Agenda
City Council Workshop Meeting
Tuesday, March 28, 2023
Richland City Hall ~ Council Chambers
625 Swift Boulevard

City Council Workshop - 6:00 p.m.

Agenda Items:

1. Transportation Project Update
   - Pete Rogalsky, Public Works Director

2. Development Permit Process Performance Audit Review (Matrix Report)
   - Joe Schiessl, Deputy City Manager

3. Narcan Distribution Program Discussion
   - Tom Huntington, Fire Chief

4. Biennial Budget Discussion
   - Brandon Allen, Finance Director

Adjournment

This meeting will be broadcast live on CityView Channel 192 on the City's website and on the City's YouTube Channel.

Richland City Hall is ADA accessible. Requests for sign interpreters, audio equipment, and/or other special services must be received 48 hours prior to the meeting by calling the City Clerk's Office at 509-942-7389.

COUNCIL WORKSHOP COVERSHEET

Council Date: 3/28/2023 Department: Public Works

Core Focus Area 2 - Manage & Maintain Infrastructure & Facilities

Subject:
Transportation Project Update

Summary:
The purpose of this presentation is to refresh and update the Council on four high-profile street improvement projects; discuss upcoming actions, including funding decisions; and discuss Councilmember roles and opportunities. The projects being presented are: South George Washington Way Intersection Improvements, Downtown Connectivity Project, SR-240 / Aaron Drive, and Island View to Vista Field.

