### Plan Intake and Process Flow

The following is an outline of the plan review process.

#### Intake Process

- 4 sets of plans are taken in by a Permit Tech
- Plans are logged into a manual ledger in chronological order. The ledger contains the following data elements: name of applicant, description of work, address, date of submittal, review required from Building, Engineering, Fire, Planning, school district, plan approval date; date applicant was notified of approval; resubmitted date, which is not completed the majority of the time; comments; and date out.
- If Planning review is needed plans are routed to Planning and they approval stamp all four sets
- 1 set of plans are placed in the Fire Department bin
- 3 sets are placed in the Building Division bin
- Fire picks up their own plans and delivers them to the Fire Marshall for review
- An OSII delivers Building plans to an Office Building Inspector. This individual, with the help of the Building Official, assesses the plans for appropriate assignment for review and logs the plans into another manual log for tracking purposes.
- This plan review log contains the following data elements: date plans received; address; resubmitted date, which is almost never completed; completion date, which is not maintained current; and Plan checker assigned
- One set of plans is routed to the Civil Engineer
- If plans are retained for in-house processing the remaining plan sets are placed in a holding rack, in order of submittal.
- When plan reviewers complete their prior assigned reviews they take the next oldest plan and notify the Permit Technician to record their name in the plan review log.
- If plans are to be sent to a third party (outside contract plan review service) the Permit Technician sends the plans to the designated plan review firm.

## Correction Process

- If corrections are needed comments are sent directly to the applicant by the assigned plan reviewer, via letter, fax or email.

## Resubmit Process

- Resubmitted plans are routed back directly to the initial plan reviewer. This date is almost never entered into the tracking log.

## Fire and Engineering Review

- Fire approved plans are routed to the plan reviewer, who holds them until the Building review is completed and combines the Fire set with his approved set.
- Fire also enters the date of their review completion in the plan intake log.
- The Civil Engineer approved plans are routed to the plan reviewer, who holds them until the Building review is completed and combines the Fire set with the City Engineering approved set.
- The Civil Engineer also denotes completion of this review process by designating ok in the plan intake log.

## Approved Plans

- After Fire (if applicable), Civil Engineering (if applicable), and Building approvals have been obtained plans are routed to the Building counter and placed in a plan review completed pile.
- Permit technicians go through the plan review completed plans, generates fees due, and check for clearances. The applicant is then notified as to what remains in order to obtain permits.
- Ready-to-issue plans are then placed into another holding bin and filed by street name.

## **Assessment of Plan Intake and Process Flow**

The intake process has the following issues that should be addressed. These issues are discussed in the sections to follow.

1. The customer may be confused when entering the building and counter hours are too short.
2. Permit Technicians are not consistently entering data into the computerized permit system
3. Processing times may be too long and lacks over-the-counter plan checks
4. It lacks a formal completeness review process.

5. There is redundant documentation for tracking that does not appear to help facilitate processing and hinders providing review status inquiry updates.
6. There is no assessment of appropriate review time that should be allocated for actual review and no accountability for review staff.
7. The system does not incorporate assessment of backlog and assignment of projects appropriately in order to maintain established review target time lines.
8. Additional technical support is needed at the public counter

### **1. Customer Processing**

In the Permit Center there are two counters, one for Building and one for Planning. Office hours are 8:30 am to 5:00 pm and counter service hours are 9:00 am to 11:30 am and 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm. To obtain service a customer must sign in on a clipboard located at each respective counter. In observing customers, not all customers are aware of where to go to obtain service. Customers were observed signing in, waiting to be called and then told they were at the wrong counter and having to start over. Customers were also observed waiting only to be told to go to a phone to call the person that they had come in to see. Customers also come in before the counter is open or after it is closed and go to the Finance window trying to obtain help.

Customers should not need to know the departmental processes to obtain service or unknowingly end up in an errant processing line. They should also be able to obtain service at any time during office hours.

**35. Recommendation:** Assign a staff person to function part-time as a receptionist that can properly direct customers upon arrival.

**36. Recommendation:** Make service hours the same as office hours by assigning one technician on a rotating basis to work the early and late shift.

### **2. Permitting System**

The Permit Technicians are not consistently entering data into the permit system. It is difficult to manage a function if the volume of work is not tracked. The current computerized permit system is very awkward and we will be recommending a replacement. However, until the system is replaced, the rules for entering data should be reviewed and reinforced and new monthly reports should be prepared.

- 37. Recommendation:** Revise the data entry for the permit system and produce monthly management reports.

### **3. Processing Times and Over The Counter Reviews**

Customer processing can take anywhere from a few minutes to over an hour. The simple permit transactions that do not require plan review are rapid. Plan intake and issuance of permits associated with plans consume more time. Currently all customer are processed in order of arrival, therefore a simple customer transaction can require a long wait time for something requiring only a few minutes of service. Many jurisdictions have created multiple processing lines based on customer transaction times to eliminate this problem.

There are many simple plan reviews that can be done rapidly and are best completed with the designer present. Having the designer present during review speeds up the process by helping to locate information on the plans quickly and to correct errors immediately. From past experience a well-managed express plan review operation is far more efficient and can be as much as four times more productive than the regular intake and review process. The other review functions, (Engineering, Fire, Planning) need to be incorporated into the process in order to ensure all necessary reviews are completed during a single appointment. Criteria identifying the parameters of simple projects should be established, a screening process developed to identify these projects and an appointment system established to control and enable processing. Building and Planning plan review staff can be assigned to staff this processing line on a rotational basis. For Fire and Engineering, due to their limited staffing, projects requiring their review may need to be limited. Plan review engineers work best for tenant improvement reviews and Inspector/Plan Checkers work best for residential reviews.

- 38. Recommendation:** Create an express plan review processing system. Identify which transactions can be processed quickly and create a separate processing line for these transactions.

Plan intake requires greater counter processing time. The plan intake process works well when processed by appointment only, allowing the workload to be distributed over the entire day. It also controls the processing of intake better and reduces customer wait times.

- 39. Recommendation:** Establish an appointment system for plan intake processing.



The Building Division has a main application form, which is a four part 8-1/2 X 11 form. There is another 8-1/2 X 11 supplemental Plumbing/Mechanical application form and three separate supplemental electric application cards that are 8-1/2 X 5-1/2. All five forms have the address on them and the electrical forms duplicate the permit number, owner information, date, builder information, use type, and description of work. These forms are very redundant and make the application process cumbersome. They should be combined into a single form which will help the migration from paper toward a new permit software system solution.

**40. Recommendation: Replace the five current application forms with a single application form.**

#### 4. Completeness Review

A comprehensive completeness check should be performed at intake to determine if plans should be taken in for review. Not assessing the completeness of plans at intake and rejecting incomplete plans prior to submittal extends the time of the first review cycle and generates excessive review cycles. Processing incomplete plans has a detrimental effect on overall timelines and incurred costs. One of the best ways to facilitate a completeness review this is to develop a completeness checklist that can be used by intake staff to verify submittal completeness and can also be given to customers as documentation of what is missing. Submittals that are incomplete should only be taken in if the applicant acknowledges that they are incomplete and desires a review to be completed anyway to provide a comprehensive list of what is missing. Processing of incomplete plans should not be held to the same processing timelines as regular projects and should be assessed fees based on total incurred costs.

**41. Recommendation: Develop a plan submittal completeness checklist and train intake staff on making assessments for plan completeness.**

#### 5. Plan Review Status Inquires

During the review process, applicants frequently want to know the status of their review. To provide this information staff needs to obtain access to the two manual plan review logs to determine review status and who is doing the building review. Since two different manual logs contain this information and are in different sections of the office, staff has difficulty accessing the information to answer customer inquiries. Also, since both logs have submittal date, address, and completion dates, duplicate data entry is required which results in discrepancies between the two logs. Only one log should be maintained and that log should be a shared electronic file that all have access to.

- 42. Recommendation:** As an interim step until a permit software solution can be implemented, create a shared Excel plan review log that is on the central server and eliminate the paper logs.

## 6. Plan Review Performance Standards

The Building Division's existing established plan review completion targets are as follows:

- 4 to 6 weeks for New Construction
- 4 to 6 weeks for Residential Additions and Alterations
- 3 to 5 weeks for Major Tenant Improvements

For this fiscal year the performance targets have been changed to the following:

- 3.5 weeks for New Construction
- 2 weeks for Residential Additions and Alterations
- 2 weeks for Major Tenant Improvements

It is important that the established performance standards for plan review be in line with the established standards set by other jurisdictions. There is no definitive resource that documents actual standards in different parts of the country, but *Municipal Benchmarks*, by David N. Ammons, Sage Publications, 2001 stipulates the following:

- **Commercial Buildings – Review Time for Building Permits**  
Data was taken from 23 cities in 11 states. Time ranged between 4 to 63 days with a median of 10 days. Some communities used a variable schedule for small, medium and large projects of 5, 10 or 15 days.
- **Residential Buildings – Review Time for Building Permits**  
Data was taken from 38 cities in 15 states. Time ranged between 1 to 39 days with a median of 5 days.

The revised targets established for this fiscal year appear to be acceptable limits for the 1<sup>st</sup> review cycle if based on review completion and not shelf time to start the review process, but additional cycle targets need to be set as well.

It is important that all review partners (Engineering, Fire, and Planning) have the same established review time lines. All review partners need to agree on appropriate turnaround time lines and utilize resources to meet these goals.

- 43. Recommendation:** Establish the same performance standard among all review partners.

