

Operations and Service Levels
Work Flow Study for Planning and
Building Services Department
(Technical Appendix)
Richmond, California

By

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Appendix A

Employee Short Questionnaire

**Table 1
Building – Employee Questionnaire**

	Emp #1	Emp #2	Emp #3	Emp #4	Emp #5	Emp #6	Emp #7	Emp #8	Emp #9	Emp #10	Emp #11	Emp #12	Emp #13	Emp #14	Ave
#1	4	2	1	2	3	1	5	4	2	2	4	3	2	4	2.79
#2	2	2	1	1	5	1	2	2	1	1	4	4	2	2	2.14
#3	5	4	2	2	3	5	3	4	2	3	3	3	5	4	3.43
#4	4	4	1	4	3	4	1	3	4	1	3	2	2	4	2.86
#5	5	3	2	3	5	4	N/A	3	5	2	3	2	5	5	3.62
#6	4	5	1	1	2	2	3	5	2	1	4	2	2	4	2.71
#7	5	1	1	1	1	4	3	3	2	1	3	3	2	5	2.50
#8	4	5	1	1	1	N/A	3	4	1	1	2	2	2	4	2.38
#9	5	2	1	2	4	1	3	3	2	2	4	2	2	3	2.57
#10	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	1	4	3	5	3	5	5	4.00
#11	3	3	1	3	4	N/A	3	1	4	4	4	N/A	4	2	3.00
#12	5	4	2	3	3	N/A	4	4	2	2	4	3	5	5	3.54
#13	5	4	4	2	5	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4.14
#14	4	2	1	3	3	4	1	4	2	1	1	2	4	1	2.36
#15	4	5	1	3	3	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	3	3	2	N/A	4	3.20
#16	5	4	3	2	4	5	2	3	1	2	4	3	5	4	3.36
#17	5	4	1	4	4	5	3	N/A	2	3	4	3	5	5	3.69
#18	3	3	2	3	4	2	1	2	1	3	3	3	3	3	2.57
#19	4	2	4	4	3	5	5	N/A	4	3	3	2	3	5	3.62
#20	4	2	4	4	3	5	N/A	N/A	4	1	2	2	5	2	3.17
#21	5	N/A	4	3	4	4	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	5	3	5	3	4.00
#22	4	4	1	3	2	4	3	N/A	2	2	2	3	4	1	2.69
#23	2	2	1	2	4	5	2	N/A	2	1	2	3	4	4	2.62
#24	3	2	4	3	4	N/A	2	N/A	2	1	3	2	5	4	2.92
#25	3	2	1	1	4	2	2	4	2	1	1	1	4	2	2.14
#26	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	1	5	5	5	2	5	3	4.29
#27	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	3	5	5	4.57
#28	5	N/A	1	5	3	N/A	5	4	5	4	2	3	5	N/A	3.82
Ave	4.18	3.31	2.11	2.82	3.54	3.64	3.04	3.10	2.81	2.30	3.29	2.59	3.89	3.63	3.17

Question #29

Please list any “pet peeves” or concerns about your job, division, department or the City.

1. Better record keeping.
2. Procrastination, office organization, inability to consistently meet deadlines, not enough office support staff.
3. Need on-line permit processing.
4. Too much multi-tasking.
5. Never enough time to do job correctly.
6. Money.
7. My pet peeve is that some co-workers take advantage of others by not working counter hours in timely fashion (always late).
8. Lack of automation.
9. Consistent type of inspections.
10. Division of labor.

Question #31

Please provide at least one suggestion or recommendation for improvement related to your job, division, department or the City.

1. More techs.
2. A better computer system that will allow us to maintain better record-keeping and access to the public; an automated, workflow system.
3. Need professional leadership and consistency.
4. Eliminate some of the seven phone lines to this department.
5. Listen to staff when they complain about other staff not doing their job.
6. Supervisor at the counter.
7. Regular staff meetings with actual implementation of results.
8. More training for inspectors.
9. Work designations and accountability.

**Table 2
Management – Employee Questionnaire**

	Emp #1	Emp #2	Emp #3	Emp #4	Emp #5	Ave
#1	2	2	5	5	4	3.60
#2	4	2	4	4	4	3.60
#3	5	2	4	5	5	4.20
#4	5	4	4	4	4	4.20
#5	5	5	4	5	4	4.60
#6	4	2	5	5	5	4.20
#7	2	4	4	5	2	3.40
#8	2	2	4	4	5	3.40
#9	4	5	5	4	4	4.40
#10	4	5	5	5	5	4.80
#11	3	3	4	3	4	3.40
#12	2	2	5	4	3	3.20
#13	1	4	4	5	4	3.60
#14	1	1	4	4	1	2.20
#15	5	1	4	5	5	4.00
#16	2	1	5	4	1	2.60
#17	2	2	5	4	2	3.00
#18	1	4	4	5	3	3.40
#19	2	5	4	5	5	4.20
#20	1	5	4	5	3	3.60
#21	4	1	N/A	5	4	3.50
#22	2	4	4	4	4	3.60
#23	4	3	4	4	2	3.40
#24	2	N/A	4	4	3	3.25
#25	4	1	4	5	4	3.60
#26	5	5	5	5	5	5.00
#27	5	5	5	5	4	4.80
#28	2	4	5	5	4	4.00
Ave	3.04	3.11	4.37	4.54	3.68	3.74

Question #29

Please list any “pet peeves” or concerns about your job, division, department or the City.

1. There is a lack of standard procedures in Planning and then resistance to change among the staff members.
2. Coordination with Finance and Human Resources regarding personnel paperwork.
3. The need for a true permitting system, using best practices.
4. Inadequate software to support work activity (financial/time, etc.). Lots of staff absenteeism and perceived inefficiency.

Question #30

Please provide at least one suggestion or recommendation for improvement related to your job, division, department or the City.

1. More consistency in times people are at work or their whereabouts. Establish standard procedures for processing applications.
2. The seating arrangement of permit techs and plan check engineers should be improved. Over-the-counter plan checking be done by other than plan checking engineers.
3. Communication that is timely (new rules, procedures from other departments).
4. Purchase a permitting system.
5. Re-organize Planning and Building space to better reflect work flow.