Attachments:
1. Transportation Project Update

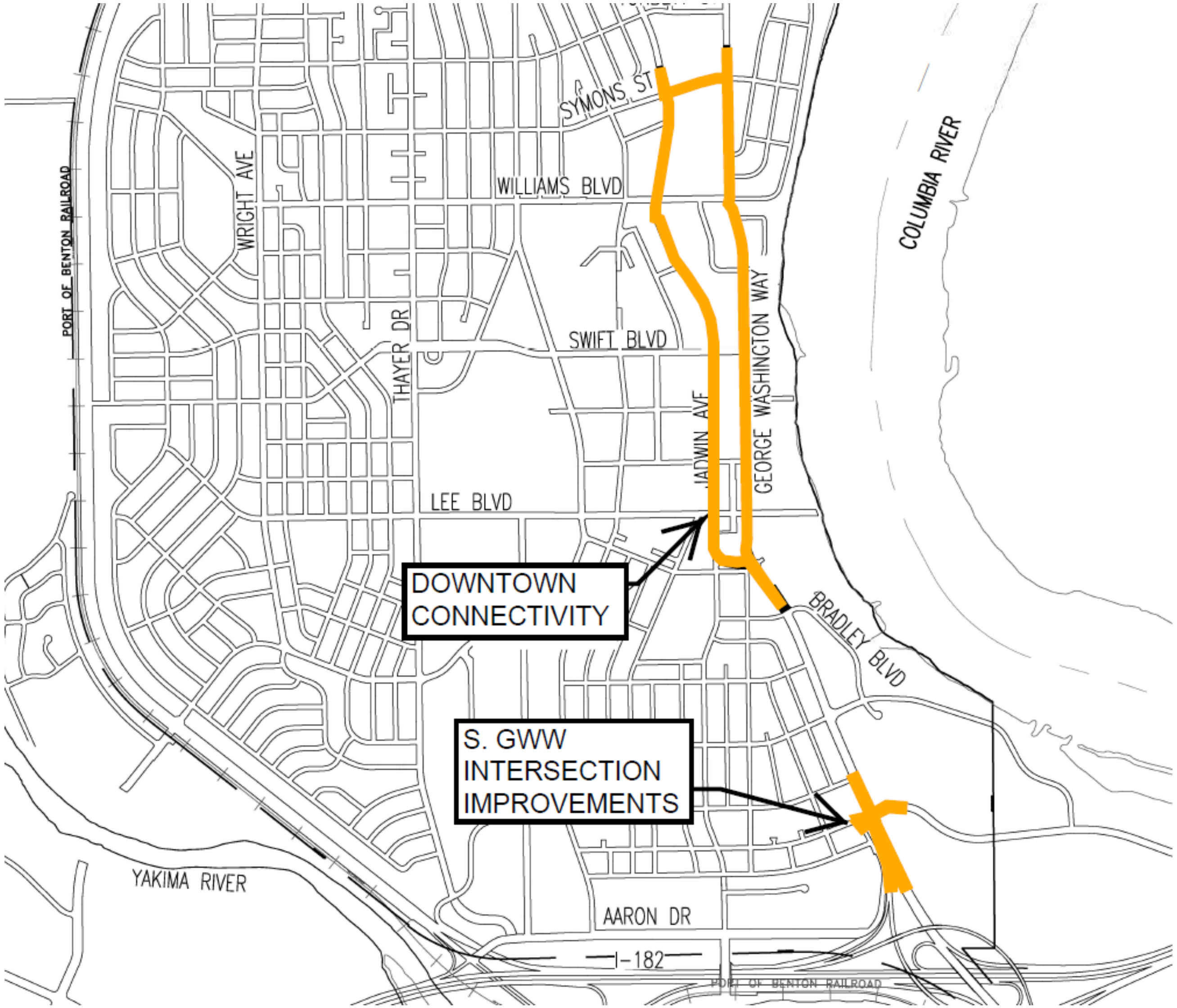
Transportation Project Update

City Council – March 28, 2023

Workshop Purpose

- Refresh and update Council on four high profile street improvement projects
- Discuss upcoming actions, including funding decisions
- Discuss Councilmember roles and opportunities

