Date: January 5, 2024

To: Lewis County Board of County Commissioners

From: Lee Napier, Director

RE: Process Improvement Team 2023 Report

The Process Improvement Team (Team) wanted to provide you with an updated overview of the ongoing efforts.

The Team was formed in 2016 for the purpose of examining how the staff of Community Development, Public Works, and Environmental Health Services conduct our routine business. Since inception, the primary objective of the Team has been to scrutinize and enhance the routine operations of Community Development, Public Works, and Environmental Health Services, herein referred to as either we or Team. Throughout our tenure, we have consistently met to identify areas for improvement, discuss best practices, and establish standard operating procedures. Our collective aim has been to streamline processes, increase efficiency, and elevate the overall experience for both internal and external stakeholders.

Upon the Team's formation, a 2016 Charter was developed and adopted with the assistance of Impact Washington as the project facilitator. While our commitment to refining practices has endured, there have been significant changes in the representation and leadership of the Team since 2016. Considering these changes, we recognized the importance of revisiting our mission. Consequently, the Team undertook the task of updating the charter to reaffirm our vision, purpose, and operational procedures. A copy of the updated 2023 Charter is attached for your reference.

One key deliverable outlined in the 2023 Charter is the annual Process Improvement Report, which is the central focus of today's briefing. This report highlights continuous and meaningful enhancements made to permitting and review processes. It is designed to showcase the progress achieved, including insights into ideas that were considered but ultimately abandoned, along with the associated roadblocks preventing implementation and slowing down permit review and internal communication.

The annual reporting serves as a testament to Lewis County's dedication to process improvement and holds the Team accountable for this commitment. The primary

audience for this report is the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and the wider public.

Currently, the Team is presenting and seeking input regarding the attached Process Improvement Report. The Team hopes that the BOCC, finds this type of report and presentation on their progress informative and inviting their valuable input.

If approved, the report will be subsequently uploaded to the Community Development webpage for public access.

Process Improvement Team Charter 2023

Introduction

The Process Improvement Team formed in 2016 to evaluate current processes, identify waste, and explore efficiencies. The founding members along with new team members wish to build upon that work by re-examining the purpose of our Process Improvement.

Vision

Process Improvement provides a forum/system to recognize and strengthen the practice, coordination and understanding between departments and divisions.

Purpose

To continually improve permitting, review and other processes to create efficiencies that add value and will reduce time from application submittal to review completion and permit issuance.

Agreement upon a system - Process Improvement - will lead to efficiencies to make the permitting process uniform, reduce time reviewing processes and ensure anyone interacting with the process can easily understand it.

Guiding Principles

1. Continue and promote open communication and coordination between departments and divisions.
2. Create consistency with the processes.
3. Focus on the functions that will affect the process the most.
4. Be open to new and creative ideas that are not necessarily the "norm".
5. Maintain a positive environment for everyone involved and celebrate accomplishments.

Membership

All Lewis County departments and divisions that play a role in the permitting and review processes, even if the role is small, are encouraged to participate in Process Improvement. Many staff will only participate ad-hoc when they have identified a potential improvement to bring before the core team. The core team members will include representatives from Community Development, Environmental Health and Public Works because those departments have a critical and frequent role in permitting and review processes.

Core Team Members		
Position	**Staff**	**Division**
Co-lead	Brad Clark	Permitting, Community Development
Co-lead	Megan Sathre	Administration, Community Development
Co-lead	Jennifer Cervantes	Administration, Community Development
Participant	Doyle Sanford	Building, Community Development
Participant	Karen Witherspoon	Current Planning, Community Development
Participant	Mindy Brooks	Long Range Planning, Community Development
Participant	Kirsten Wecker (alternate) John Abplanalp	Environmental Health
Participant	Tiffany Alexander	Public Works

What

Prior to enacting a change, no matter how small, to a permit or review process, staff should to bring forward the idea to the Process Improvement Team to make sure the change is vetted. Any staff can bring an idea forward to the Process Improvement Team, please see the "How" section for more information. No idea should be considered too out-of-the-box to bring forward for discussion. Often "crazy" ideas can result in the biggest and most impactful changes.