**Table 3
Planning – Employee Questionnaire**

	Emp #1	Emp #2	Emp #3	Emp #4	Emp #5	Emp #6	Emp #7	Emp #8	Emp #9	Emp #10	Ave
#1	1	5	3	4	4	4	3	1	4	1	3.00
#2	1	5	3	4	4	2	2	2	4	1	2.80
#3	1	5	3	2	4	4	2	3	3	4	3.10
#4	4	5	3	1	2	1	3	3	3	2	2.70
#5	4	5	3	4	4	1	5	4	3	2	3.50
#6	5	5	3	1	3	4	3	4	2	4	3.40
#7	4	5	3	2	4	1	1	2	2	3	2.70
#8	4	5	3	1	4	1	1	4	4	3	3.00
#9	4	5	3	2	4	1	1	4	5	4	3.30
#10	5	5	3	5	4	3	2	4	4	4	3.90
#11	5	5	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	2.80
#12	4	5	3	3	4	1	2	2	4	2	3.00
#13	4	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	2.90
#14	2	2	3	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1.70
#15	4	5	3	2	3	1	N/A	3	N/A	1	2.75
#16	1	2	1	2	4	1	2	3	3	2	2.10
#17	2	4	3	5	4	1	2	4	5	1	3.10
#18	1	2	3	2	3	2	1	4	2	2	2.20
#19	2	4	3	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	4.10
#20	5	N/A	3	N/A	5	3	2	5	3	1	3.38
#21	5	N/A	3	N/A	5	5	5	2	4	4	4.13
#22	2	4	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	1	2.40
#23	1	4	3	3	1	2	1	3	2	1	2.10
#24	2	4	3	2	4	1	1	3	4	1	2.50
#25	2	4	3	3	3	1	3	2	2	1	2.40
#26	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	4.60
#27	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4.60
#28	1	N/A	3	3	N/A	1	N/A	1	3	1	1.86
Ave	3.07	4.36	2.93	2.88	3.59	2.18	2.46	3.00	3.33	2.36	3.00

Question #29

Please list any “pet peeves” or concerns about your job, division, department or the City.

1. Process seems to be invented on a day-to-day basis if zooming is silent on subject. Interpretations need to be written down.
2. Cost recovery system has to be reviewed.
3. Too much micro-management, delegation, lack of respectful, consistent management and inter-personal communication skills.
4. Leadership waffles (i.e., losses focus, makes uninformed decisions, bends to pressure). Lack of consistent review standards. Poor communication between management and staff particularly on vague policy issues. Management provides poor direction and focus to staff. Unclear or impossible-to-complete tasks are assigned with no basis or standard for completions.
5. Design review board onerous, lack of communication with other departments.

6. Everyone involved; no one accountable. “Great Ideas” make pointless busy work. Goals and policies are unclear, muddled and arbitrary.
7. On occasion “good planning” runs contrary to the desires of developers – in those cases the desires of developers are held in higher regard than the long-term well being of the city I believe the Planning and Building Services Department should facilitate “appropriate” development – instead of just shallowing whatever developers bring to us with the idea that we are beggars who can’t be choosers and something is better than nothing. When planners point out flaws in proposed developments we are seen as “obstacles” instead of stewards of the long term viability of our city.

Question #31

Please provide at least one suggestion or recommendation for improvement related to your job, division, department or the City.

1. We review almost anything a homeowner proposes as a prospect and take it to public hearing. More projects should be processed administratively and staff should be supported by developing standard residential design guidelines to ensure staff can provide the same level of review on all projects.
2. Better communication between departments. Better record keeping systems.
3. Better air quality in the building.
4. Conduct meetings with all applicable departments and the applicant and architect, etc. at the very beginning of the process for information gathering and consensus of the objectives, plans, programs (whatever is applicable). Change from top-down management to open communication, sharing of ideas and tasks between all divisions/departments so that real time frames for projects are projected.
5. Revise the zoning ordinance.
6. Make people accountable, including management.
7. Revise design review ordinance to give staff greater discretion in approving certain projects.
8. Track counter visits and calls. Reduce clutter and junk. Document policies and interpretations. Use standard use types when completing zoning compliance forms. Do not collect information if it cannot be verified or is not used (esp. zoning compliance information). Simplify application forms by removing information that a planner can look up. General plan, zoning, APN, etc. Use technicians to accept applications by appointment. Create simple checklists for basic application material requirements for common applications. Eliminate unnecessary and redundant forms. Put staff contact information (direct lines, names, etc.) on website. Catalog records and practice good records management. So many more...
9. We need a clear vision, if you will, a solid plan – describing the preferred direction of growth – then stick with it. Don’t just change the plan and all the rules

to accommodate every yahoo who comes through town with a bad idea and a suitcase full of cash.

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 B

Customer Survey Comments

Richmond Planning Division Survey Customer Comments

Please add any comments or suggestions you may have that will improve our process or customer service. Please give us at least one idea.

Positive Comments

1. The staff was very patient and helpful to me. They took the time to guide me through each step of the process; I couldn't be more pleased than I am.
2. I think the overall process is just fine.

Building Division

1. Used infill program to build houses. There were no choices in plan design. Also there were many errors on the plans. Overly expensive construction costs.
2. Planning Department was fine. Are you going to do this process for the Building Department? Those are the guys who are arbitrary and potentially corrupt.
3. Still in review. Less copies of plans required.
4. Building Department – Plan check process not timely. Handouts and process not clear. Fees were not accurate. Did not return calls. Needed council and City Manager intervention. Engineering – Worked with us. Appear understaffed. No complaints. Fair and honest.
5. Process takes too long (eight weeks max). I give the Planning Department a B. I give the Building Department an F. Bad inspectors and plan check is now six months out.
6. From the original submission of plans for plan check is 13 weeks. If we did not call, about eight weeks into process, they would still be sitting on someone's desk. Planning staff helpful, can't say the same for building.
7. I was told plan checking would be eight to twelve weeks for a 256 sq. foot garage addition. I had to call a city councilman to get process expedited. Some Building Department staff were rude and very hard to reach by phone; no one knew that they were all in "class." Building inspector had concerns regarding electrical panel but did not discuss with contractor. Returned later with head inspector and had panel replaced after all dry wall work was complete. Delayed project! Also, during final inspection asked for an additional smoke detector in addition to detectors in all bedrooms. Another delay due to this to get final approval.
8. Inconsistency in manner is obvious. Unreasonable delays in response. Reviews are tremendously long. Some staff members are very courteous while some others are very non-professional. Especially plan checker _____ is my case. He did his

checking in 20 minutes in the last hour, after four months of our waiting and bugging all the way to the city manager. It's a nightmare for me to get approval from Richmond for a relatively easy/simple building permit. Compared with neighboring cities, Richmond's Planning Department really needs an overhaul to be a functional body to taxpayers.

9. I have no way of knowing but the review time for my small project – conversion from a garage to a bedroom and a half bath – seemed to take a long time. Maybe all projects just get in line. Maybe a fast track could take the small projects.
10. The inspectors need to be more consistent and take less time returning the plans.
11. The first round comments were fair but the second was too general and needed a more precise and clearer explanation. Approval took the longest out of over a hundred permit applications I've done in many cities for 20 years periods.

Communication

1. I am an appraiser and the city staff is helpful. However, they are hard to get, especially those with seniority. My frustrations are slow response and the inability of planners to provide their opinion. I like this city and will continue to work with them. People are friendly. Last concern – why not open the doors at 8:30am?
2. Better telephone service – have personnel return calls.
3. Get rid of voice mail. Or make voice mail more understandable. Have someone answer the telephone that knows the city departments, what they do and what the telephone number is.
4. Direct staff to answer phone calls. If truly not available, direct staff to promptly return phone calls when messages are left. Direct staff that they are not permitted to impose conditions based on regulations or statutes that have not been adopted by the City.
5. People coming in for the first time are very confused as to where to start. They don't know about the sign-in sheets. There are no signs or arrows directing folks where to go or what to do.
6. Getting in touch with officials at higher than lower staff levels is nearly impossible. For major projects, this can be unacceptable.