George Washington Way Projects

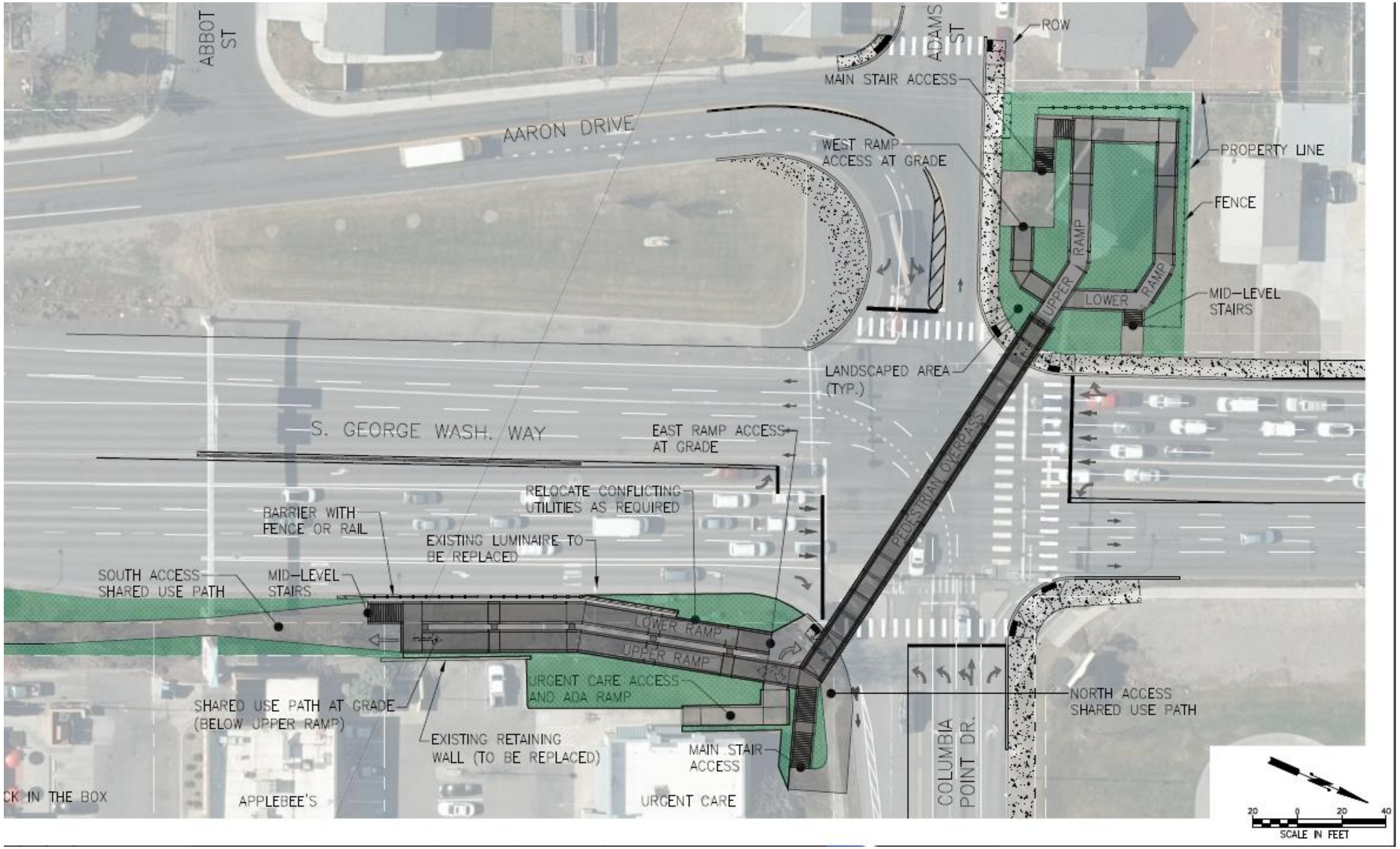


South George Washington Way Intersection Improvements - Planning

- Busiest, most congested intersection for decades
- Several prior improvements
- 2014 – 2015 analysis, planning and public outreach
- Preferred technical alternative rejected as too impactful to nearby property owners
- 2021 BFCOG Funding Award Resumes Planning

South Gway - Design

- Additional lanes
- Upgrades to traffic signal
- Pedestrian bridge
- Landscaping / entry features



South GWay Intersection Improvements - Implementation

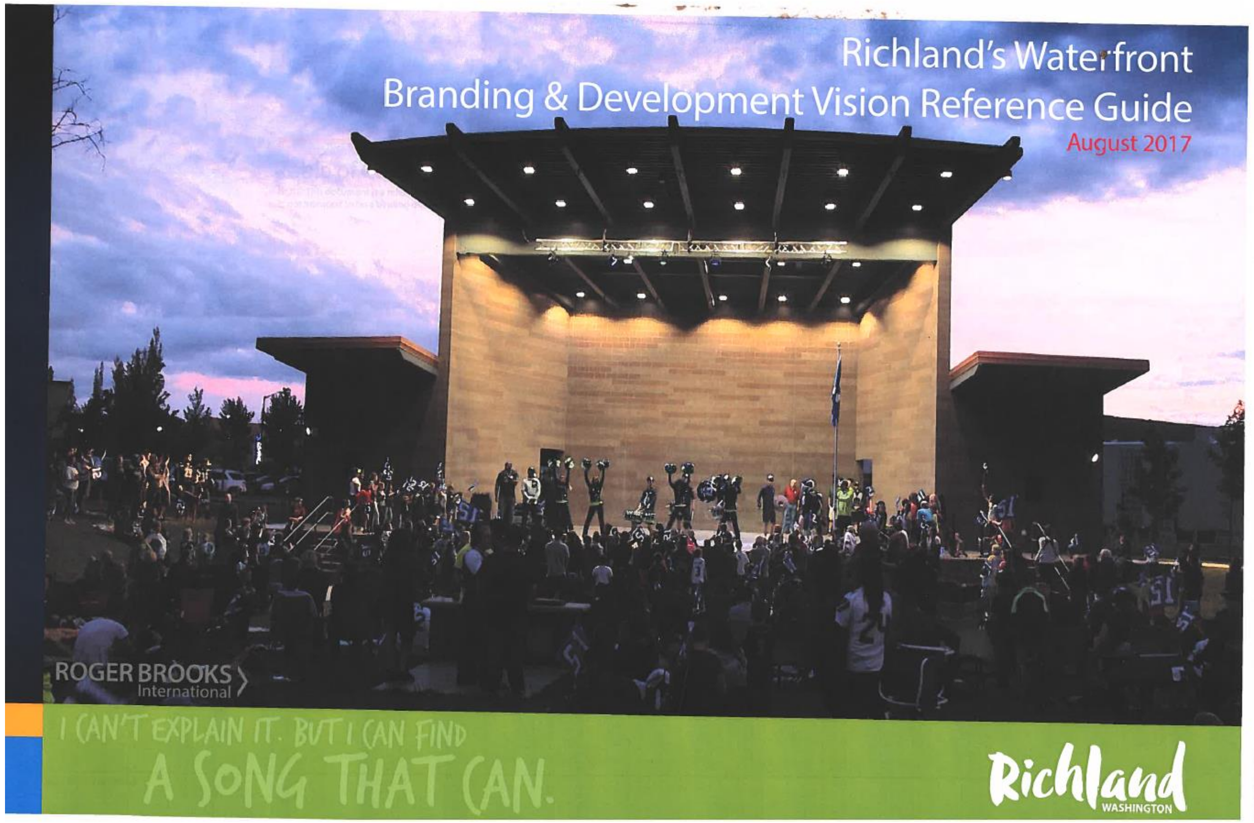
- 2023
  - Complete Engineering Design
  - Complete environmental review
  - Complete property acquisitions
  - Complete entry features design
- 2024
  - Construct improvements