The following are examples of the types of improvements that can be brought to the Process Improvement Team:
- Water screen in 2018
- Electronic building plan review
- Master Site Review process added in July 2018
- Septic permit application tasks/review electronically in December 2020
- SEPA Adept routing January 2021
- Website and online application forms
- Building inspections online
- Road approach process

How

The Core Team meets at least once per month on the first Tuesday from 3-4pm. Additional meetings, when necessary, will occur on the third Tuesday from 3-4pm. The Co-Leads will prepare an agenda for the monthly meetings and distribute to all members who will be in attendance. The Core Team is also the lead on disseminating information about process changes to a wider audience.

To bring an idea forward to the Core Team, staff should contact one of the Co-leads to have the idea put on a future agenda. When someone brings an idea forward, please provide the following information. It is not necessary to have the answers fully fleshed out. For example, question 2 might be a brainstorming exercise with the Core Team.
1. What is the problem to be solved?
2. Whom, if anyone, has already discussed the problem?
3. Have you identified any potential solution(s)?
    a. If the solution(s) were to move forward to implementation, who should be the lead?
    b. If the solution(s) were to move forward to implementation, which departments/divisions will be impacted?
4. What do you need from the Process Improvement Team to move forward?

Deliverables

The Core Team is responsible for tracking the process improvements that are made and producing an annual report. The Core Team is not responsible for documenting the specific process changes as they occur; that is the responsibility of the lead(s) identified under the "How" section.

The Process Improvement Report is a document that is updated every year to document constant and meaningful improvements to permitting and review processes. Ideas that were also considered but abandoned should also be included, including the road block(s) that prevented implementation. The goal of the annual reporting is to demonstrate Lewis County's commitment to process improvements and hold the county accountable for that commitment. The audience for the Process Improvement

Report is the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and the general public. The report will be presented to the BOCC annually and will be uploaded to the Lewis County webpage for the general public.

Every individual solution that is implemented will be documented. The lead identified in the "How" section will produce the document. The documentation may take many different forms that are specific to the process and solution. The document will be stored in a common electronic folder that is accessible to all departments and divisions and will be cited in the Process Improvement Report.

Current folder location:
\\fs1\Public Services\Department Share\COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT\Process Improvement

Process Improvement Team
2023 Annual Report

Purpose

The Process Improvement Team's purpose is to continually improve permitting, review and other processes to create efficiencies that add value, will reduce time from application submittal to review completion and permit issuance, and improve customer experience.

Summary

In 2023, the Process Improvement Team updated their charter to re-establish the vision, purpose, and procedures of the team. This charter was developed by Community Development with input from Public Works and Environmental Health. Together, the team identified and implemented changes to the processes described below.

Processes Improved

Online Building Permit Inspection Submittal

Citizens of Lewis County can now complete a short online form to request an inspection for their building permit. Previously, customers were required to call in to make this request. Having an online form allows efficiency of time for both customers and employees, as well as providing accurate and complete information to the building inspectors.

Water System Plan Review

Members of Community Development, Public Works, and Environmental worked together to identify efficiencies in reviewing Water System plans. Using the Adept software, staff created new activities for multiple departments to review the documents at the same time, assign tasks to each other, and complete reviews quicker than the previous process of hard copy routing.

Flood Permitting / Community Rating System (CRS)

Community Development staff reviewed the requirements for Flood Development permits, LOMAs, and Elevation Certificates to identify the best way to process, track, and manage the records. This was a process that was already in place but has been refined and lessons learned were tracked on so further changes can be made in the next reporting cycle. Discussions on the type of Credit Activities for the next reporting cycle are underway.

Adept Online Portal

Brad Clark, the Adept Administrator for Community Development, and Public Works and Environmental Health staff, worked with the team and Adept staff to develop a concept for an online customer portal to view the status of permits. This is not being pursued at this time, as there may be available funding or other requirements that are proposed by the Department of Commerce as they implement Senant Bill 5290.