Negative Comments

1. The process was an example of the epitome of inefficiency. It's unfathomable that a municipal department could operate in the manner that the City of Richmond's Planning Department does. Just another thing to make me embarrassed to claim residency in this city.
2. Respect the client's time and efforts. One of the clerks literally laughed at my husband's failing to understand the process of how many copies and type of copies

- they needed submitted. The engineer who reviewed our plans verbally instructed my husband as to the next step, when he took the next step (incorrectly), he was ridiculed. It should all be done in writing to avoid this in the future.
3. The planners are like scared rabbits. Afraid to help work out problems. The politics are unbelievable. The counsel is not very knowledgeable. A very scary city to work and get things done.
 4. I have been through the development process 25 to 30 times in the last 20 years in Richmond. Some staff members are good, some are very poor. Richmond and staff are not consistently fair especially when they feel there are political issues (their opinion). I am usually more knowledgeable than staff – especially the poor staff members. So advice can be wrong, incomplete or poor, staff-member dependent. Attitudes at the counter run the same range. I was asked to participate in focus group but was away on vacation.
 5. Initially at my first inquiry about the approval process, city staff directed me to the website and its codes. I looked them over once to find out later they were out of date. When I tried to discuss with city staff our project – construction of a second unit – I was told (quite prematurely) that I must first submit plans. When I submitted plans, issues were raised which could have been addressed earlier. Outrageous recommendations, such as an underground parking garage, were made. Staff opposed the permit. Design review seemed sympathetic but reluctant to overrule department's negative findings. Upon submission to Planning Commission we received a permit and have constructed a beautiful unit for my son. Bottom line – I did not feel that the Planning Department's staff was helpful or supportive. From the get-go, it appeared to be an adversarial relationship.
 6. Planning Commission discussion and procedures during the hearing were confusing – it was not clear to us in audience whose project was being discussed, what was going on and specifically what was being voted on as modified by conditions attached to motion.
 7. _____ should not be there. Obnoxious, imposing on applicants, on staff and on his colleagues on board. Repeatedly states how easily he maneuvered the pliable applicants. He frequently abstains from votes, yet he makes motions. He is a disaster and worse, two or three other members try to appease him by hearing more unreasonable and useless demands on applicants. Please share these comments with city council. He is a disgrace to Richmond.
 8. This project consisted of adding a second floor to an existing house. I visited the planning counter in December to find out what the process would be. I was not informed that the project would require design review. If I had known, I would have applied to planning months sooner. The design review process was extremely slow due to the fact that meeting agendas are filled months in advance. During the hearing the board spent more than an hour scrutinizing window placement, which I thought was out of control in view of the size of the project. They also spent time

off topic discussing code compliance issues not related to design review. Other cities do not require design review for residential additions.

9. Focus on what is really important, i.e., planned growth, appropriate density, smart business development. Don't focus on the siding material for a backyard cottage – waste of everybody's time if a homeowner wants wood instead of stucco, let them have it, it's their house. I found a few enlightened people on planning staff. I found building department plan check to be a bit of a joke and trying to access plan checkers next to impossible. I found many people at the counter in both planning and building to be arrogant and extremely unhelpful.
10. They wanted six weeks to look at the plan and only wanted the plan as complete and not in stages. Only when I raised a fuss and requested a supervisor did I get any help. Also, the inspectors refused to sign off on electricity, plumbing, etc. until after it was painted and landscaped, delaying it another two to three months costing me another three to five thousand dollars. No leeway was given for me for going green with 50% to 75% building materials being recycled construction debris being recycled as well as not being sent to a landfill.
11. _____ was especially helpful, extremely professional and courteous to us at all times. Based on our experience with her, we give the Planning Department a B+. The only negative experience we encountered was with our first point of contact when we arrived for appointments with _____. We presumed that this first point of contact was the receptionist or a lower-level employee. She was surly, discourteous and would not let _____ know that we had arrived for appointments. We had to call _____ on our cell phone to apprise her of our presence. This state of affairs needs to be fixed.
12. I have been trying to purchase a large commercial parcel in Richmond for the past year. I have never encountered such unprofessionalism in any city I have ever worked with. The senior staff never returned one phone call that I made to them. Ridiculous!!! I've had to come in to make an appointment for another day on more than one occasion. This office needs to start over! With a new commitment to acting in a professional manner.
13. I was told that though the regulations permitted what I wanted, the regulations were wrong. The requirements should be given to the applicant up front. So that attempts can be made to meet them prior to submitting plans, which are wrong through ignorance. It should not be necessary to hire an architect for simple remodeling projects. Yet it is almost impossible to get something approved without professional plans. This Planning Department is unnecessarily aggressive and personal in dealing with property owners. They put more energy into complaints than into helping property owners move through their process smoothly.
14. My plans/application took about three to four months to approve. Never got an answer.

15. Our plans for a second living unit were submitted to the city in November 2005. They were ultimately approved in May 2006. This is an unreasonable amount of time to wait for approval, even if corrections needed to be made. When we contacted the city for status we were informed that the plans had not been reviewed because city staff had been on vacation and/or out of the office. We believe that arrangements should have been made for other staff to review plans so that a significant delay should never have occurred.

Recommendations

1. Add to zoning requirements a step-down or sloped height criteria for hillside homes (see diagram below). Change to minimize structures impact on natural topography or reduce encroachment on views to neighboring lots. Initial consult with plan reviewer (not front desk person) for first time folks submitting a set for permit to understand all the documents that will be needed and get over copies. Process (preferably online) to get real data of where one's permit is in the process and contact information for who to get information from. During our permit process, we got voicemail every time we called, with call return time of one to two weeks and sometimes (at least three) we got voicemail boxes that were full. Lastly it took one month to get a face-to-face meeting to resolved minor comments. Perhaps another two front desk triage/filers are needed to handle the volume of work and calls. I would vote for a local tax increase to pay for such vital individuals.
2. I will preface my recommendation by acknowledging that I work for the SFBRWQCB. I would like to suggest that the Planning or Building departments provide information on construction management practices (BMPs) to ensure that water quality is protected. As an example – all marine municipalities attached a stormwater CMP plan sheet to all approvals requiring that those BMPs be implemented.
3. There should be a drinking fountain available at the waiting area because some people wait for a long time before being entertained.
4. On first visit to site of Richmond yacht club, inspector couldn't find it. City should provide better maps to its workforce.
5. When assigned staff is unavailable for extended periods (one week or more) other staff should be able to respond to questions on individual projects.
6. The phone system is a nightmare! Without knowing what division of planning the planner is in, it can be incredibly cumbersome. The phone system, if you elect not to have a receptionist, should be arranged by planners' last names, not by "current" or "advance" planning divisions. Staff extensions should also be posted on the website. I would recommend also to place as much material related to projects on the planning website.

7. Why can't we reuse plans which were already previously submitted, approved, built and sold? We don't have to repay the fees but this greatly speeds up the process.

Newly Added

1. Overall, being a first timer, I found the "city" was very helpful. All delays were basically on my side. Thank you.
2. Improve access to planners – can take one to two weeks to get a return call. Planning/design review/environmental review guidance documents are sometimes contradictory. Also, unclear and lack the details necessary to allow applicants to fully understand the process. Need better process flow diagrams to communicate process. Documents/instructions are mostly geared toward residential projects. Need better process/documentation for commercial and/or industrial projects. Website is helpful, but would be improved by providing forms that can be downloaded and completed in electronic format.