**44. Recommendation:** Make revised plan review processing targets the time to complete review and incorporate addition processing cycle targets as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8  
Recommended Processing Times**

	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Cycle</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle</b>
New Construction	3.5 Weeks	2 Weeks	1 Week
Residential Add/Alts	2 Weeks	1 Week	3 Days
Commercial Major TI's	2 Weeks	1 Week	3 Days

**7. Plan Review Actual Performance**

The Building Division has had a great deal of difficulty meeting their established targets. The revised targets will be even more difficult to meet without significant changes. On 6-22-2006, the oldest plan waiting for review had been submitted on 4-20-2006, which is over 8 weeks of delay. In reviewing actual data provided from 11-15-2005, the average processing time to complete a project was nine weeks and the longest was 35 weeks. This reaffirms that the Division is having trouble meeting their targets. It is important that greater effort be made to lower the plan review processing targets and that these revised targets be maintained. In order to accomplish this, actual review time data must be monitored. Total processing time, from date of submittal to completion of review, must be tracked for each review cycle and monitored to ensure time lines are being met.

If workload demand increases beyond staffing capacity, plan review relief systems (third party review services) should be immediately deployed. In order to properly monitor these activities the section should be managed by a staff person who has organization abilities and supervisory authority over staff. Currently, the Building Official is attempting to fill this role with the assistance of an Office Inspector. Because of the inadequate tracking system currently being used and the poor performance in meeting established targets, current management of plan review is not working. The Building Official should not be performing this role in addition to his other assigned duties and responsibilities and the Office Inspector does not have the skill set to perform the job. Most jurisdictions of this size have a middle management position that oversees day to day processing functions of this nature.

**45. Recommendation:** Establish plan review processing targets (actual plan review processing) and monitor staff performance levels.

- 46. Recommendation:** The newly created Supervising Building Inspector position that is vacant should be staffed with an individual who can supervise the Plan Review Engineers. This position should oversee the plan review and counter processing functions. This position should have all plan review and counter staff reporting directly to him/her.
- 47. Recommendation:** Total processing time and actual review time per plan review cycle should be tracked. If a shared Excel file were utilized this could be easily done with very little staff time consumed.

The Building Division is experiencing inefficiencies in plan review. The reasons are related to pulling staff away from plan review to service the counter, poor quality of plan submittals, and staff not working efficiently. In reviewing one Plan Check Engineer's personal plan review log, out of 64 projects reviewed 41 required a 2<sup>nd</sup> review cycle, 21 a 3<sup>rd</sup> review cycle and 10 a 4<sup>th</sup> review cycle. When 32% of projects require a 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and 16% a 4<sup>th</sup> of review, this indicates problems are occurring. These problems could be the result of incomplete plans being submitted, designers not being responsive to plan review correction being requested, or incomplete reviews being done. Changing to a performance based fee methodology as described earlier in this chapter would greatly improve processing efficiencies.

- 48. Recommendation:** Implement a performance based fees methodology and require plan review staff to account for processing time.

The use of standardized review checklists result in more thorough and consistent reviews being done and speeds up the review process. Plan review checklists should be incorporated into the plan review process that utilizes imbedded macros to allow rapid production of correction lists. These checklists should be developed in cooperation with the inspection section to improve the quality of plans and reduce the number of omissions that are occurring,

- 49. Recommendation:** Create plan review checklists that have macros imbedded that can generate customized correction lists which can be incorporated later into a permit software system.

### 8. Plan Reviewers Counter Duties

Two full-time Plan Review Engineers are assigned counter duty. One is assigned a.m. duty from 9:00 to 10:30 and the other p.m. duty from 1:00 to 2:30. Counter duty is intended to provide technical assistance to the Permit Technicians and perform some

minor over the counter plan review. Having knowledgeable plan review staff assigned to the counter is extremely important and needs to be maintained. This support service should be available the entire time the counter is open. To provide this service by assigning plan review staff dual duties makes them very non-productive in processing plan checks. Review of the plan review assignments over the last 6 months showed the following activity: two plan check staff assigned counter duty processed 10 plan checks between them and the two contract staff, one of which only works part time, processed 44 reviews. The productivity of non-counter staff is over four times greater than staff assigned counter duties.

**50. Recommendation:** The newly created Supervising Building Inspector position that is vacant should be staffed by an individual that is capable of providing counter technical support as well as supervision.

## G. OTHER PROCESSING ISSUES

### Civil Engineering Review

The Building Division has a Civil Engineer assigned to their section to review the site conditions on private property, (grading, drainage, and flood zone management). Because there is a single person doing this review process, this function can at times be the primary bottleneck in obtaining a permit.

**51. Recommendation:** Provide a back up for civil engineering review by working out an agreement with Public Works to assist when workload become excessive or absences occur.

### Clerical Support

Clerical staff answers phones, takes inspection requests, manages plan storage, provides administrative support, prepares council packets, processes time cards and manages employee evaluations. When calls come in they can ring on up to six phones. These calls are not always processed in order of receipt because calls are placed on hold and then picked up later. Callers seeking information are put on hold only to be transferred to a Permit Technician or an Inspector's voice mailbox. The Department needs a call management system equipped with a sequencer where callers can self direct and that will ensure callers are processed in the order of calling.

**52. Recommendation:** Purchase and install a phone call management system that will help direct callers and ensure proper processing.

Timecards are still being manually processed which is unnecessarily time consuming. Time cards should be processed electronically with validation features, (accounting of total hours and holidays) automatically.

**53. Recommendation: Develop an electronic time card system.**

The Department processes a large number of plan retrieval requests, which are very time consuming because all plans are still stored in paper. Sometimes the plans retrieved are not the ones needed because multiple plans exist on a single property. All plan retrieval requests are currently being processed by one Office Assistant position, which creates delays in accessing plans.

**54. Recommendation: Cross-train all clerical staff and Permit Technicians on plan retrieval.**

To maximize productivity of staff and to share staffing resources when absenteeism occurs, clerical staff should be cross-trained to perform each other's functions and to help with plan intake and permit issuance if needed.

**55. Recommendation: Clerical should be cross-trained to perform all clerical functions and should be trained to do simple plan intake and permit issuance functions.**

## H. FIRE REVIEW

### Overview

The Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) personnel are located next to the Planning and Building Services offices. The working relationship between the three groups appears to be working very well. FPB reviews construction plans and does inspections for proper structure exiting. They also do plan review, issue permits, and inspect systems (alarms, sprinklers, tanks and hot-work), administer annual occupancy inspections for assembly uses and care facilities, do refinery inspections and conduct weed abatement inspections.

### Clerical Support

Building construction plans are taken in and routed to FPB by Building Division counter staff. All other reviews are submitted to FPB directly and these permits are issued by FPB. The Bureau does not have clerical counter support staff.

- 56. Recommendation:** Create a Permit Specialist position to support the FPB intake and permit issuance process.

### Cost Recovery

Fire revenue is approximately only 50% cost recovery. Revenue shortages can create service deficiencies for a division, which are counter productive. This appears to be true in the Fire Prevention Bureau.

- 57. Recommendation:** Perform a fee study in FPB and bring fees up to 100% cost recovery.

FPB participates in the planning review process and provides site access recommendations during the entitlement process but receives no compensation for this review.

- 58. Recommendation:** Incorporate a Fire review fee into the entitlement process to pay for Fire services provided.

### Records Management

FPB has its own Record Management System (RMS) that is used to track plan review processing and occupancy inspections. The Fire Prevention Bureau is happy with this system, but it is important that Building, Engineering, Fire and Planning all be on the same platform to facilitate communication and project tracking. Therefore even though FPB is desirous to expand the RMS system by purchasing addition modules, it is not advisable to do so at this time, because the RMS system will undoubtedly be replaced in the near future.

- 59. Recommendation:** FPB should not expand the RMS system but rather should adopt the same platform that will be recommended for all the permitting functions.

RMS is used for billing annual inspections but the Finance Department is the only department allowed to collect revenue and RMS does not interface with the SAP Finance system. This lack of interface creates tracking problem for both.

- 60. Recommendation:** Make sure the new software solution deployed will allow the FPB billing system to interface with the Finance system.

The GIS system deployed in Richmond is not accessible by FPB.

- 61. Recommendation: Make sure the new software solution deployed will allow Fire Prevention access to GIS layers.**

### Staffing

When FPB gets backlogged due to excess workload demand, they do not have any established relief system. The plan review staff assigned to the Fire Prevention Bureau come from the line positions and because of rotation and different skill needs, training at times is overwhelming. Many jurisdictions utilize permanently assigned Fire Protection Engineers that are trained in fire prevention to eliminate this problem. Another problem is that line staff is not trained in hazardous material processing and hence the Bureau does not have any expertise in this area.

- 62. Recommendation: Hire Fire Protection Engineers to replace the line staff.**
- 63. Recommendation: Establish a contract with a third party fire protection plan review service that can be used when workload peaks occur.**

### Training

The Fire Prevention Bureau has training needs but does not have any established formal training program.

- 64. Recommendation: Create a training program for the Fire Prevention Bureau.**

## I. BUILDING INSPECTIONS

### Assignments and Scheduling

Inspection requests can be called in or faxed in. Inspections requested by phone are limited to approximately 25 inspections per day. Inspections requested by fax are guaranteed next day inspection if requested prior to 1:30. This system does not always allow next day inspection service for all phone-in customers. Staffing levels should be maintained at a level that will ensure that next day inspection can be provided at least 95% of the time.



- 65. Recommendation:** Perform a staffing analysis to assess what adequate inspection staffing is needed to ensure next day inspection service for all customers 95% of the time.

When an inspection is received via the phone, the clerical staff completes an inspection request form and then routes all inspection requests to a single staff member to enter requests into a central inspection log. Inspections can be requested for a.m. or p.m. This process is cumbersome and difficult to track during the course of the day and hence some days too many inspections are taken in for a.m. or p.m. service and then customers have to be contacted to reschedule to a different time. If the inspection request system were automated these problems would not occur. In order to automate an inspection scheduling system, inspection requests must be given a weighted value based on the inspection being requested. If this is done the inspection can instantly be matched to available manpower.