Campgrounds & RV Parks Code Change

The Planning Team has identified an inefficiency in the processing of permitting for new RV parks and campground. The process was changed from a Binding Site Plan to a Special Use Permit, which reduces time and cost to process permitting. Development standards were also clarified to make it easier for customers to understand the requirements. Staff will document how implementation of the new process and standards work during 2024 and discuss if any adjustments are needed.

Fee Schedule Update

The Building Department updated its fee schedule for 2024 to keep up with rising operating costs, including employee salaries, training, and equipment. The new fee schedule was developed with the goal of covering permit review costs while maintaining lower overall fees than neighboring Counties. The department has worked hard to keep the fees as low as possible while still maintaining a high level of service to the customer. The update was a 25% increase in the building valuation multiplier which results in a projected 15% increase in revenue.

Building Plan Review & Retention Process

The Building Department changed the way physical building plans and specifications are reviewed to reduce the review time by the Plans Examiner, as well as limit the number of resources and amount of storage that are needed to complete the process. Previously, two sets of building plans were reviewed by the Plans Examiner; one set was returned to the customer and the other set was stored in the office until completion of the project. Now, only one set of plans are reviewed, scanned to Laserfiche for electronic retention of the documents, and returned to the customer.

Revamped Building Inspection Slip

The Building Department updated the inspection slip to make it more user-friendly and informative. The new slip has the option to scan a QR code to request an inspection online. The new slip also has a better overall layout that makes it easier to read and understand. The department hopes that these changes will help customers to better navigate the inspection process and ensure that their projects are completed in a timely and efficient manner.

Permit Applications & Handouts Webpage

The Process Improvement Team discussed ways to better communicate information to customers. Through this discussion, the team identified the need to put more information on the Permit Applications & Handouts webpage but felt that the current layout of the webpage would be overwhelming if more was added. This led to the redesign of the webpage to make it easier to read and created a foundation to add more information to in 2024. Our goal is for customers to have a one stop webpage that gives them all the necessary information to identify which permits they need and what the process will entail.

Two handouts were created that are posted to the new webpage and shared with customers. The first handout explains how properties may accommodate different types of RV use. For example, if a property owner wants to allow two or more RVs to park on their property for a fee, then they need to meet the updated RV Parks and Campground code. The second handout explains the permitting differences between a shed, detached bedroom and ADU. This handout was produced because of a trend of converting a shed to a detached bedroom or ADU. Staff hope these handouts will make it easier for customers to understand the permitting requirements before starting the permitting process.

Water Purveyor Consent Form

The Planning Team and Environmental Health developed a tool to improve communication between public water system purveyors and permit applicants seeking to drill wells within a system's service area. The new Purveyor Consent Form allows water systems to provide written acknowledgement and consent for new permit exempt wells located within their established service areas prior to project/permit approval.

Senant Bill 5290

Senate Bill 5290 updated required permitting processes and timelines for jurisdictions in Washington State. Staff have reviewed the changes to the state laws. However, the Department of Commerce is producing guidance and staff will wait to consider local changes to conform to the bill until the guidance is available.

Looking Forward

The Process Team will be looking at the following items 2024.

- Discuss and identify ways to improve communication and permit review between departments and the public.
- Continue digitizing Environmental Health's septic records.
- Process changes as a result of SB 5290 and Commerce guidance.
- Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update
- Rural Housing Alternatives code change and the resulting impacts on process.

Along with these items, the team anticipates that other topics will be evaluated as they are brought to the surface. Many process improvements are discovered throughout the work and the team encourages any staff member to bring forward ideas to be discussed.

Process Improvements Completed

The process improvements are listed with the most recent at the top.

2022

Major update to Adept (Internal)

Added a new screen and layout for how tasks can be added and sent out efficiently. Made the process easier to route applications electronically, reducing the amount of time permit processing takes.

Electronic Building Plan Review (External)

Refined process to allow for the submittal / review of building plans electronically. Customers no longer need to come to the building to drop off building plans or mail in physical copies, saving time and money for the customer. No hard copy retained after permit issuance, saving time and money for the county.