Table 4
Richmond Building Permits Survey
Customer Comments

How many days do you feel is reasonable for the City to take reviewing your permit application before they respond to you?

7-14	30	3-5	7	5
30	5	2	14	30
30	14	2	5	7
3	15	2	30	5
1	14	5 minutes	5	20
10	30	14	5	1
10	15	1	15-30	2
5	5	2	5	

Please add any comments or suggestions you may have that will improve our process or customer service. Please give us at least one idea.

Complaint

1. Idea – they should implement a computerized call or phone in system for inspection request. Complaint – get rid of the obvious dead weight at the permit counter. _____ who always seems over worked, but walks around wasting time. _____ who should have been fired five years ago, who is totally useless. I believe that _____ should answer to the apparent inabilities of his staff. Without a good leader who doesn't seem to care how can there be a good staff?
2. The plan checking used to be fair and competent. Plan checkers concentrated on the most important issues in life, safety in structural engineering. Now the plan checking is trivial, not practical, unfair and overly done. _____ is the worst plan checker I have had in over 30 years working in the bay area.
3. _____ has been one of the rudest and most impatient persons that I have worked with at any city office.
4. Requirements made by the city on the building I felt were overkill. It was only a car garage not a department store. I had to purchase big beams to support the frame. The backside of roofing had to be sheared off because it was two feet from fence. That was not caught on review. This caused additional work and expense.
5. I was promised blueprints to be mailed on three occasions. I paid for them but they were never sent. I was also promised follow-up calls but never received them. I

- got a permit to have four windows installed into my house. I received no help on a few specific issues to get the job finished. I am afraid to have inspectors come to see the progress not knowing if I am doing the work correctly or not.
6. Opening and closing times are not consistent with regular customer business hours. Sometimes a sign is put up for example today closed at 3:15pm. It's an out of the way trip to end up at closed doors or closed desks.
 7. The last permit we applied for took six months for a simple swimming pool on a level lot. The client passed away before we could start construction. Contra Costa County takes 20 minutes to get a permit and the longest time we wait is a Brentwood and Pittsburg which takes about three weeks maximum. At this time, my sales staff refuses to go to Richmond because they feel the customer (homeowner) will lose patience and cancel their contract due to the time it takes to get a permit.
 8. Some of the permit technicians have been at the counter too long and they feel they can say and do anything they want without consequences. Building – I witnessed a verbal argument between permit techs and plan checker (engineer) at the front counter. She asked him to stay out of her business, and only come when we call for you. This disrupted the entire waiting area. Planning – don't always go by their sign-up sheet. There was an incident when I was clearly the next person on the list. The plan checker saw a pretty girl who was sitting at the counter and proceeded to help her instead of going by the list. I called him on this, and the service and information he gave me after that was vague. When I got back to my office I found that the information was not correct. So I had to make another visit.
 9. My last two building permits were issued after 19 and 20 weeks of review. After six weeks, the city staff attempted to send the initial response via fax to my cell phone. The written response was received after eight weeks. Only one minor change was required of one building but the reviewing engineer created a list of potential code issues for me to prove otherwise – a huge waste of time and money. Inspectors created problems that did not exist and in conflict with approved plans.
 10. Our plan checker was retired and just filling in. Very poor experience. Too many changes in staff.

Inspections

1. Twenty-four hour inspections, 48 hours at most, offer special inspections or emergency inspections for a fee.
2. Hire more building inspectors.
3. Takes two to three times longer to obtain a permit in Richmond. Also to obtain an inspection we are not always given the next day. Always get next day inspections in every other town. Must be short on staff.

4. Same UBC book, different interpretations. Two inspectors – two opinions. One inspector has negative outlook, almost angry with homeowner repair work.
5. I think that an inspector should come out to a site to conduct any type of inspections and that they should be required to provide the code violations they observe. In addition to letting us know the violations right then and there, the inspector should give an explanation of the code in violation and the reason for the violation instead of just writing it off. I think the inspection process as a whole would be more efficient if all inspectors were consistent and had better communication with the builder. The issue that concerns me the most is that inspectors are not conscious of the time it takes to rectify things. I lose time on the little things that inspectors would call me on, that could be corrected in 10 minutes on the same day but the inspector would not come back and instructed me to call back for a re-inspection. I have been delayed over a month due to one inspector. In my opinion inspectors like these do not need to hold positions with the city of Richmond. We pay his salary and he is slowing down the progress of our jobs. I have addressed this issue to _____ and still no change. Overall, I think that inspectors need to keep in mind the time it takes to fix a problem and not waste time; all I want is for things to run smoothly.
6. Inspector failed to advise us electrical panel over-sees to be replaced until request after structural requiring extra work. Inspector declined to inspect smoke detectors until final inspection then requested we add more causing us and your inspector additional trip to job.
7. When scheduling inspections it's difficult for roofing contractors to have to wait certain days for inspectors. We sometimes do not know we are going to be on a job because of the weather, and once we start, we work right on through to finish which may take two to three days. So say starting on Monday and needing an inspection on Tuesday, but you say you cannot get out there till Thursday for inspection. I cannot just sit around waiting two days for inspection and cannot just go start another project and have open jobs strung out across the city. Most cases, the inspection department has worked this out with me and getting me taken care of.
8. The process was good, but field inspection was horrid – we were failed and not properly inspected just because the inspector was in a bad mood, happened several times. Held up our construction.
9. Inspectors did not return calls. Our permits are over the counter so do not apply to days. Inspectors are not available for taking calls in the morning and do not return calls left on their machines. Inspectors need to be made available by phone to give explanations and approximate time windows for their inspection times, less than a four-hour window time. There is no way to access the inspectors by phone, all other cities have a way to contact the inspectors to give clarifications, get better time windows after they get their inspections schedules and to answer questions.

10. Field inspectors should be more knowledgeable regarding the permit process. It should not be any discrepancies between the information give to the public by inspectors out in the field and the city of Richmond's' supervisors.
11. Inspector should sign off corrective work once ok'd. So next inspector do not need to re-check the same work over and over again. Inspector should provide their business card on their first visit on any inspection. In some jurisdictions, they will attach a supplement on your permit on what the code is, like if your permit involves windows, the supplement will specify window height, egress requirements, if it should be tempered, etc. If your permit has crawl space; it will specify drawing height requirements. If permit involves stairs, landing handrail, railings, the supplement will specify what needs to be done to meet code. Although it is the responsibility of the permit holder to meet code, it will solve a lot of time for your inspector and the builder by reducing mistakes and corrective work if this kind of supplement and provided specifications with the ever changing code.
12. I had a hard time reaching the same person at the office (over the phone) to ask questions. It would be nice if there was a designated time that all or each inspector was in the office and available to answer questions either over the phone or in person.

Planning

1. Planning takes too long to process.
2. Had a lot of headaches about a parking pad permit, but finally it was worked out. When Atchison Village Board of Directors tried to get specs on projects for units at AVMHO, different members of city planners seem to give different answers. Board found such a result concerning fences.