- 66. Recommendation:** Automate the inspection request system and deploy it over the Internet and/or through an Interactive Voice Response system.

### Documentation

The Building Division has six different inspection job cards. There is an individual office inspection card for Building and Electrical, two different ones for plumbing and mechanical, a consolidated office inspection record that covers all trades, a consolidated job card inspection record, plus a correction notification form. The individual office inspection cards are pulled by a permit technician each time an inspection is requested and taken to the field by the inspector. The inspector in the field is expected to record the results of the inspection on each of the individual inspection cards, on the field job card and if corrections or a partial approval is granted, on the Correction Notice slip. Not all documents are being completed uniformly because most inspectors will skip some part of the documentation process in order to reduce the amount of redundant documentation built into the system. The individual office inspection cards are returned at the end of the day along with the written correction notices for the Permit Technician to file back. The results of the previous days inspections are to be transferred to the consolidated office inspection record, but this is not occurring on a regular basis. This process is so redundant it wastes time and produces inconsistent record keeping and hence should be replaced immediately.

- 67. Recommendation:** Eliminate the individual inspection records and the consolidated office inspection record and rely on the inspection notice slips to document inspection results. Suggestion - Create a two-part job card using carbonless paper to document inspection results in the field. Once a

project has been granted a final, bring the front page of the job card back to the office to be the consolidated inspection record.

### Equipment

The inspectors carry a sizable amount of forms, books and equipment with them daily and have need of storage containers to organize and transport their equipment. Toolboxes should be provided for those without sufficient storage for their supplies and equipment.

**68. Recommendation:** Provide inspection staff with adequate storage to transport supplies.

Inspectors need electrical testing tools in order to perform some inspections. This equipment is not being made readily available. A supply of testers should be purchased and made available for staff use. Staff should not have to purchase their own equipment and then obtain reimbursement.

**69. Recommendation:** Purchase necessary electrical testing equipment and make available to staff.

### Fees

Even with next day inspection services contractors will inflate the number of inspections requested if there are no penalties for requesting additional inspections. Sometimes this practice is even encouraged by some inspection staff because a large number of inspections can give the appearance of a large workload when in reality very little work is being requested. A fee structure that requires contractors to pay for services being requested stops misuse of the system and greatly increases productivity.

**70. Recommendation:** Implement a performance based fee methodology, where inspection services are limited based on assessed fees relative to actual incurred costs.

### Hours

Inspector work hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They are in the office in the morning from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., offer AM inspection from 8:00 a.m. to Noon, PM inspections from Noon to 4:00 p.m. and are back in the office generally from 3:30

p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The field staff has no clerical support in the morning creating problems communicating with customers calling in. They need limited clerical support from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.

- 71. Recommendation:** Provide at least one clerical support person from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. to assist with processing phone calls.

### Resolution of Problems

When field problems arise that require additional plan review, inspectors have trouble accessing plans in the office to facilitate discussions. They also have difficulty getting plan revisions processed through plan review in a reasonable time. If problems arise regarding site issues that require a planner to obtain resolution, the inspection section has difficulty in getting their assistance. Once construction has commenced, delays in resolution of problems are more costly than any other time and hence should be given priority.

- 72. Recommendation:** Give priority to accessing plans for inspectors, cross-training all clerical staff and facilitated by providing clerical support in the morning. Expedite completion of plan review for revisions and give priority to resolution of Planning issues once construction has started.

The field operation also voiced concern that no formal training exists within the division. This has resulted in some inconsistencies in application of codes. These inconsistencies are exhibited in slightly different enforcement methods between inspectors due to different levels of training. When items are missed by plan review and then corrections are generated through inspections customer dissatisfaction occurs. Better consistency between inspectors and plan review is needed.

- 73. Recommendation:** Assign an inspector to the training committee and when a valued training opportunity is discovered, require that all inspection staff attend.
- 74. Recommendation:** Have regular staff meetings to discuss inconsistencies among inspection staff and to identify plan review problems. Document problems revealed and incorporate issues into the plan review checklists and inspection handbook.

## **J. SPECIAL PROGRAMS**

The Building Division has three special programs: Code Compliance, Rental Program and the Chevron Inspection Program. Each of these programs has recently been created and has not been staffed or deployed yet. Review of these functions is not yet possible. The concepts of the programs were discussed with the Building Official and each program appears to have merit and to be well thought out.

### **Chevron Inspection**

The Chevron facilities in Richmond have continual need for plan review and inspections, which is a sizable workload. Previously, oversight of Chevron's construction was performed through a Certified Inspection Program that was monitored by a contracted auditing firm, Black and Veatch. This program is in the process of being replaced by a new inspection program that will be administered directly by the Building Division. The workload is rather sizable and it is anticipated to require one full-time Plan Review Engineer and two inspectors to provide service. The program will have its own annual budget and the newly created staff will be assigned full time to administer the program.

### **Code Compliance**

When projects are started without first obtaining permits, the Building Division must investigate and provide direction for resolution. Sometimes abandoned buildings need to be investigated to determine how best to secure the property. These processes are very time consuming and require special handling, which will be the responsibility of the newly created Building Inspector position assigned to Code Compliance.

### **Rental Program**

In Richmond all non-owner occupied rental property is subject to housing inspections. A contract firm, "Sterling Group", performs the housing inspection based on Section 8 HUD standards. If code compliance issues are discovered, there is a need for a building inspector to review the problem and provide direction for correction. The newly created Building Inspector position assigned to the housing program will conduct these inspections.

## **VI. PLANNING DIVISION**

### **A. PROFILE**

The Planning Division has three sections responsible for performing planning functions: Current Planning which is responsible for zoning implementation, Advanced Planning which is responsible for the general plan and long-range issues and Administrative Services, which supports the other two sections. The Current Planning division staffs the Planning Commission, the Development Review Committee, the Design Review Board and the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee.

#### **Authority**

The Planning Divisions operate under authority of the Richmond Municipal Code, the Richmond General Plan and California State Planning Law.

#### **Organization**

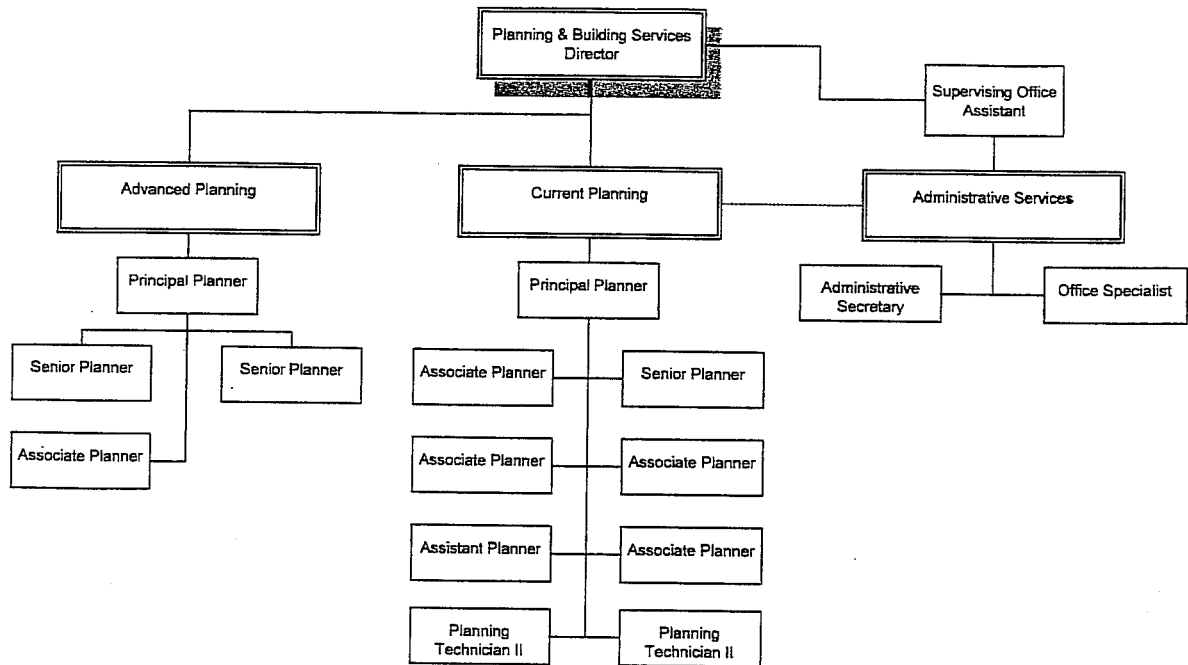
Table 9 indicates specific positions and responsibilities for the Current, Advanced and Administrative Services sections.

**Table 9  
Positions and Responsibilities for Planning Division**

Position	No. of Positions	Responsibilities
Principal Planner	2	One Principal Planner is responsible for Current Planning and one for Advanced Planning. These positions are responsible for the day to day management and leadership within their respective Divisions. Additionally, the Principal Planner in Current Planning also staffs the Planning Commission. The positions report to the Director of Planning and Building Services
Senior Planner	3 (1 vacant in Advanced)	Two in Advanced Planning and one in Current Planning. These positions perform senior level project review, handling complex land use and policy development issues. Additionally, the Senior in Current Planning also staffs the Design Review Board. The positions report to the Principal Planner of their respective Divisions.
Associate Planner	5	There is one position in Advanced Planning and four in Current Planning. Performs journey level planning work, reviewing projects, preparing staff reports and drafting decision letters. One Associate Planner in Current Planning is also assigned to staff the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. The positions report to the Principal Planner in their respective Divisions.
Assistant Planner	1	The Assistant Planner in Current Planning is involved with the review and preparation of routine current planning cases. Reports to a Principal Planner.
Planning Technician	2	Both positions are in Current Planning and are responsible for preparing mailing labels, posting project sites, preparing public hearing notices, prepare case files, maintaining the website, and routing plans to the Technical Review Committee members. These positions report to the Principal Planner.
Supervising Office Assistant	1	Provides administrative support to the Building Official, prepares personnel actions for the entire Department. Reports to the Director.
Administrative Secretary	1	Answers phones, provides administrative support to the Planning Commission and provides direct support to the Department Director. Reports to the Supervising Office Assistant.
Office Specialists	1	Answers phones, opens the mail, tracks faxes, and provides administrative support to the Design Review Board. Reports to the Supervising Office Assistant.
<b>Total</b>	16 (4 Advanced, 9 Current and 3 Admin)	

Figure 5 below shows the organizational chart for the Planning Division.