South GWay Intersection Improvements - Funding

- BFCOG – 2019 - $650,000
- BFCOG – 2022 - $2,700,000
- City – 2020 – 2023 - $436,000
- Cost to Complete – 2024 budget request - $3,100,000

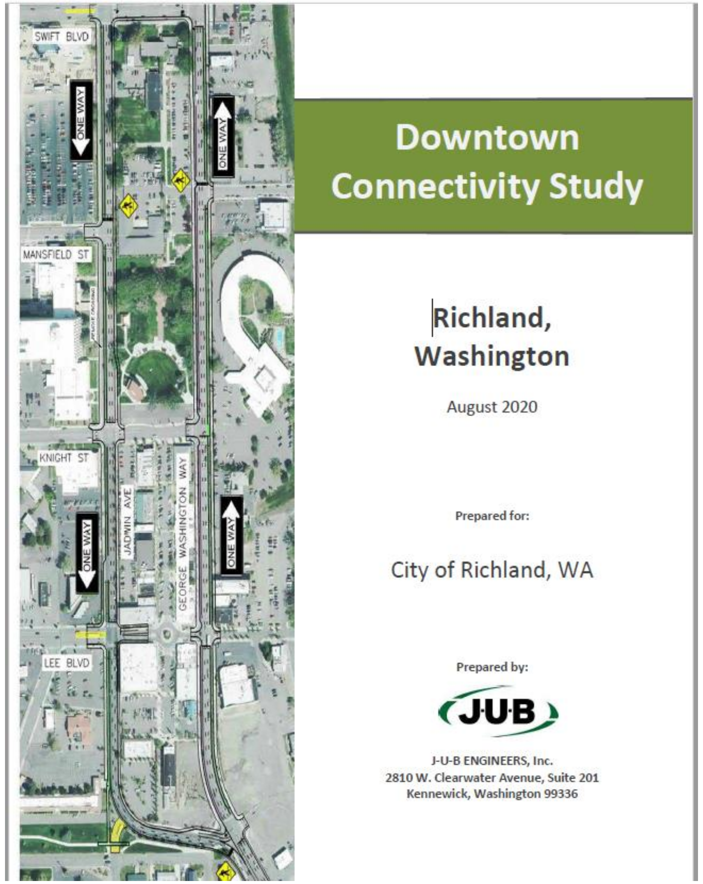
Downtown Connectivity Project - Planning

- Roger Brooks Planning Study
  - Gway Impedes City vision for downtown
  - John Dam Plaza
  - Parkway, Uptown
  - Swift Corridor



Downtown Connectivity Project - Planning

- Downtown Connectivity Study
  - Community Collaboration
  - Technical Alternatives Analysis
  - Public Engagement
  - Council Resolution No. 98-20