Positive Comment

1. I am satisfied with the city staff.
2. Give ____ a big raise as she is the best counter person I have ever experienced. JRCI has pulled over 1,250 permits in the past three years alone.
3. All my permits have been same day.
4. First of all I want to apologize for not being able to remember the names of all the field inspectors and city staff that helped me during this project. I want to thank you and all your field inspectors and office staffs that I have the pleasure to deal with in person and over the phone. You all are very helpful, patience, and informative. Overall, I would say my experience with the City of Richmond Building, Engineering and Planning Department personnel in this project are of a pleasant one.

5. It's hard for me to give any ideas or suggestions because I had a great experience remodeling my new home, going through the City of Richmond. They were very helpful and I never once had any problems.

Recommendations

1. Initial approval seemed unreasonably slow. Evaluate setting a standard, publishing it and working to it.
2. Signs don't direct you to the proper area. If you are new, you have to ask where to go. The "sign-in" sheet is not easy to see. It should be elevated from the counter area. Maybe a pedestal in the middle of the area.
3. We do water heater change outs only – over the counter type. Get rid of multiple page forms on over the counter. Change to fax and email or go only.
4. All nearby cities accept applications by fax. Richmond makes you come down in person to get a permit. It also seems more expensive than other cities too. The staff is very nice though and does a good job.
5. Permit department should work through the lunch hours. Rotate personnel to cover the times. Many people like to come and apply for permits around the lunch hour times between 11:30am to 1:00pm. Next time you want people to participate in a survey, provide a self-stamped envelope.

Newly Added

1. Your department is as good as any we dealt with. The inspectors are fair and courteous.
2. Richmond is the only city that I dealt with that takes three days for an inspector to come out after scheduling. Most cities are next day.
3. Plan check should be consistent with field inspections.
4. When we call with a question for an inspector, we need to know when we will be responded to. In one circumstance, we called for seven days and finally had to go ahead. Fortunately it was ok. But not comforting.
5. The only issue with the permit/inspection process has to do with inspection turnaround. Most cities have 24-hours or next day inspection. When reroofing it is difficult to plan a job to set up inspections three to five days in advance. There are too many variables that could cause you to miss the first inspection. Then to have to reschedule more than one day out causes great delays with that project and the others on schedule around it.
6. Although I obtained a permit – I did not construct the room I planned. Just one suggestion – for first timers like myself, signage in the Building/Planning areas could be clearer. My first time there I didn't know to sign in and didn't know which way to go. Thanks for the survey.

7. They do a great job!
8. Your system works very well, but plan check seems to be short handed.
9. The Planning Department is simply a tax (residential) design review on residential where there is neighborhood approval is enough. The Building Department lost my last set of plans for three months. More building inspectors and plan checkers (in building). An incentive bonus system for plan turnaround time. Limit planning to commercial and multi-family. An incentive bonus system for inspectors to arrive on time at jobsite.
10. The approval process should be seamless, moving from planning to building without losing any time. Same application number and with staff ensuring that all steps are happening simultaneously (e.g. fire, schools, etc.). Planning Commission review for subdivision should precede design review. Saves time and money of developer knows in advance whether or not site plan can be approved.
11. The inspectors were great, respectful, informative and fair. Because I am a homeowner who did most of the work myself, drawing up good plans was especially difficult. Although the plan checker was patient enough to assist me in editing the plans – I thought it would be helpful if the city had a “how to” guide to “plan drawing” for those who don’t hire an architect. I had to come back several times to get the plans right. Time and money could be saved on both sides if good instructions on plan drawing were developed. The receptionist at the front desk were helpful, but had a less than a patient and friendly attitude towards some questions. (It seems like they preferred to deal with professional contractors who didn’t have too many “stupid” questions to ask.)
12. Richmond is one of the few cities in or around the bay area that make it very hard for a roofing contractor to complete a reroofing project in a timely manner. First of all, when we call in for an inspection, we can not get one for the next day like most cities. We are told that they are very busy and they are usually two or four business days out. That means that we have to stop work for a day or two to wait for our inspection. If this inspection were the final, this wouldn’t be a problem, but since it is the in-progress; tear off, or roof nail, that makes it impossible to finish the roof in the two to three day time frame that we promised the homeowner. I guess that we could base the schedule of our company doing business in Richmond around the Building Department’s availability, but that would be unfair to the roofing contractor. We are subject to the elements and most cities only require a 24-hour notice for inspection. We have called to voice our concerns, but was told that we better not cover the roof before the inspection because we might have to remove the roof again, costing us thousands of dollars.

Appendix C

Employee Perceptions

Two confidential questionnaires were completed by many of the employees in the Planning and Building Department.

A short, closed-ended questionnaire (shown in Appendix A) was completed at a staff meeting by twenty nine employees and collected by the consultants. The raw scores and tallies of this survey are also shown in Appendix A.

A longer, eight page questionnaire was completed by 11 employees and mailed or emailed to the consultants in San Diego to assure confidentiality. Information obtained from these questionnaires was essential to our analysis. The number of questionnaires returned is shown in Table 13. In most of our studies, only half of the employees that complete the short questionnaire take the time to complete the long questionnaire.

Table 5
Number of Employees Responding to Questionnaires

Function	Number of Short Questionnaires	Average Response to Short Questionnaire	Number of Responses With Averages Under 3.0	Number of Long Questionnaires
Building Division	14	3.17	13	5
Management	5	3.74	2	1
Planning Division	10	3	14	5

The short questionnaire also asked employees to list pet peeves and give suggestions for improvements. These comments were used as part of our analysis for this report and are shown in Appendix B.

The short, closed-ended questionnaire consisted of a series of statements to be rated by the respondents. Responses were tallied and averaged and the raw scores are displayed in Appendix B. The statements were designed to elicit the mood and feelings of each employee about overall Division or Department excellence. For each of the 28 statements, the employee was asked to respond as follows:

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

Generally, the higher the rating (i.e., 4's and 5's) the better the employee perceives the subject area and the more excellent the Division or Department.

We've conducted this survey in many Planning and Building Departments and Divisions. Generally, a score below 3.0 is an indication of issues that need to be addressed. We like to see average scores in the high 3's and 4's. We believe that the scores give a reasonably accurate assessment of the employee's view of their Division

or department. The five managers scored the highest with an average score of 3.74. It is common the managers believe their organization is performing better than do the employees. The average score for the Building Division was 3.17 and the average for the Planning Division was 3.0.

Questions with average scores below 3.0 are discussed below.

Records Management

Question 14 concerning records management was scored below 3.0 by all functions of Building, Management and Planning. Records management is a key issue that was discussed in other sections of this report.

Low Responses for Both Building and Planning

Building and Planning had low responses for the following seven questions. The scores shown are for Building, followed by Planning.

Management Issues

Questions 2, 4, 7 and 18 are issues that relate directly to management and need to be resolved by management.