**Figure 5  
Organizational Chart for the Planning Division**



**Activity**

Activity level has increased 57% from 728 to 1140 total planning permits between FY 2003-04 and FY 2005-06. The Table 10 below shows a three year permit history from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2006.

**Table 10**  
**Planning Permit History FY 2003-04 – FY 2005-06**

Application Type	FY 03-04	FY 04-05	FY 05-06	3 Year Avg. No. of Applications	Min. Processing Time (hours)	Max. Processing Time (hours)	Median Processing Time (hours)	Total Processing Time (hours)
Administrative Design Review	N/A	16	34	25.0	4.0	16.0	12.0	300.0
CEQA (Categorical Exemption)	N/A	69	258	163.5	1.0	4.0	2.5	408.8
Conditional Use Permit (Minor)	27	18	30	25.0	6.0	18.0	14.0	350.0
Conditional Use Permit (Major)	10	13	14	12.3	10.0	32.0	24.0	296.0
Design Review (Plan Check)	24	187	140	117.0	4.0	10.0	6.0	702.0
Design Review	111	131	95	112.3	4.0	20.0	16.0	1797.3
EIR	1	9	12	7.3	80.0	120.0	100.0	733.3
Initial Study	23	7	5	11.7	16.0	40.0	30.0	350.0
Sign Review	19	19	15	17.7	1.0	6.0	4.5	79.5
Lot Line Adjustments	13	10	8	10.3	4.0	8.0	5.0	51.7
General Plan Amendment	4	4	1	3.0	40.0	80.0	60.0	180.0
Pre-Application	3	4	1	2.7	2.0	10.0	7.0	18.7
Tentative Parcel Map	8	3	10	7.0	6.0	25.0	18.0	126.0
Tentative Tract Map	6	6	2	4.7	8.0	32.0	24.0	112.0
Minor Variance	35	32	25	30.7	8.0	24.0	16.0	490.7
Zoning Administrator Review	35	52	30	39.0	4.0	12.0	8.0	312.0
Zoning Compliance	409	498	460	455.7	1.0	3.0	2.0	911.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>1140</b>	<b>982.0</b>				<b>7219.3</b>
<b>Change</b>		<b>+48.1%</b>	<b>+5.6%</b>					

## B. POLICY ISSUES

The Planning Division faces an array of policy issues ranging from the General Plan update to the need for a policy manual. Policy issues by their nature have a Citywide impact.

### General Plan Update

The City recently hired the MIG consulting firm from Berkeley to undertake an update to the Citywide General Plan. MIG is leading a team of sub-consultants responsible for updates the General Plan, reviewing the existing specific plans for possible updates, and revising the zoning code.

This is one of the most expensive and important projects that the City is undertaking. It is essential that the project result in a community consensus that will set the strategy for future planning and redevelopment in Richmond. Richmond is a diverse community and this will be a difficult assignment. It is early in the assignment and undoubtedly adjustments will need to be made along the way. We did receive the following comments from staff and citizens that we passed along to the consultants:

- The Citizen committee feels they should be having more meetings
- Some of the printed material tends to be out of date, not in a user friendly format and too generic



- Attendance at some of the citizens meetings has been less than desired

An effort of this magnitude also requires considerable work by City staff. As currently organized, we believe additional staff work and leadership on the General Plan is warranted. One approach would be to hire a seasoned contract planner at a high level to work on the General Plan with a two year assignment. Another approach would be to re-assign staff from both Planning and Redevelopment for the function.

**75. Recommendation: The City should strengthen the staffing and leadership being given to the General Plan effort.**

The General Plan can also be used as an opportunity for the identification of Priority Sites for development. Redevelopment and planning staff, working with the community, should jointly identify key locations where development/redevelopment should occur. These sites might be located at high profile intersections or within particular neighborhoods where development would act as a catalyst for further development or neighborhood revitalization. Once the sites are identified the General Plan should outline development scenarios, which could be analyzed in the General Plan and the program Environmental Impact Report. Such a program could continue the revitalization of neighborhoods across Richmond.

**76. Recommendation: The General Plan should identify priority sites for development, which can serve as a catalyst for further development and revitalization.**

**77. Recommendation: The priority sites should be identified jointly by planning, redevelopment and the community.**

**78. Recommendation: Development scenarios should be developed for the Priority Sites, which would be analyzed in the program Environmental Impact Report, which could reduce development time in the future.**

To increase community awareness of the General Plan process City staff drives around town in a vehicle – the Plan Van – in order to gather opinion. The concept is unusual and has been successful in engaging the public in the update process. However, like many innovative programs, the Plan Van has had some issues. It was reported to us during the interviews that staff would sign-up for time in the van, but then not show up. Others would sign up or participate without authorization of their supervisor. This could lead to employees abusing their time at work. Management needs to actively monitor staff's time to assure there is no abuse.

- 79. Recommendation:** The Principal Planners should monitor staff's time in the Plan Van to assure there are no abuses of work time.

### Specific Plan Review

Specific Plans are a hybrid of a zoning ordinance and a General Plan. Specific Plans have a higher level of detail than a General Plan and typically encompass multiple zoning designations. Specific Plans allow cities to focus development on an identified geographic area and tailor development standards to meet the needs of that area. MIG is examining all of the City's Specific Plans to determine which plans should be amended or if any of the plans can be replaced by the General Plan itself. Some of the Specific Plans are over a decade old and may have limited relevance to contemporary conditions. We would recommend that particular attention be given to review Specific Plans that are more than a decade old, including the Knox/Cutting (1991) and North Shore (1993) Specific Plans.

- 80. Recommendation:** All Specific Plans should be reexamined to determine if they meet contemporary needs, particular attention should be given to the Knox/Cutting and North Shore Specific Plans.

### Green Building Standards

One of several innovative programs started by the Department is exploring preparation of Green Building standards. Green Building standards have been evolving over the last decade ever since the Environmental Protection Agency introduced the Green Building Council and the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program in 1998. In order to successfully develop Green Building standards, however, Building and Planning need to agree on how the standards will be implemented locally. There have been only limited discussions in Richmond between Planning and Building over standards and their implementation. Some Building staff are concerned that they have or will not be properly included in the process of creating standards. We would recommend that the Planner assigned to lead this project work closely with Building Plan Checkers and Inspectors to address their issues.

- 81. Recommendation:** Planning and Building staff should work closely together to assure that the Green Building standards are appropriate for Richmond and that the programs can be implemented.

## Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation is becoming increasingly more important in the community. Many communities also find that historic preservation is an integral part of economic development. In order to address this issue the staff is applying to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to become a Certified Local Government (CLG). The establishment of a CLG program encourages the direct participation of local governments in the identification, evaluation, registration, and preservation of historic properties within their jurisdictions and promotes the integration of local preservation interests and concerns into local planning and decision-making processes. The CLG program is a partnership among local governments, the State of California-Office of Historic Preservation, and the National Park Service (NPS) which is responsible for administering the National Historic Preservation Program. Staff hopes to have the certification process completed by the end of 2006.

Richmond has a Historic Preservation Advisory Committee that reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Design Review Board for improvements to historic structures. According to staff, the Advisory Committee process is efficient because it only requires a three member quorum of the Committee to make a recommendation on an application. Staff did suggest that if the City wanted to pursue historic preservation more seriously, additional training would be necessary.

**82. Recommendation:** Additional staff training should be provided in the area of historic preservation once the City becomes a Certified Local Government by the State.

## Design Review Board

Richmond requires Design Review Board (DRB) approval for most new construction, with minor exceptions (e.g. residential addition of less than 500 square feet and commercial and industrial additions of less than 1,000 square feet). Staff can also approve additions to single family homes of less than 1,200 square feet and less than 15 feet in height through an Administrative Design Review (ADR) process. We believe the DRB should focus on projects that have a greater neighborhood or community impact, which would mean increasing the threshold of review. The ADR threshold should be increased to include new single family homes of less than 2,000 square feet, additions of less than 2,000 square feet regardless of height, commercial additions of 2,500 square feet and industrial additions of up to 10,000 square feet.

**83. Recommendation:** Administrative Design Review thresholds should be increased thereby delegating more authority to staff. ADR limits should be increased to new single family homes and residential additions up to 2000

square feet, commercial additions up to 2,500 square feet and industrial additions up to 10,000 square feet.

Currently, projects are considered by the DRD first, which then makes a recommendation to the Planning Commission. This sequence should be reversed at least in some cases such as Conditional Use Permits and Variances where the use or structure should be approved by the Planning Commission before the DRB approves the design. Under the current system, applicants could spend time and money addressing DRB issues regarding building and site design and then not get the use approved by the Planning Commission.

**84. Recommendation:** The Planning Commission should review and approve the Conditional Use Permit and Variance requests before the DRB reviews and approves the design.

In order to get “good” design the City needs to be clear in what it considers good design. Based upon our review of the current design guidelines they are too vague to be useful. For example, the guidelines are not tailored to the various neighborhoods; instead the guidelines are a one size fits all. The guidelines contain no visual images that express what the text means. Findings within the ordinance are very generic, which makes it difficult for the Board to definitively make findings for approval or denial. Finally, the guidelines make no distinction between designs for residential, commercial or industrial buildings. The design guidelines need to be completely overhauled to contain more specificity as discussed above.