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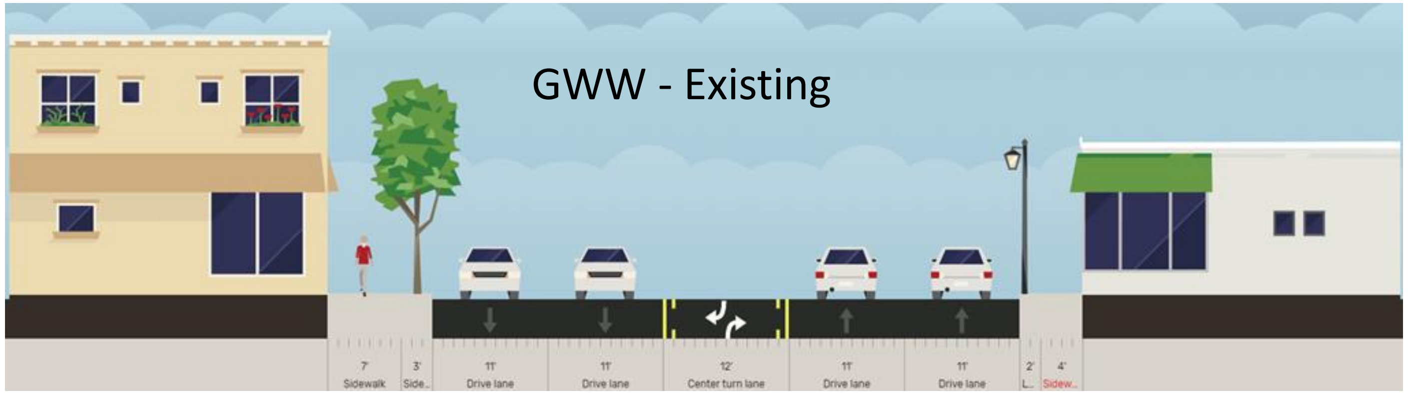
