



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.