**85. Recommendation:** The design guidelines should be overhauled and made more specific. Revisions should include better findings, precedent images showing design the City wants to encourage and differentiation between residential, commercial and industrial standards.

One of the issues we heard repeatedly during our interviews was a concern that the DRB was overreaching in their decisions by exceeding their scope of authority. We attended a DRB meeting as part of our data gathering work. But the meeting only had one item which was moved to consent so there was no discussion of an actual case. We did observe, however, a discussion between staff and the DRB regarding nexus issues. Several DRB members were concerned that they had not been given proper direction from staff regarding the link between an applicant’s request and imposition of conditions. The issue revolves around how far the DRB can go in imposing conditions, which can also be called “overreaching.” This apparently is not a new issue for the DRB and they were clearly frustrated that staff had not answered their questions.

To be effective, Board members should rely upon input and guidance from staff when conducting hearings and making decisions. Boards are typically only as good as the guidance they are provided and the assigned staff needs to provide that guidance. Staff needs to provide direction and training to the DRB in order to help them succeed. Training is available through outside organizations such as the American Planning Association and the League of California Cities, or by staff if staff has the capacity to provide that training.

**86. Recommendation:** Staff should work cooperatively with the DRB to address their specific concerns.

**87. Recommendation:** Staff should provide training for the DRB members either directly or by sending members to outside training provided by the League of California Cities or the American Planning Association.

During our interview with the DRB chair, concern was expressed that the Board was left out of the loop regarding the status of projects after they were approved or recommended for approval by the Board. Members want to be informed if the Planning Commission or City Council revises or overturns their decisions. This feedback would allow the Board to make better initial decisions if they know the direction of the Commission and City Council.

**88. Recommendation:** DRB members should receive informational updates on projects where the DRB decision is not final or when their decision is appealed.

### Development Review Committee

In Richmond proposed subdivision maps are reviewed by a sub-committee of the Planning Commission known as the Development Review Committee (DRC). The DRC meeting is a noticed meeting held on the Monday before the Thursday evening Planning Commission meeting. These meetings place another demand on staff time through preparation of agendas, notices and minutes; and it requires attendance by the applicant and the public at another public hearing. Further, the DRC meetings have expanded to include an agenda review meeting in advance of the regular Commission meeting on Thursday night.

We have several concerns with the process as explained to us. First, very few cities still use DRC meetings where Commissioners attend. While this was a common practice for subdivision maps in the past, most cities currently have a staff level review of maps by technical staff only. In Richmond the TRC should be serving the

function of the DRC, which makes the DRC redundant. Second, having a sub-committee of Commission members reviewing and discussing the agenda with members of the public also commenting makes for a confusing public hearing process. This may also be a violation of the Brown Act. Further, comments could be made at the DRC meeting that are not repeated for the benefit of those who attend the "public hearing" in front of the entire Planning Commission.

As an alternative to having the DRC conduct an agenda review we would suggest that the Chair and possibly Vice-chair of the Commission meet with the Principal Planner and the Director to review the agenda. Having the Commission Chair meet with Director and Principal Planner for an agenda review session is another common practice.

**89. Recommendation:** The duties of the DRC for subdivision map review should be reassigned to the TRC.

**90. Recommendation:** The DRC should be replaced with an agenda review process that includes the Commission Chair, and possibly Vice-Chair, along with the Director and Principal Planner. Agenda review meetings would be non-noticed because no action is taken and only two Commissioners are in attendance.

### Policy Manual

There has been considerable turnover in Planning staff over the last few years, thus resulting in a lack of institutional memory within the organization. Staff spends too much time developing policy or creating a process for every new case that doesn't fall neatly within the Municipal Code; and there are many such cases. A policy manual should be developed to memorialize policy or process decisions made by the Principal Planner or Director. A manual will assure consistency over time and among projects that have similar characteristics. One of the Associate Planners is currently drafting a policy manual as time permits. This project should be given a higher priority by management so the manual can be completed and used. Because the manual is a living document it can be completed in its current form and further amended as appropriate.

**91. Recommendation:** The Planning policy manual should be completed within the next 90 days.

### Forecasting Calendar

The Current Planning Section uses a forecasting calendar to manually track cases as they move through the process. The calendar allows Planners to know when their cases will be scheduled for a hearing based upon how large the agenda is for the meeting and any Permit Streamlining Act requirements. These calendars are fairly typical within departments; however, some staff felt the calendar actually delayed small projects. Because a case planner knows the project won't be heard for three or four meetings they didn't review the case file in detail preferring to work on more immediate cases. The situation is exacerbated because the Department has no timelines for the review and approval of projects which means if the agenda is too large small projects can be moved to another hearing date.

**92. Recommendation:** Continue to use the forecasting calendar to manage the size of Planning Commission and DRB agendas, but assure that all projects are reviewed and scheduled for hearing based upon the established and legal timelines.

## C. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Organizational issues have a more limited impact than policy issues, but they may ripple across the entire City organization. This section examines both internal and external departmental working relationships.

### Expectations and Roles

We believe one of the critical issues within the Department is clarifying the roles and expectations of the senior management team. A strong team requires both vision, setting the direction, and managers implementing that direction. Based upon our observations the Director is a visionary leader who should be supported by strong managers who are focused on the details of their respective functions. Managers must monitor the details and assure that all staff are working towards that common goal and vision. It is unclear to us who is responsible for monitoring the details.

Throughout our time on-site we observed a Director who was highly engaged in meetings and had enough information to talk about most issues that were raised. While this is necessary and important, it is also important for the managers to be engaged and involved in the meetings and to possess all the details. How responsibility is divided among the management team should be resolved for the proper functioning of the Department.

We would recommend that the Director focus on the big-picture vision for the Department and that he build external relationships to implement that vision. The

mid-management team needs to take on the day-to-day management of the staff and the case load. This includes the need to establish clear timelines for their staff, monitor the status of projects, and establish accountability.

**93. Recommendation:** Roles and responsibilities of the management team should be clarified so that each member knows what is expected of them. Once roles are established, that message needs to be communicated to staff so staff knows whom to address for various issues.

**94. Recommendation:** The Director should be responsible for setting the vision for the Department and communicating that vision to elected officials and community leaders. The mid-management team should be responsible for managing their functions.

### Principal Planner

The staffing analysis does not allocate any time from the Principal Planner for Current Planning toward projects because we believe this position should not have a caseload. In some cases it is appropriate for a Principal Planner to have a caseload, but not in Richmond. There are too many management and training issues which are cited in this report that are a higher priority and that need to be addressed first. After the Division has all its processes and procedures in place and staff is properly trained, the Principal Planner may be able to handle a small caseload. We believe that management's first priority is managing their staff, and time spent doing the work is time taken away from management duties and responsibilities.

**95. Recommendation:** The Principal Planner for Current Planning should spend time on managing the Division and not handle a caseload until there are reliable procedures and processes in place.

### Staff Meetings

Even though the Planning and Building function is within a single Department they need to gel as a single work group and not as two side-by-side groups. Staff meetings are one of the best methods of bringing people together and to get them talking about issues of mutual concern. While the Planning staff has weekly meetings with the Director in attendance there are no regular meetings that include both Planning and Building staff. Department meetings of all staff should be scheduled on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. The meetings should be structured to foster dialogue between Planners and Building staff. The meetings should focus on Department strategy, mission, customer service and part of the meeting should be devoted to a training topic. An



agenda that allows for open question and answers and the free flow of information should be prepared. In order to stay focused and to be respectful of everybody's time meetings should normally last no more than one hour.

- 96. Recommendation:** Monthly staff meetings should be scheduled for all Department staff. The meetings should allow for open dialogue among staff and discussion between planning and building should be fostered.

Part of the Department management team also meets weekly, but these meetings need to include the whole team. Currently the meetings include the Director and the two Principal Planners, but the Building Official generally does not attend. Regular management meetings of the Department need to be scheduled to discuss strategic issues of where the Department is going and how it will get there.

- 97. Recommendation:** Management meetings should include the Director, two Planning Division managers and the Chief Building Official. These meetings should be focused on strategic issues within the Department.

- 98. Recommendation:** Meetings should generally be limited to one hour in order to respect everybody's time and to stay focused.

### Redevelopment Agency

The Planning Department and the Redevelopment Agency interact often on projects. Because the Agency is the City's development arm, Redevelopment advocates for projects that are believed to be in the City's economic best interest. This is fundamentally different than Planning's role in the development process. These different roles have created tensions between the two departments. Redevelopment, however, can help directly implement the Planning Department's goals by executing projects. For this reason the departments need to develop a better stronger relationship.

Redevelopment has two tasks or roles to play in the planning process: 1) a strategic role to help implement the General Plan and 2) a consultation role selecting projects and helping developers through the development process.

Planning has three tasks or roles to play in the redevelopment process: 1) a strategic role in adopting and maintaining the General Plan, 2) processing projects through the City's ordinances and design review process, and 3) assisting Redevelopment in processing redevelopment projects. Planning needs to recognize that redevelopment projects are not just another project. They are projects that the City has established a specific policy incentive to be accomplished.

These roles can only be executed if the departments cooperate. Regular meetings and discussions between the management and staff of the departments will begin to foster that relationship. The Directors of the departments must also play a role in getting their respective staff to understand how the two departments can function together for the benefit of the City.

More specifically:

- Redevelopment must play an active role in the General Plan update process so that at the end, the Plan is totally consistent with the redevelopment strategy and Redevelopment is willing to use the Plan as its development strategy.
- Redevelopment should consult with Planning at the early stages of considering projects. It is recognized that some of this consultation must take place on a confidential basis. The planners need to recognize this confidentiality.
- Planning should keep Redevelopment fully informed of applications or inquiries within the redevelopment areas.
- Redevelopment should assure that projects its supports are of the highest urban design quality.