- Question 2, ‘When problems are identified, this organization moves quickly to solve them.’ Scored 2.14, 2.80.
- Question 4, ‘The concern for employees in this organization is more than lip service.’ Scored 2.86, 2.70.
- Question 7, ‘We have a strong emphasis on training in this organization.’ Scored 2.50, 2.70.
- Question 18, ‘There is good teamwork and communication between the different divisions or departments conducting development review, plan checking and inspection in the City.’ Scored 2.57, 2.20.

- 1. Recommendation: The Planning Director and Division Managers should carefully review Question 2, 7 and 18 and develop a program to address various employee concerns.**

Development Review and Plan Checking Processes

Questions 22, 23, 24 and 25 address various development review and plan checking processes. These issues are the focus of this report. Employees recognizing that these are problems can be helpful as the problems are addressed.

- Question 23, ‘Permit and development processes in the City are neither unnecessarily complex nor burdensome on the applicant.’ Scored 2.62, 2.10.
- Question 22, ‘The City has a coordinated development review and plan checking process.’ Scored 2.69, 2.40.

- Question 25, “Plans and permits are reviewed in the City in a timely manner.” Scored 2.14, 2.40.
- Question 24, “Permit and development review in the City is undertaken in a consistent manner.” Scored 2.92, 2.50.

Building Division – Low Responses

The Building Division scored below 3.0 on 13 of the 28 questions or 46%. The lowest scores that only related to Building included four questions. All four questions address issues that need to be addressed by Division management. Seven or eight of the 14 employees scored these question low. Five employees scored low on all four questions.

- Question 8, “Management in this organization discusses objectives, programs and results with employees regularly.” Scored 2.38.
- Question 9, “There is free and open communication in this organization between all levels of employees about the work they are performing.” Scored 2.57.
- Question 6, “Managers in this organization encourage and advance new ideas from employees.” Scored 2.71.
- Question 1, “This organization seeks to identify problems quickly.” Scored 2.79.

- 2. Recommendation: Management of the Building Division should review the four management related questions where employees have concerns. Consideration should be given to conducting an employee retreat on these topics using an outside facilitator.**

Planning Division – Low Responses

The Planning Division scored below 3.0 on 14 of the 28 questions or 50%. The lowest scores that only related to Planning included five questions.

Management Issues

Four of the questions relate directly to management issues as follows:

- Question 16, “I have enough time to do my work as it needs to be done.” Scored 2.10. This was scored at 1 or 2 by seven of the 10 employees.
- Question 15, “I am satisfied with the type of leadership I have been receiving from my supervisor in this organization.” Scored 2.75. This was scored at 1 or 2 by three of the 10 employees.

- Question 11, “This organization encourages practical risk-taking and supports positive effort.” Scored, 2.80. This was scored at 1 or 2 by five of the 10 employees.
- Question 13. “We do our jobs very well in this organization.” Scored 2.90. This was scored at 1 or 2 by three of the 10 employees.

3. Recommendation: Management of the Planning Division should review the four management related questions where employees have concerns. Consideration should be given to conducting an employee retreat on these topics using an outside facilitator.

Field Inspections

- Question 28, “Field inspections in this organization are undertaken in a consistent manner” Scored 1.86.

This question relates to how well planning conditions are being implemented during construction and was discussed elsewhere in this report.

Management Low Response

Managers responded below 3.0 to one question as follows:

- Question 16, “I have enough time to do my work as it needs to be done.” Scored 2.60.

Low responses to this question by managers can be troubling since it is the managers that need to spend increased time in developing strategies to change the organization. Three of the five managers scored wither 1 or 2 on this question and should look to increase their level of delegation.

4. Recommendation: The three managers who scored low on Question 16 should work to increase their level of delegation.

Appendix D

Customer Perceptions

In today's environment, governmental performance is measured by customer satisfaction. In order to determine Richmond's performance, we used several techniques consisting of interviews with the Mayor and City Council members, two customer focus groups, and a mail surveys to applicants.

This Appendix includes customer comments for improving the City's Community Development, Planning Division. The intent of this customer input was to elicit views and opinions on positive and negative aspects of activities and to seek ideas for change that will improve and enhance the Department and/or Division. However, as would be expected, the focus was on perceived problems.

In considering the results, the reader must bear in mind that unlike documents and statistics the views expressed by individuals are subjective and may reflect personal biases. Nonetheless, these views are at least as important as objective material because it is these people with their feelings and prejudices that work with or are often affected by City activities. A second important consideration is that in analyzing the material, it may not be as important to determine whether a particular response is "correct" as it is to simply accept a response or try to determine why customers feel the way they do. Tom Peters, the noted management consultant, correctly said that in relation to customer service, "Perception is everything." In other words, perception is reality to the person holding the perception.

It should be noted that the purpose of this Appendix is to report on the customer input so that the reader of the report can view the comments as customer perceptions without our editing. These comments are not the conclusions of the consultants. Using our methodology as described in Figure 1 and Section B of Chapter II of the report, the customer comments are taken as one form of input to be merged by input of others and our own judgment. Our specific response is in the form of the various recommendations included in the report.

Mayor and City Council

We met two City Council Members in individual confidential meetings in order to gain a perspective on the governmental direction for the City. Given the small number of interviews we decided not to include comments in this section but did review the comments as part of our overall research.

Focus Group – Applicants

Twelve people who had been applicants in the City's development and permitting process met on June 22, 2006 for two hours at the Harbor Master's Office on Marina Way South. The meeting was held in confidence and no staff members were present. The groups included an attorney, architects, builders, designers, and developers. Focus group comments are included below. Topics are arranged in alphabetical order.

Overview

In the last two or three years Richmond has gotten better, much more professional. The City ranks in the middle of other cities the focus group members work in – some better and some worse. The best is Santa Clara.

Building Plan Check

- The Building plan check takes for too long, in some cases months.
- One Plan Checker is too thorough, needs to look at the big picture.
- If you build the same house a second time, why do you need to have another design review?

Complete Applications

There are problems in obtaining a complete application, including:

- The Permit Streamlining Act 30 day timeline is often not met and staff say they need additional time.
- The application requirements are the same for a room addition as for a large project.
- Working drawings should not be required for the Design Review Board.

Suggestion: Guidelines should be prepared in relation to the complete application process.

Conditional Use Permits

People don't apply for Conditional Use Permits because it takes too long.

Design Review Board

Issues include:

- The Planning Commission has a group that meets with you before the Planning Commission meeting. This often leads to items being taken as consent on the agenda.

Suggestion: A pre-meeting process similar to that used by the Planning Commission should be used by the Design Review Board.

- The Planners are sending reports to the DRB without adequate internal Department review.
- The DRB handles too many small projects.

Suggestion: The square footage standard should be increased so that staff can process more projects administratively.

- Some DRB members do not understand the neighborhoods that should influence DRB decisions.

Neighborhood Councils

There was a substantial amount of discussion concerning the Neighborhood Councils. Issues included:

- Some Councils give you the feeling that they are elected bodies, but each Council varies as to its make up.
- Some feel that Councils delay the process.
- Each Planner seems to have a different opinion as to how the Councils work.
- Some Councils are not representative of their area.

Suggestion: Guidelines should be prepared as to how the process should work in relation to Neighborhood Councils.

Permitted Uses

There is confusion as to what are permitted uses. It is difficult to get an opinion on this from the Planning Director.