Created an Adept Manual (Internal)

Fire Marshall Access, Fire & Life Safety Reviews

Refined WAN and SAN Reviews

2021

Private Road Naming

Public Works Application & Fees (External)

Permit Center became a "one stop shop" for customers. This allowed customers to submit all Community Development, Public Works, and Environmental Health applications to the same place.

Routing SEPA, Simple Segs, BLAs Electronically through Adept (Internal)

Improved the efficiency of the routing process and eliminated the need to print off hard copies. This decreased the amount of time it takes to review applications as well as saves the county money because of reduced printing and waste.

Revamped Community Development Webpage (External)

The Lewis County Community Development webpage was restructured to help customers navigate and find relevant information, including permit applications and active permits.

2020

County & City Collaboration for Building Permitting

Lewis County Community Development together with the Cities of Morton, Mossyrock, Toledo and the Town of Pe Ell met to discuss ways to improve and maintain communication between the entities, as well as better inform our mutual customers about the building permit steps. To that end, the jurisdictions first met in early 2020 to identify areas of common interests and coordination with the goal of streamlining the permit process for the citizens of Lewis County The outcome was the City Approval Form(s)

Refined Septic Application Process Flow

Address Process Overhaul

Major Update to Adept (Internal)

Separate Adept modules from Community Development and Public works were merged to one module, which allowed staff to search a parcel or address and come up with all associated activities from both departments. Lowered the total annual cost for system support / maintenance fee. Allowed Community Development staff to assist customers with multi-department information.

Electronic Routing (Internal)

Applications for addresses, county water and sewer are scanned and routed through Adept, reducing the review time and the paper waste.

2019

Administrative Approval Process (Internal)

Created a standardized process for how staff review and make determinations for Administrative Approvals. This increased the consistency between planners and reduced the amount of time it takes to review and share the decision information with the applicant.

Standardize New Project Descriptions in Adept

To improve how new construction is communicated to the Assessor.

Weekly Issued Building Permit on Website (External)

Weekly issued building permit reports were added to the Community Development website so customers can see how many building permits are being issued each week, as well as what type of building permits are being issued.

Daily Inspections on Website (External)

Daily inspections were added to the Community Development website so customers can see when their inspection is.

Digitizing Environmental Health Records (Internal)

Staff began scanning septic records to make them more quickly accessible to staff and customers.

2018

Implement the Streamflow Restoration Act (Internal)

This state mandate required an update to Adept to add a water screen to capture water source information and added fee. A report was also created to capture fees taken in to meet reporting requirements to the State.

Building Permit and Inspection Card Layout (External)

Updated the building permit so that it is signed by permit tech instead of the customer needing to sign for it. and updated layout of inspection card to a more user-friendly layout.

Implemented Master Site Review (MSR)

Implemented a three-step permitting process to streamline the permitting process. The Master Site Review (MSR) became the first step in the process to complete before an applicant submitted additional site preparation and development permits.

2017

Webpage Update (External)

Updated permit applications and forms were added to the Community Development website. This made it easier for the public to find applications and forms and eliminated the need to drive to the Permit Center to pick up an application. In addition to updating the forms, the site was broken into three major sections: Get a Permit, Explore County Information, and Track Long-Range Planning Projects. Relevant information for the topic is provided under each of the headings. Upcoming meeting materials including agendas and handouts are included in the Calendar on the main page of the site.

Streamline Planning Review (Internal)

Started scanning applications and site plans into Adept for Planning Review instead of routing paper copies. This decreased paper waste in the department and improved the efficiency of reviews.

2016

Credit Card Payments (External)

Gave customers another option to pay permit fees and allowed them to call and pay fee over the phone, reducing the need for customers to drive to the Kresky Building.

Process Improvement Workshop

Started the process for process improvement. The 5-day workshop included representatives from Community Development, Public Works, and Environmental Health, as well as stakeholders from the community. The focus was on the Single-Family Residence permit process to include identifying waste and finding efficiencies in the process. The result was the formation of the original Process Improvement Team.