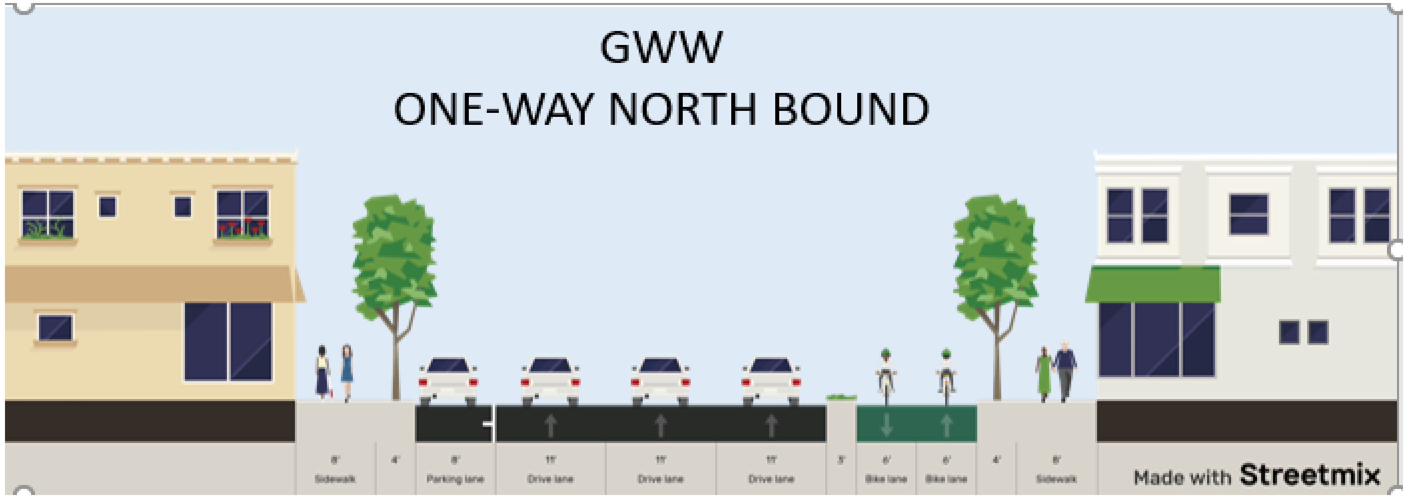
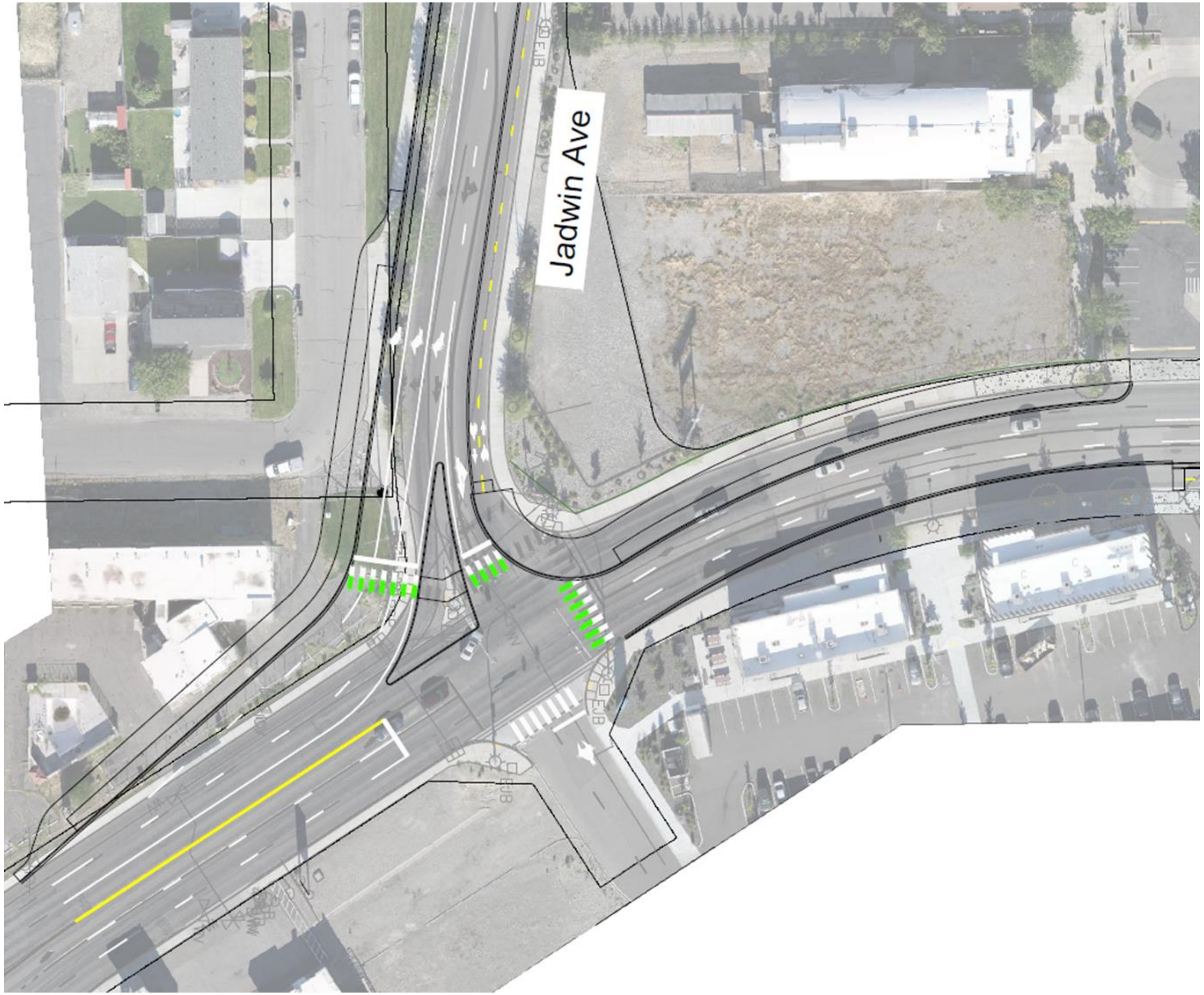
Downtown Connectivity Project - Design