Planning Staff

Planning staff need the courage to make decisions and to make them faster.

Policy Documents

The General Plan, Specific Plans and the Zoning Ordinance are internally inconsistent and each addresses issues with almost the same level of detail. Staff is given great discretion but often does not exercise it.

Suggestion: The General Plan, Specific Plans and Zoning Ordinance should be revised.

Political Issues

Everything in Richmond tends to be political and issues include:

- Some staff members are not adequately knowledgeable
- The Planning and Building Services Department is not in touch with the elected officials

- The cities that work the best are those where the council has a clear vision, which is missing in Richmond.

Specific Plans

The Knox-Cutting Specific Plan is not a good plan and kills many projects.

Suggestion: Re-do the Knox-Cutting Specific Plan.

Focus Groups – Citizens

Nine citizens met on June 22, 2006 for two hours at the Harbor Master's Office on Marina Way South. The meeting was held in confidence and no staff members were present. Focus group comments are included below. Topics are arranged in alphabetical order.

Citizens

- Richmond staff appear to have an agenda.
- Citizens do not get heard.
- Citizen applicants need more handholding from staff.
- There needs to be a better way of informing the community as to what is coming up.

Customer Service

Customer service issues include:

- When you walk into the office you just sort of hang out. There needs to be a receptionist.
- Most staff does not answer their phones or return phone calls and the voice mail boxes are often full. The exception is the Administrative Secretary in the Planning Division.

Enforcement

- Enforcement of project specific conditions is not good.
- Often the files can't be found.
- The Planning and Building Services Department should not be allowed to waive a City Council condition without notice.
- Citizens will complain to the Planning Director, but cannot get a response.

Field Review

Both the staff and Planning Commissioners should look at proposed projects in the field.

General Plan

Many of the focus group members have been involved and are interested in the General Plan effort. Issues include:

- The Plan Van is good in some areas but not others – it has no bell and no ice cream!
- There is a concern that the consultant will say they made the effort irrespective of the community's response.
- The General Plan Advisory Committee is not meeting again until September which is too far in the future.
- Today was the deadline to comment on Issues and Opportunities paper but most didn't know this was the case.
- There is information on the website but citizens need to be spoon fed on how it works.
- In summary, many feel the General Plan outreach is not working. The PR part is too large and is not effective.

Goals for Staff

Some feel that staff is told from the political level to help the applicant and make the project work. The Council says to be developer friendly.

The City Council can't decide if it wants business or housing. The main goal seems to be taxes.

Neighborhood Councils

The City tells the developers to talk to the Neighborhood Councils. A better approach would be for the City to send the application and plans to the Council who would then invite the applicant to their meeting.

Planning Commission and Design Review Board

There is no training for members but it is sorely needed.

Redevelopment

Redevelopment appears to have secret workers and you can't find out who are the staff members.

Rules and Procedures

The City has certain rules and procedures but they are often not followed and there is inadequate respect for the General Plan. For example:

- An RFP for a redevelopment project went out prior to the forming of the Project Area Committee.
- For the Knox Cutting Specific Plan there have been exemptions for housing and a special interpretation if a school is allowed.
- There have been issues surrounding a crematorium.
- Many small areas in Richmond have their own zoning.
- DRB conditions are often ignored or they simply disappear from the reports to the Planning Commission.

Suggestion: There need to be guidelines concerning the role of the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission.

Suggestion: The City should stick with the process and make it transparent.

Staff Reports and Documents

The staff reports are not available far enough in advance of the meetings. They should be available a week in advance and also posted on the website.

Customer Surveys

Two mail surveys were used in this study to obtain applicant customer input. One was sent to applicants for Planning permits, another for Building permits. It should be noted that some customers commented on Building permits in the Planning survey and visa versa. This is to be expected.

Planning Survey

A Planning survey was sent to 509 applicants for Planning approvals. Fifty two surveys were returned for a return rate of 10.2%. This is below our normal return rate of 15% to 25%.

The overall response to the surveys is shown in Figure 7. Questions 4 through 18 were designed so that checking a "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" category is a sign of a satisfied customer. A "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" is a sign of a dissatisfied customer. The percentages shown in the margins to the right indicate the percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question statement. The "Not Applicable" category was excluded from this calculation.

Normally, when negative responses of "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" exceed 15%, the responses indicate an area of possible concern. Less than 15% normally

indicates this category of question is satisfying the customers. Percentages higher than 15% but below 30% are areas that should be examined for possible customer service concerns. Negative percentages of 30% or higher indicate areas needing early attention since roughly one third or more of the customers have concerns about service.

Some believe that only customers who have problems will return a survey of this type. While it is likely that customers with problems may be more likely to return the surveys, our experience with this and dozens of similar surveys indicate that they still produce valid information. For example, we've worked in other communities where the negative responses seldom exceeded 15%.

It should also be noted that a survey of this type is not a scientific, statistically controlled sample. Nevertheless, when high numbers of respondents express concerns, they are indications of problems that need to be addressed.

The questionnaires also asked applicants to indicate suggestions and areas for improvement. 41 of the 52 respondents provided suggestions which we used as part of our analysis.

Planning Questions 15% or Less Negative

Six of the questions had responses below 15% negative. Planning staff was considered courteous (Question 11), and handouts were considered useful (Question 14). The Planning Commission and the Design Review Board also had negative responses below the 15% threshold.

Planning Questions 16% to 30% Negative

Four questions were in this range of negative responses.

- “Planning staff responsive and helpful”, 24% negative, Question 4.
- “Staff dealt in a positive manner providing options”, 25% negative, Question 5.
- “Application plan checking is complete and accurate”, 30% negative, Question 6.
- “The conditions of approval were reasonable and justified”, 28% negative, Question 12.

Planning Questions Exceeding 30% Negative

Five questions were in this range of negative responses. When negative responses exceed 30% they deserve early attention.

- “Application review turnaround time is acceptable”, 58% negative, Question 7.
- “Codes and policies are applied in a fair, consistent and practical manner”, 35% negative, Question 8.

- “Turnaround time was not any longer than with other cities or counties”, 47% negative, Question 9.
- “Richmond is fair, consistent and practical in application of regulations as other neighboring cities or counties”, 40% negative, Question 10.
- “Planning staff were easily accessible”, 42% negative, Question 13.

5. *Recommendation:* Planning staff should review the customer questionnaire and determine areas where they can be responsive to customer concerns.

