

Date: August 10, 2021

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Oscar W. Orci, Director Development Services 
Christina P. Winting, Executive Director Civil Service /s/
Joe Ambrosini, Director Human Resources 
Lea Eriksen, Director Technology and Innovation 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Long Beach Builds Initiative**

On [May 11, 2021](#), the Director of the Development Services Department (Department), provided a memorandum regarding building permit delays due to the certain impacts, including the COVID-19 pandemic. On June 15, 2021, after the release of this memorandum, The City Council, through agenda item [R-23](#), recommended several measures to improve the permit and development review process. The status of these measures is outlined in this memorandum.

Since the issuance of the May 11, 2021 memorandum and City Council discussion on June 15, 2021, the Department has continued to make timeline and efficiency improvements to the benefit of its customers and stakeholders. The in-person Permit Center re-opened on May 10, 2021, and the capacity has been expanding. As the overall Civic Center re-opening progresses, the Department will be increasing capacity at the Permit Center further by allowing for more in-person appointments.

Additionally, the Department continues to use overtime, contract, and consultant staffing, as well as other measures to reduce customer wait times and permit backlogs. The re-opening of the Permit Center, along with these staffing augmentations has reduced the wait times and permit processing delays experienced over the past year due to the pandemic. Service continues to improve for those electing to make in-person appointments and for customers submitting permit applications electronically.

Staffing and technology are still the Department's primary challenges. On the staffing front, the Department has hired additional Permit Center staff; however, the Department has also continued to lose staff to other employers. Measures to improve the staffing situation are outlined herein and will be implemented in the coming weeks and months. The Department is also working with the Technology and Innovation Department and our outside vendors and partners on two parallel paths -- improving existing software in the short-term while pursuing a modern software system to better meet the City's needs and priorities in the medium-term.

Responses and status updates to the specific points in the City Council motion are found following:

1. Request the City Manager to conduct a review of the City’s hiring practices, and to issue a directive which prioritizes fully staffing the Permit Center as well as other offices dealing with the review and approval of building permits.

The Department is working in conjunction with the Departments of Human Resources and Civil Service in response to this request. Each department has identified short-term and long-term solutions that aim to assist the City’s recruitment and retention efforts, particularly with tough-to-fill vacancies.

Human Resources has identified several potential initiatives to enhance the City’s recruitment and retention efforts:

- a. Modify Policy and Procedure No. 3.1 “Step Placement,” which includes enhancing the recruitment plan to reach out directly to allow for existing employees to advance on college and university programs, and revising the salary range outside current job posting to highlight benefits of the traditional anniversary date (terms and conditions to be developed).
- b. Provide a new hire bonus incentive program to attract applicants and incentivize potential hires to accept employment with the City/Department (terms and conditions to be developed), sharing this information in a virtual informational session to reach as many Permit Technician candidates as possible and maintaining a continuous recruitment.
- c. Conduct a compensation study of base salaries of certain classifications that have a history of being difficult to recruit or retain employees, from comparable cities to determine the City’s position in the market.
- d. Provide robust training opportunities to improve employee morale and customer service.

It should be noted that that some of these potential initiatives will require City Council authority and/or the City to engage in the meet and confer process with each affected bargaining unit. Staff will return to the City Council for formal authority at a later date once the parameters for these initiatives are developed.

2. Request the City Manager to provide a report within 30 days regarding the status of the City’s permitting software and provide options for optimizing and expediting the permit review processes.

The Department is working in conjunction with the Technology and Innovation Department in response to this request by:

- a. Completing the implementation of an online self-service portal allowing applicants to submit, pay, and track submissions electronically.
- b. Reviewing the operations and systems in place for cities such as Oakland, San Jose, San Diego, and Huntington Beach.

- c. Continuing to make enhancements to the City's current land management software system, Infor Public Sector, by performing annual version upgrades and redesigning all legacy permit and licensing application workflows to be compatible with the online self-service web portal.
- d. Pursuing the services of a consulting firm to assist in identifying the City's requirements for a modern permitting and licensing system that will better meet the City's needs and priorities. This process will include engagement with other City departments using the existing system for their operations.

3. Request the City Manager to explore the creation of a "Development Shot Clock" for the review of local development projects in line with transparency, timelines, and standards consistent with the State law.

The City is currently subject to various development deadlines imposed by the Housing Accountability Act, SB 35, and various State accessory dwelling unit laws. The intent of the City Council's request is to increase transparency and accountability for timelines in the development process. This goal will be achieved through:

- a. Updating the Department's existing Housing Dashboard during calendar year 2022 to include additional information regarding average housing review and approval timelines.
- b. Providing information regarding permit turnaround times to each Councilmember during scheduled monthly briefings.
- c. The Department will work with Technology and Innovation Department staff to provide data and associated dashboards to provide better insights and transparency in the local development review process.
- d. The Department will include the importance of project tracking, reporting and analytics within any future Requests for Proposals (RFP) for future Land Management System software.
- e. The Department will immediately update its training and communications programs to apprise staff and managers of existing development shot-clock restrictions such as those associated with wireless facilities, accessory dwelling units, and other housing units.
- f. Upon stabilization and enhancement of the Department's staffing and implementation of the Land Management System software that meets the City's needs and priorities, the Department will, with input from the City Council, establish completion goals for all major types of commercial, residential, and industrial development. Goals will be set for entitlement and permit processing and those goals will be integrated into the Department's operations and reported out to the City Council and the public.

Completing these enhancements is a top priority for the Departments of Development Services, Technology and Innovation, Civil Service, and Human Resources. We will continue to provide regular updates to the City Council documenting our progress.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (562) 570-6369.

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