**99. Recommendation:** The Directors of Planning and Redevelopment should instill a sense of cooperation between department staff by explaining the mutually beneficial roles each department plays.

**100. Recommendation:** Quarterly meetings between Planning and Redevelopment staffs should be scheduled.

### Job Assignment of Duties

Staff is hired and assigned in either the Current or Advanced Planning sections. From a functional standpoint, staff in either section can and often do either type of work. Many planning organizations assign only Advance Planning projects to the Advance Planning section and Current Planning projects to the Current Planning section. Other organizations provide more flexibility like Richmond. This type of arrangement is not unique and can work very effectively; however, there needs to be ground rules to assure that the Current Planning work – case processing – doesn't consume all of the staff time. We would suggest that Advanced Planning staff handle not more than one Current Planning projects. Conversely, Current Planning staff should be assigned no more than one Advance Planning project at one time and spend no more than 20% of their time on Advanced Planning projects.

**101. Recommendation:** Establish ground rules which allow Current and Advanced planners to perform limited amounts of work in the division other where they are assigned. Generally, Current Planners should allocate not more than 20% of their time to Advanced Planning; and Advanced Planners should be assigned no more than one Current Planning project at any one time.

### Work Program

When the new Planning and Building Services Director was hired approximately one year ago, he developed a list of projects/programs that he wanted to accomplish. Teams were created and a staff member was assigned to lead the effort. This program has been outlined on the white board in the Department's conference room. This task list is a great beginning, but it needs to be more fully developed into a work program. A complete work program should have goals for each project, a timeline including milestones and an allocation of resources. Resource allocation should include both the amount of staff hours necessary to complete the project and the cost of outside services (i.e. consultants). Ideally, the work program would be adopted by the City Manager either as part of the budget process or as a separate item. In the absence of a work program neither the public nor the Council understands what projects the department is working on, which is why the department can become overburdened with new projects and additional studies directed by the Council or City Manager. We believe the work program will also address one of the specific comments made by one staff member: "We are very good at identifying issues, but we cannot follow through to solve them."

The work program will also establish the need for specific positions, additional personnel, or the appropriate staffing level.

**102. Recommendation:** A complete work program containing project goals, timelines, milestones, and resource allocation should be developed. The work program should be reviewed and approved by the City Manager and presented to the City Council for information.

In the absence of a completed work program we looked at the Department's objectives contained in the Annual City Budget. The objectives are inadequate for staffing or resource allocation purposes. In fact, five of the Department's seven objectives for FY 2005-06 are virtually identical to the objectives in the FY 2004-05 budget. Unless the objectives are specific and measurable it is not possible to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the Department.

**103. Recommendation:** Annual budget objectives should be consistent with the Department's work program.

## D. PROCESS ISSUES

The following sub-sections address an array of Planning process issues ranging from application material to time tracking. This section has been arranged alphabetically for ease of locating issues. It should also be understood that many process issues impact other Departments because of their role in the review and approval of development projects.

### Brochures and Application Material

Richmond has a set of nine different pamphlets explaining everything from the Conditional Use Permit process, to rezoning and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). We believe the brochures are too long and overwhelming which mirrors opinions voiced by several staff members also. If the material is too long, the public won't bother to read it. Customers would prefer instead to ask staff all of the questions.

We would recommend two or three brochures. There should be an abbreviated brochure for small-scale projects (e.g. room additions, fences, signs, etc.). A second brochure should be developed for all other projects. These projects typically would require Planning Commission and/or DRB approval. This brochure would also contain filing requirements and a flow chart with timelines.

An optional third brochure could be developed to outline the environmental review process. The brochures should contain filing requirements and a simple flow chart including review times so applicants know what to expect and when to expect to get an approval.

**104. Recommendation:** The Department should develop a minimum of two brochures to replace the nine existing brochures. There should be a brochure for small scale projects and one for large scale projects as outlined above.

The existing brochures are not on display in the public counter area nor are they on the web site. These brochures should be readily available to the public for self service.

**105. Recommendation:** Display the planning brochures in the public counter area and on the Internet.

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

Richmond contracts out most of their environmental review work. Contracting out this work is time consuming, expensive and probably unnecessary. This process requires both the City's Planner and the consultant to become familiar with the same project. Typically Planners in California cities prepare their own environmental review. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that a review of all "projects" be completed before the project is approved.

The review is designed to assess the impact of the project on the environment. However, many small projects are exempt from review based upon the CEQA guidelines. Other small to medium sized projects can be reviewed by staff if they are properly trained. Usually only large projects or those that have the potential for significant impact to the community require the hiring of an outside consultant who is an expert in CEQA law.

The City Attorney's office has offered to train staff in the basics of CEQA so staff can begin to transition into completing their own environmental review of projects. This process can take several months and staff may also want to attend training offered by the Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) to augment the City Attorney's training.

**106. Recommendation: Staff should be trained to conduct the CEQA review for small and medium scale projects that they are processing.**

### **Crime Prevention through Environmental Design**

In the Mayor's 2006 State of the City Address considerable attention was given to the crime rate in Richmond. Various efforts are underway to address this issue using a comprehensive approach. However, the one approach that is not being used is referred to as Defensible Space or Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). A number of organizations provide training in CPTED and we were told that one or more persons in the Richmond Police Department may have had some training. CPTED strategies include:

- Provide a clear border definition of controlled space.
- Provide a clearly marked transition from public to semi-public to private space.
- Locate gathering areas in places with natural surveillance and access control and away from the view of potential offenders.
- Provide natural barriers to conflicting activities.
- Design space to increase the perception of natural surveillance.

- Overcome distance and isolation through improved communications and design efficiencies, e.g., emergency telephones, pedestrian paths.

According to the literature, CPTED concepts need to be included in an expanded design review that emphasizes interagency and interdisciplinary approaches to decisions about the design and use of the built environment. In particular, the local law enforcement agency should participate early in the review process.

**107. Recommendation:** The City should have one or more staff trained in CPTED.

**108. Recommendation:** Staff trained in CPTED should be a part of the City's Technical Review Committee.

### Development Engineering

There are two Departments involved in the review of civil engineering plans for development projects; the Building Division and the Public Works Department. Building reviews grading plans for all projects and stormwater management plans for in-fill projects. The Engineering Section of Public Works reviews subdivision maps, public improvement plans and stormwater management for tract maps. This dual responsibility can lead to inconsistencies between reviewers within two different departments. To eliminate potential inconsistencies the City should develop a handbook containing standards for construction details and standards for review.

**109. Recommendation:** The City should prepare a developer's handbook containing design standards and review criteria for grading and public improvement plans.

### Filing and Routing an Application

Planners take turns working 4 hour shifts at the public counter. The Planner of the Day answers zoning and planning questions and accepts land use applications being filed. Several staff members reported that it is difficult to both answer questions and also accept applications because it was too busy. While we were not able to spend much time at the public counter, this might explain why incomplete applications are being accepted. During our interviews we heard from Commissioners, DRB members and other staff that incomplete and/or poor quality plans were accepted and processed through the system. We would suggest that a primary and a secondary planner of the day be assigned so there is adequate time to review project applicants before they are filed.

**110. Recommendation:** A back-up Planner of the Day should be assigned to allow for the through review of all new applications at the counter.

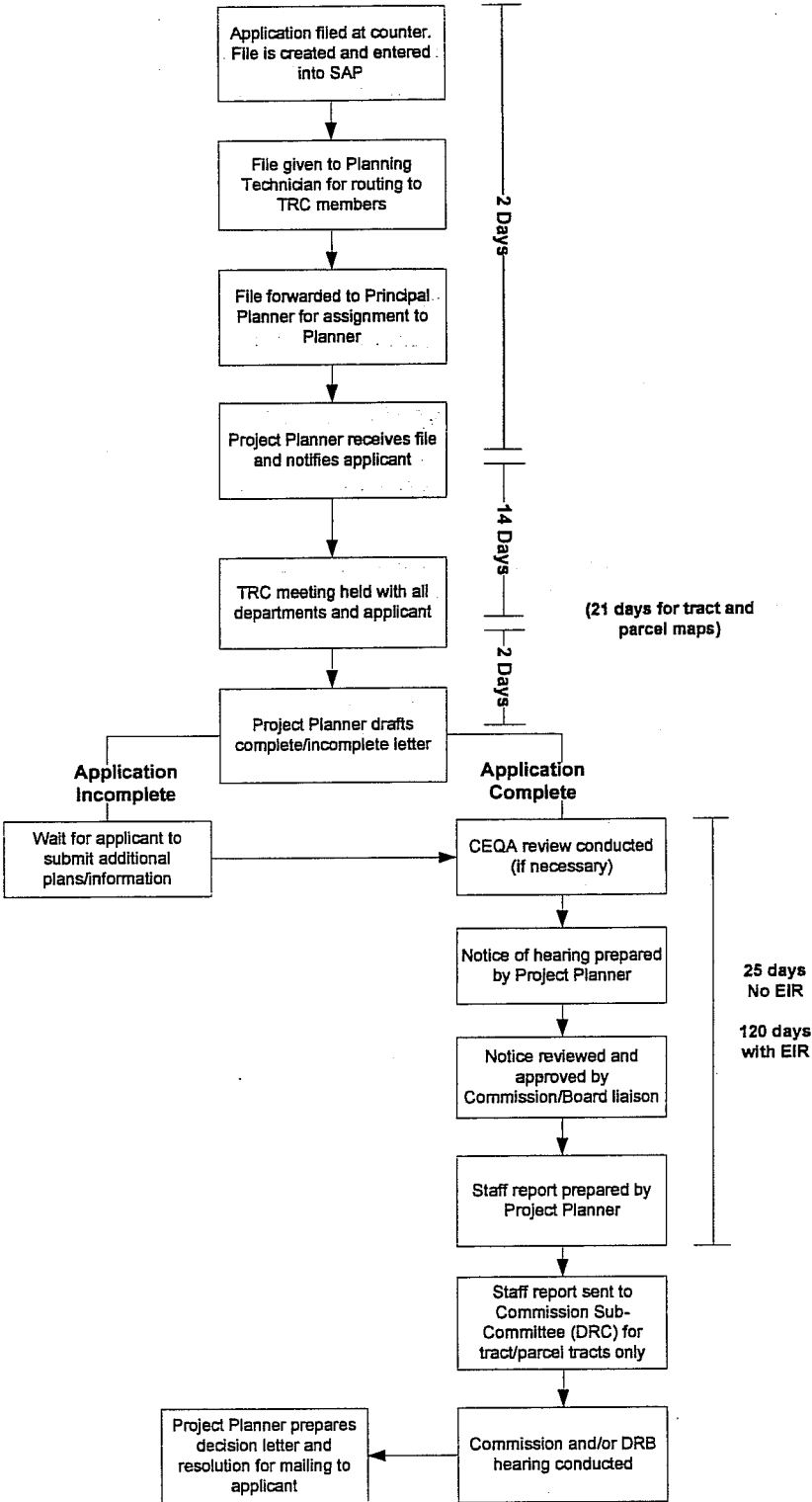
**111. Recommendation:** Planners should screen project applications so that only applications that have sufficient data for analysis are accepted at the counter.