Figure 1 Planning Survey Responses

1. Please check off the types of planning actions you have applied for through the City during the past 12 months.

<input type="checkbox"/> 14 Conditional Use Permit	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Subdivision or Lot Line A Department
<input type="checkbox"/> 30 Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Variance
<input type="checkbox"/> 6 Sign Review	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 Zoning Administrative Review
<input type="checkbox"/> 12 Other (list) _____	

2. Please indicate what the permit or approval was for.

<input type="checkbox"/> 10 New single family residence	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 New commercial or industrial building
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 New apartments or condominiums	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 Remodel or tenant improvement to commercial or industrial building
<input type="checkbox"/> 20 Remodel or addition to single family residence	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Sign
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Remodel or addition to apartments or condominiums	
<input type="checkbox"/> 9 Other (list) _____	

3. Please indicate how often you work with the City's planning review and approval process.

<input type="checkbox"/> 27 One time user of the planning review and approval process
<input type="checkbox"/> 25 Twice or more user of the planning review and approval process

Question	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Percentage
4. When making an application, I have generally found the City Planning staff to be responsive and helpful.	7	29	3	5	7	0	24%	
5. In general, the staff has dealt with me in a positive manner, providing options where they were available and attempting to help me through the process.	11	22	5	5	8	0	25%	
6. Application plan checking is complete and accurate. Additional problems did not surface later that should have been caught in the initial review.	4	23	5	7	7	4	30%	
7. Application review turnaround time is acceptable. I did not have to wait an excessive amount of time to get plans back or find out about problems that needed to be corrected.	4	11	4	10	16	7	58%	
8. Codes and policies are applied by staff in a fair, consistent and practical manner.	4	20	6	9	7	3	35%	
9. The turnaround time for review and approval or disapproval of my application was not any longer with Richmond than other cities or counties where I have filed applications.	6	8	6	5	13	13	47%	
10. Richmond is just as fair, consistent and practical in its application of regulations as other neighboring cities or counties.	4	14	8	8	9	9	40%	
11. Planning staff was courteous.	12	30	5	1	3	0	8%	
12. The conditions of approval applied to my project were reasonable and justified.	6	21	7	8	5	4	28%	

Building Survey

A Building survey was sent to 559 applicants for Building permits. Fifty-five surveys were returned for a return rate of 9.8%. This is below our normal return rate of 15 to 25% but still sufficient for analysis.

The overall response to the surveys is shown in Figure 8. Questions 3 through 20 were designed so that checking a “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” category is a sign of a satisfied customer. A “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” is a sign of a dissatisfied customer. The percentages shown in the margins to the right indicate the percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question statement. The “Not Applicable” category was excluded from this calculation.

Normally, when negative responses of “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” exceed 15%, the responses indicate an area of possible concern. Less than 15% normally indicates this category of question is satisfying the customers. Percentages higher than 15% but below 30% are areas that should be examined for possible customer service concerns. Negative percentages of 30% or higher indicate areas needing early attention since roughly one third or more of the customers have concerns about service.

Some believe that only customers who have problems will return a survey of this type. While it is likely that customers with problems may be more likely to return the surveys, our experience with this and dozens of similar surveys indicate that they still produce valid information. For example, we’ve worked in other communities where the negative responses seldom exceeded 15%.

It should also be noted that a survey of this type is not a scientific, statistically controlled sample. Nevertheless, when high numbers of respondents express concerns, they are indications of problems that need to be addressed.

The questionnaires also asked applicants to indicate suggestions and areas for improvement. 34 of the 55 respondents provided suggestions which we used as part of our analysis.

Building Questions 15% or Less Negative

Eight of the questions had 15% or less negative including:

- “Handouts were useful”, 10% negative, Question 5.
- “Submittal requests and forms clear and easy to use”, 12% negative, Question 6.
- “Staff was courteous”, 13% negative, Question 10.
- “It was easy to schedule inspections”, 15% negative, Question 14.
- “Inspectors were timely”, 8% negative, Question 15.
- “Inspectors were knowledgeable”, 15% negative, Question 16.

- “The process for obtaining Certificate of Occupancy was satisfactory”, 7% negative, Question 19.
- “Internal relations between Building and Fire worked well”, 9% negative, Question 20.

Building Questions 16% to 30% Negative

Nine of the questions had 16 to 30% negative responses.

- “City staff was responsive and helpful”, 16% negative, Question 3.
- “Staff dealt in a positive manner”, 20% negative, Question 2.
- “Plan checking was complete and accurate”, 27% negative, Question 7.
- “Richmond is as fair as neighboring cities”, 21% negative, Question 12.
- “Staff was thorough and clear in explaining problems”, 28% negative, Question 13.
- “Staff was easily accessible”, 28% negative, Question 17.
- “Inspectors rarely found errors that should have been caught during plan checking”, 28% negative, Question 18.
- “Internal relationships worked well between Building and Planning”, 21% negative, Question 20.

Building Questions Exceeding 30% Negative

- “Plan checking turnaround time was acceptable”, 38% negative, Question 8.
- “Turnaround time for review was not any longer than other cities”, 33% negative, Question 11.

- 6. *Recommendation:* Building staff should review the customer questionnaire and determine areas where they can be responsive to customer concerns.**

Figure 2 Building Survey Responses

<p>1. Please indicate what your permit or approval was for.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">New commercial structure</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">30</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Residential addition or alteration</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Commercial addition or alteration</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">8</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Heating, electrical, or mechanical</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">13</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Residential new construction</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">13</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Other (list) _____</td> </tr> </table>								2	New commercial structure	30	Residential addition or alteration	4	Commercial addition or alteration	8	Heating, electrical, or mechanical	13	Residential new construction	13	Other (list) _____
2	New commercial structure	30	Residential addition or alteration																
4	Commercial addition or alteration	8	Heating, electrical, or mechanical																
13	Residential new construction	13	Other (list) _____																
<p>2. Please indicate how often you have obtained a building permit from Richmond.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">11</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">One time user of an Richmond building permit</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">41</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Two or more time user of an Richmond building permit</td> </tr> </table>								11	One time user of an Richmond building permit	41	Two or more time user of an Richmond building permit								
11	One time user of an Richmond building permit																		
41	Two or more time user of an Richmond building permit																		
QUESTION	TOTAL	PERCENT	TOTAL	PERCENT	TOTAL	PERCENT	TOTAL												
3. When making an application for a building permit, I have generally found the City staff to be responsive and helpful.	15	28	3	7	2	1	16%												
4. In general, the City staff has dealt with me in a positive manner, providing options where they were available and attempting to help me through the building permit process.	18	21	4	6	5	1	20%												
5. I found the handouts for building permits supplied by the City to be useful and informative in explaining the requirements I must meet for the City.	11	26	9	3	2	3	10%												
6. I found the submittal requests and forms clear and easy to use for obtaining a building permit.	10	30	6	5	1	2	12%												
7. Building permit plan checking was complete and accurate. Additional problems did not surface later that should have been caught in the initial review.	10	20	5	4	9	6	27%												
8. Building permit plan checking turnaround time was acceptable. I did not have to wait an excessive amount of time to get plans back or find out about problems that needed to be corrected.	9	16	4	5	13	7	38%												
9. The codes for building permits and conditions of approval were applied by staff in a fair and practical manner.	10	27	6	4	6	1	19%												
10. City staff was courteous.	19	23	5	4	3	1	13%												
11. The turnaround time for review and approval or disapproval of my building permit was not any longer with Richmond than other cities where I have filed applications.	7	18	6	5	10	8	33%												
12. Richmond is just as fair and practical in its application of building permit regulations as other neighboring cities where I have filed applications.	8	16	13	4	6	7	21%												
13. When Richmond staff found problems during review of my application, they were thorough and clear in explaining what I had to do to correct those problems.	9	22	5	4	10	5	28%												
14. It was easy to schedule inspections for my project.	14	25	6	5	3	2	15%												