When plans are accepted by the Planner a file is created at the counter and the project is entered into the SAP system. The file is then forwarded to the Planning Technician who enters the project into two other systems 1) the website, so it can be viewed by the public and 2) an in-house case tracking system. The case file is then forwarded to the Principal Planner who assigns the project to a case planner. It typically takes four to seven days for a project to get entered and routed before a case planner is reviewing the project. This should be reduced to two days by having the Planning Technician and Principal Planner monitor the time files sit on their desks.

**112. Recommendation:** Cases should be assigned and the file should be on the planners' desk within two days of being filed at the counter.

The Figure 6 flow chart below outlines the revised filing and review process discussed in this section.

Figure 6  
Revised Application Filing and Review Flow Chart





Part of the internal review process for all projects is called the Technical Review Committee (TRC). Under the current process the case planner receives the file from the Principal Planner and determines which departments will receive plans as part of the technical review. The file is then returned to the Planning Technician who routes the plans. We would suggest that the Department develop a standard protocol for the routing of plans to TRC members so plans are routed by the Planning Technician the first time the file is received. TRC members are given two weeks to review the plans and provide comments back to the Planning Technician. Following the TRC meeting, some of the planners prepare a letter stating whether the application is complete or if additional information is needed. However, not all planners prepare a letter on the status of the application following the meeting. We would strongly recommend that a letter be prepared for all projects the day after the TRC meeting.

**113. Recommendation:** The Planning Technician should route plans to TRC members automatically when the Technician initially receives the file.

**114. Recommendation:** The project planner should draft a complete/incomplete letter within two days of the TRC meeting.

The TRC process is ineffective in gathering comments, conditions and resolving project issues. First, we have been told that many reviewing agencies miss the deadline to submit comments. Second, the Committee rarely meets face to face to discuss projects. Third, the committee members who do attend are typically lower level personnel who lack authority to modify conditions or department policy to meet other departments concerns.

The TRC process should be an interactive process between departments and the applicant and all project issues should be resolved through that process. In order to have that type of dialogue mid-level to senior level staff need to be assigned from each department/agency. Staff in attendance needs to be able to make decisions that will be upheld throughout the process. The meetings are currently chaired by the Planning Technician. To give the meeting the stature it deserves, the Principal Planner for Current Planning should chair the meeting.

**115. Recommendation:** the Principal Planner for Current Planning should chair the TRC meeting.

**116. Recommendation:** Each reviewing department/agency should designate senior staff to attend and participate in the TRC meeting.

**117. Recommendation:** Staff in attendance needs to be empowered to make decisions regarding the application that will be upheld throughout the approval process.

**118. Recommendation:** The project planner and the applicant should attend the TRC meetings.

The Planning Department should also reevaluate which departments and agencies should be in attendance at the TRC meetings. For example, the City is concerned about crime, but the Police Department does not attend the TRC meetings where they could potentially have input on defensible space concepts.

**119. Recommendation:** Reevaluate which departments need to be involved with the TRC process and include the Police Department.

### Meeting Minutes

Richmond uses a contract employee to prepare very extensive minutes of the Planning Commission and Design Review Board meetings. The length of the meeting minutes and a turn over in contractors has delayed the preparation of meeting minutes for up to six months, which is much too long. Many cities have been using action minutes for their public meetings. Action minutes along with either an audio or video tape of the meeting create a solid public record. We would suggest that action minutes of the Planning Commission and DRB meetings be prepared and be ready for adoption by the next meeting following the original meeting date. The action agenda should also be posted on the website as soon as possible after the meeting.

**120. Recommendation:** The Planning Commission and DRB meeting minutes should be done as action minutes and they should be completed by the next meeting following the original meeting date.

### Post Approval Review

During our interviews we heard concern from several staff members and customers that conditions of approval were not being properly monitored, because the current process is not well structured. After projects are approved by the Planning Commission or DRB and before they are submitted for Building Plan Check the plans need to be reviewed by Planning staff for consistency with the approved plans. Under the system applicants submitting for Building Plan Check need a Planning sign-off before Building accepts the plans. In some cases plans can be checked and approved

over the counter by Planning. There are, however, many projects that cannot be reviewed over the counter and Planning needs to take those projects in for review. Because applicants don't know which projects are an over the counter review, versus projects that need to be taken in for review; applicants will need to make multiple trips.

We would suggest a revised system where Planning only stamps the plans indicating they have the required Commission or DRB approval. Plans are then submitted for Building Plan Check and Building routes the plans to Planning for their review as part of the overall plan check process. The project planner would have five days to review the Building set of drawings for consistency with the Commission or DRB approval and return plans to Building.

**121. Recommendation:** Revise the Building plan check process for projects that have Planning Commission or DRB approval such that Planning is a review agency and reviews plans within five days of receiving them from Building.

Public Works Engineering Division also expressed a concern that they are not always notified when a project receives Commission or DRB approval. They have requested a copy of the resolution containing the conditions of approval for their records.

**122. Recommendation:** Planning should electronically forward a copy of the Planning Commission or DRB resolution to Public Works, if it contains conditions for public improvements.

Prior to occupancy of newly constructed commercial buildings a certificate of occupancy must be issued by the Building Division. Each of the review agencies, including Planning, has to sign-off on the certificate to assure that their individual conditions are met. The certificate of occupancy process appears to be inconsistent based upon planning staff input. Planners do not receive notification directly from the building inspector that their review and approval is needed. Instead Planning is contacted by the general contractor or job superintendent requesting an inspection. We would suggest that Building Inspector route a notification slip to all agencies/departments informing them a sign-off is required. Planners would then have two days to schedule and complete their inspection of the property. This process assures that all conditions have been cleared before occupancy of new commercial buildings are granted.

**123. Recommendation:** Planning should complete the Certificate of Occupancy inspection within two days of receiving a written request from the appropriate Building.

**Review Times**

We reviewed records from 2003 through 2006 to determine the median and average number of calendar days it took to process Planning applications for the City's major permit types. The results are listed In Table 11 below:

**Table 11  
Permit Processing Times Years 2003 – 2006**

Permit Type	Years 2003 - 2006	
	Average. Time	Median Time
Conditional Use Permit	108 days	84 days
Design Review	107 days	76 days
Variance	97 days	85 days
Tentative Map	143 days	99 days

It should be noted that these times include both staff time and the time that the applicant takes to submit additional data, if necessary. However, these times are much too long and should be reduced significantly. Design review applications should be heard by the Board within 30 days of a complete application being filed. Conditional Use Permits, Variances and Tentative Maps should be heard by the Planning Commission within 45 days of a complete application being filed.

**124. Recommendation:** 95% of all design review requests should be heard within 30 days of a complete application being filed.

**125. Recommendation:** 95% of all conditional use permits, variances and tentative maps and variances should be heard by the Planning Commission with 45 days of a complete application being filed and 100% within 60 days of being deemed complete.

**Staffing Levels**

As part of our analysis we examined staffing levels to determine if the Department has adequate Planning staff. To complete this analysis we asked staff to estimate the median number of hours required to review and approve each of the major permit types. Using the average number of Planning permits over the last three years and the median processing time in hours for each permit type, we arrived at the total number of hours to process all Planning permits. Total hours were converted into the number of full-time equivalent Planners (FTE's) needed. To arrive at FTE's we took the number of productive hours (after subtracting vacation, holiday, sick and training

time) minus the number of hours spent working on matters unrelated to processing permits, and arrived at a total number of hours available for permit processing. Table 12 below shows the total hours required for permit processing and the number of staff required.

**Table 12**  
**Total Hours Required for Planning Case Processing and Staff Required**

Year	Hours Required for Case Processing	Total Staff Hours Available	Hours Available for Case Processing	Hours for other Work	Total Staff Needed (FTE's)
FY 05-06	7481	1550	1163	387	6.4
3 Year Average	7219	1550	1163	387	6.2

There are a total of eight planners within the Current Planning Division, plus one manager (Principal Planner). Based upon the estimates for processing time there are enough Planners within the Current Planning Division. Thus, the problem of not meeting timelines in Current Planning does not relate to a lack of staff. Rather, it relates to lack of clear processing policies, adopted performance standards, staff training and management oversight.

**Standardized Formats**

An almost universal complaint we heard was the lack of standardization. There is no standard format for agenda reports or resolutions, and no standard set of conditions. Staff reports are difficult to prepare because staff does not know what information to include and when to include it. Lack of standardization also makes it difficult for Commissioners to review reports and know where to find the information. The lack of standard conditions means either conditions that should apply are omitted or conversely conditions that should not be attached are actually approved in error.

**126. Recommendation:** Standard conditions of approval and standard report formats should be developed.

**Time Tracking**

The Planning Department initiated a cost recovery program for Planning projects. A time keeping software system known as "Timeslips" was installed so Planners could track their time spent on a project. But it appears that staff is not diligent in recording their time in the system. Often the administrative support staff will record the Planners time spent on a project. Planning staff themselves need to enter their time daily into the Timeslips system.

**127.** *Recommendation:* Planning staff needs to record their time daily in the Timeslips system.

# Appendix A

## Persons Interviewed

**Building Division, Planning and Building Services Department**

Angelita Almarinez, Permit Technician I  
Brenda McNeil, Permit Technician II  
Chris Castanchoa, Sr. Building Inspector  
Coy Charles, Code Compliance-Bldg. Inspector Supervisor  
David Myers, Sr. Building Inspector  
Eugene Lovelace, Sr. Building Inspector  
Fred Clement, Chief Building Official  
Gautum Manadhar, Plan Check Engineer  
Habte Asfaha, Plan Check Engineer  
Irma Perez, Permit Technician II  
Pat Carter, Permit Technician II

**City Attorney**

Mary Renfro, City Attorney

**City Clerk**

Diane Holmes, City Clerk

**City Council**

Thomas K. Butt, Councilman

**Community and Economic Development**

Steve Duran, Director  
Alan Wolken, Deputy Director of Redevelopment  
Thomas J. Mills, Economic Development Administrator

**Design Review Board**

Eileen Whitty, Chair

**Engineering Department**

Rich Davidson,

**Finance Department**

James Richman,  
Verretta Edward,

**Fire Department**

Don Perez



**GIS**

Roi Evron

**Human Resources Management Department**

Juan Phelps, Senior Personnel Analyst

**Information Technology**

Sue Hartman, Director

**Planning and Building Services Administration**

I Kuan Choi, Administrative Secretary

Leonie Stern, Supervising Office Assistant

Richard Mitchell, Director

Sabrina Key, Office Specialist

**Planning Commission**

Virginia Finlay, Chair

**Planning Division, Planning and Building Services Department**

David Barbary, Associate Planner

Hector Rojas, Assistant Planner

Janet Harbin, Principal Planner

Joe Light, Associate Planner

Lina Velasco, Associate Planner

Lori Reese-Brown, Principal Planner

Mimi Liem, Senior Planner

Ruby Benjamin, , Planning Technician II

Walter Oetzell, Planning Technician II

Tanya Boyce, Associate Planner

# Appendix B

# Employee Short Questionnaire

City of Richmond  
Operations and Service Levels Work Flow Study

EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Department Name \_\_\_\_\_

Division Name \_\_\_\_\_

- Note the word "organization" in the questionnaire will be described before you fill out the questionnaire.

In the boxes below, enter the appropriate number for each statement according to this guide.

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 - Strongly Disagree | 4 - Somewhat Agree |
| 2 - Somewhat Disagree | 5 - Strongly Agree |
| 3 - Neutral           | 6 - Not Applicable |

- 
1. This organization seeks to identify problems quickly. [ ]
  2. When problems are identified, this organization moves quickly to solve them. [ ]
  3. This organization has an effective process for listening to citizen or client concerns. [ ]
  4. The concern for employees in this organization is more than lip service. [ ]
  5. Good service is the rule rather than the exception in this organization. [ ]
  6. Managers in this organization encourage and advance new ideas from employees. [ ]
  7. We have a strong emphasis on training in this organization. [ ]
  8. Management in this organization discusses objectives, programs and results with employees regularly. [ ]
  9. There is free and open communication in this organization between all

- levels of employees about the work they are performing. [ ]
10. Employees in this organization treat citizens with respect. [ ]
11. This organization encourages practical risk-taking and supports positive effort. [ ]
12. This organization has a clear sense of what its programs are trying to accomplish. [ ]
13. We do our jobs very well in this organization. [ ]
14. We have an efficient records management and documentation system in our organization. [ ]
15. I am satisfied with the type of leadership I have been receiving from my supervisor in this organization.
16. I have enough time to do my work as it needs to be done. [ ]
17. I am kept abreast of changes that affect me. [ ]
18. There is good teamwork and communication between the different divisions or departments conducting development review, plan checking and inspection in the City. [ ]
19. I understand the development and permitting processes as related to our organization. [ ]
20. I am aware of standard turnaround times in our organization for plans and permits as communicated by my supervisor. [ ]
21. I am able to meet standard turnaround times for plans and permits as communicated by my supervisor. [ ]
22. The City has a coordinated development review and plan checking process. [ ]
23. Permit and development processes in the City are not unnecessarily complex nor burdensome on the applicant. [ ]
24. Permit and development review in the City is undertaken in a consistent manner. [ ]

- 25. Plans and permits are reviewed in the City in a timely manner. [ ]
- 26. It should be the policy of the City and its employees to assist any applicant in completing his/her application, see that it is complete as soon as possible, and process it without undue delay. [ ]
- 27. It should be the policy of the City to make the permit process as pleasant and expeditious as possible. [ ]
- 28. Field inspections in this organization are undertaken in a consistent manner. [ ]

Please briefly answer the following:

- 29. Please list any “pet peeves” or concerns about your job, division, department or the City.
- 30. Please provide at least one suggestion or recommendation for improvement related to your job, division, department or the City.

# Appendix C

## Employee Long Questionnaire

City of Richmond

Operations and Service Levels Work Flow Study

Employee Name \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_ Division \_\_\_\_\_

The following questionnaire is an important and essential part of the study being conducted by Zucker Systems. The study is aimed at improving effectiveness and efficiency for the City's permitting and development processes. Your ideas and thoughts are essential to the process. This questionnaire will supplement other work being undertaken by the consultants.

Please complete this questionnaire and return it in a sealed envelope to Zucker Systems, 1545 Hotel Circle South, Suite 300, San Diego, CA 92108-3415 no later than a week from today. Take your time in answering the questions and be as complete as possible. You are encouraged to include attachments or examples. If you wish, you may email your response to [paul@zuckersystems.com](mailto:paul@zuckersystems.com). You may obtain an email version from \_\_\_\_\_.

Your comments may be merged with others and included in our report; however, the consultants will not identify individuals in relation to specific comments. Your responses and comments will be held in confidence.

Thank you for your help.

Paul C. Zucker, President, Zucker Systems

- 
1. What do you see as the major **strengths** of the City's development and permitting processes – the things you do well?
  2. What do you see as the major **weaknesses** of the City's development and permitting processes and what can be done to eliminate these weaknesses?
  3. What important policies, services or programs are no longer pursued or have never been pursued that you feel should be added?

## Draft 12/5/06

4. Do you feel any of the City's ordinances, policies, plans, or procedures should be changed as related to your work? If so, list them and explain why.
5. Are there any programs, activities or jobs you would eliminate or reduce and why?
6. How would you describe the goals or mission of your Department/ Division?
7. What would help you perform your specific duties more effectively and efficiently?
8. What problems, if any, do you experience with Division or Department records or files and what should be done to eliminate these problems? (Please be specific.)
9. Are there any problems in providing good service to your customers? If so, please list them and give us recommendations to solve these problems.
10. Do you feel that the processing of development review and plan checking should be shortened, sped up or simplified? If so, what do you suggest?
11. What suggestions do you have for improving internal communication in your Department or Division?



## Draft 12/5/06

12. Do you have any difficulty in carrying out your functions due to problems between other departments or divisions? If so, please explain and provide suggestions on how to correct these problems.
13. Have you received sufficient training for your responsibilities? If not, please comment and indicate areas you would like more training.
14. What functions are you currently handling manually that you believe could or should be automated? (Please be specific.)
15. What functions that are currently computer-automated need improvement? List your suggested improvements.
16. What problems, if any, do you have with the telephone system and what would you suggest to correct the problems?
17. What problems, if any, do you have with the email system and what do you suggest to correct these problems?
18. Do you have all the equipment you need to properly do your job? If not, please list what you need.
19. Please provide comments concerning good or bad aspects of the City's organizational structure for the development and permitting processes. Provide any suggestions for improvement or changes.

## Draft 12/5/06

20. Do you use consultants or should consultants be used for any of the development processes or any of the related functions in your Department or Division?
21. If you use consultants for any of the development processes, what problems, if any, do you experience with these consultants and what would you recommend to correct this problem?
22. Please list the major tasks or work activity you undertake and provide a rough estimated percentage of your time for each task. The percentages should total 100%. If appropriate, relate your time to specific types of development review and plan checking processes.

**Task**

**Percent**

23. If you are short of time to do your work, what changes would you recommend to correct this problem?
24. Are the relations between your office and field staff working well? If not, what would you recommend to improve them?
25. What additional handouts to the public or changes to existing handouts to the public would be helpful?
26. What changes if any would you recommend for the City's website or e-government applications?

## Draft 12/5/06

27. What changes, if any, would you recommend in relation to the City's GIS program?
  
28. List any other topics you would like the consultants to consider, or other suggestions you have for your Division, Department or City. Take your time and be as expansive as possible.

Note: We will interview many, but possibly not all, staff. If you would like a confidential interview we will try to do so. Let us know by phone, email or in person. Also, feel free to call us at 1.800.870.6306 or email to [paul@zuckersystems.com](mailto:paul@zuckersystems.com) to discuss any concerns or provide recommendations. When calling, ask for Paul.