- Road diet design
  - Maintains vehicle capacity
- Repurposes right of way for:
  - protected bicycle space
  - wider sidewalks
  - on-street parking
  - stormwater facilities
- Improved mid-block pedestrian crossings
- Improved lighting
- Landscaping, public art, placemaking

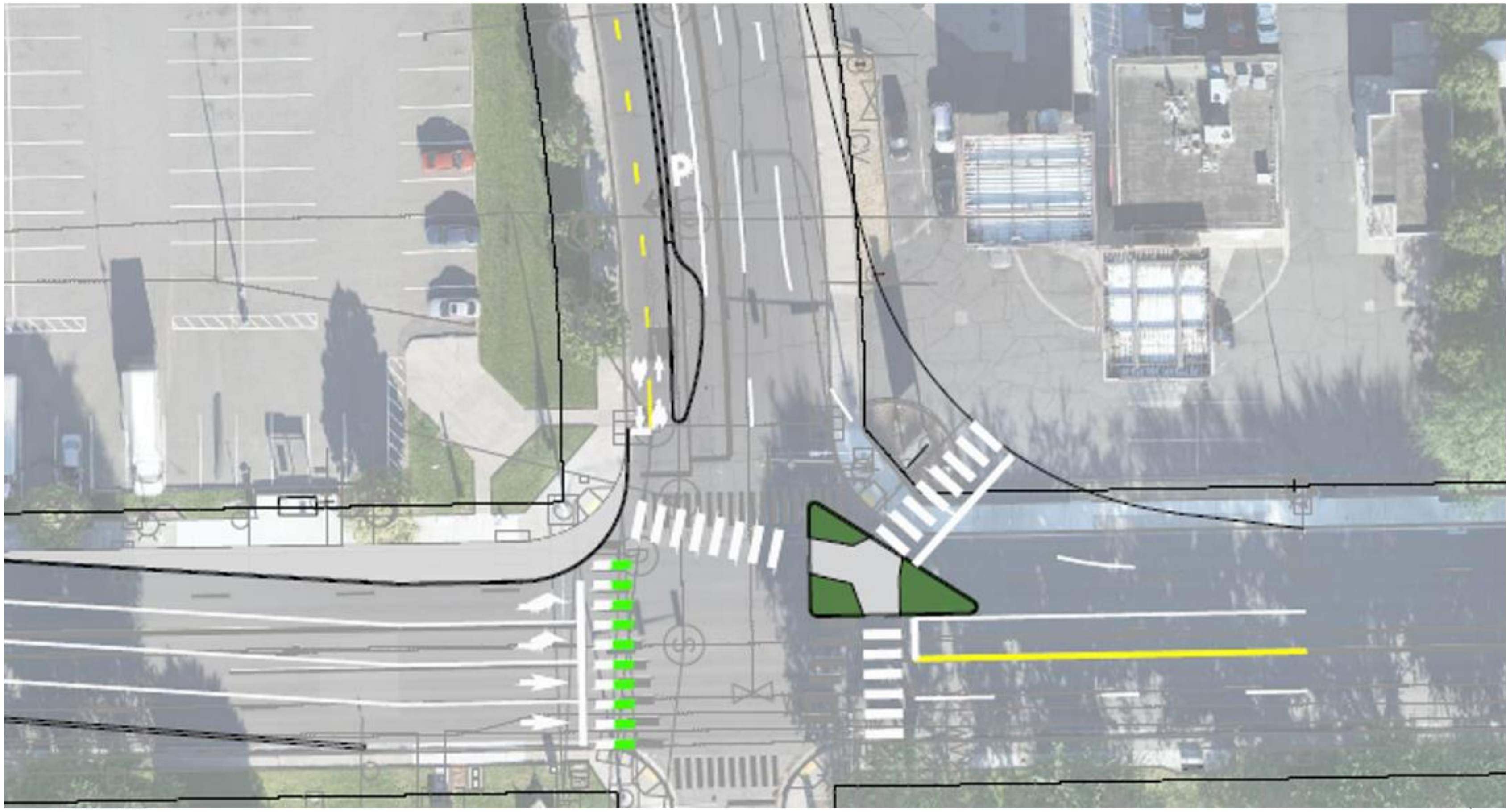




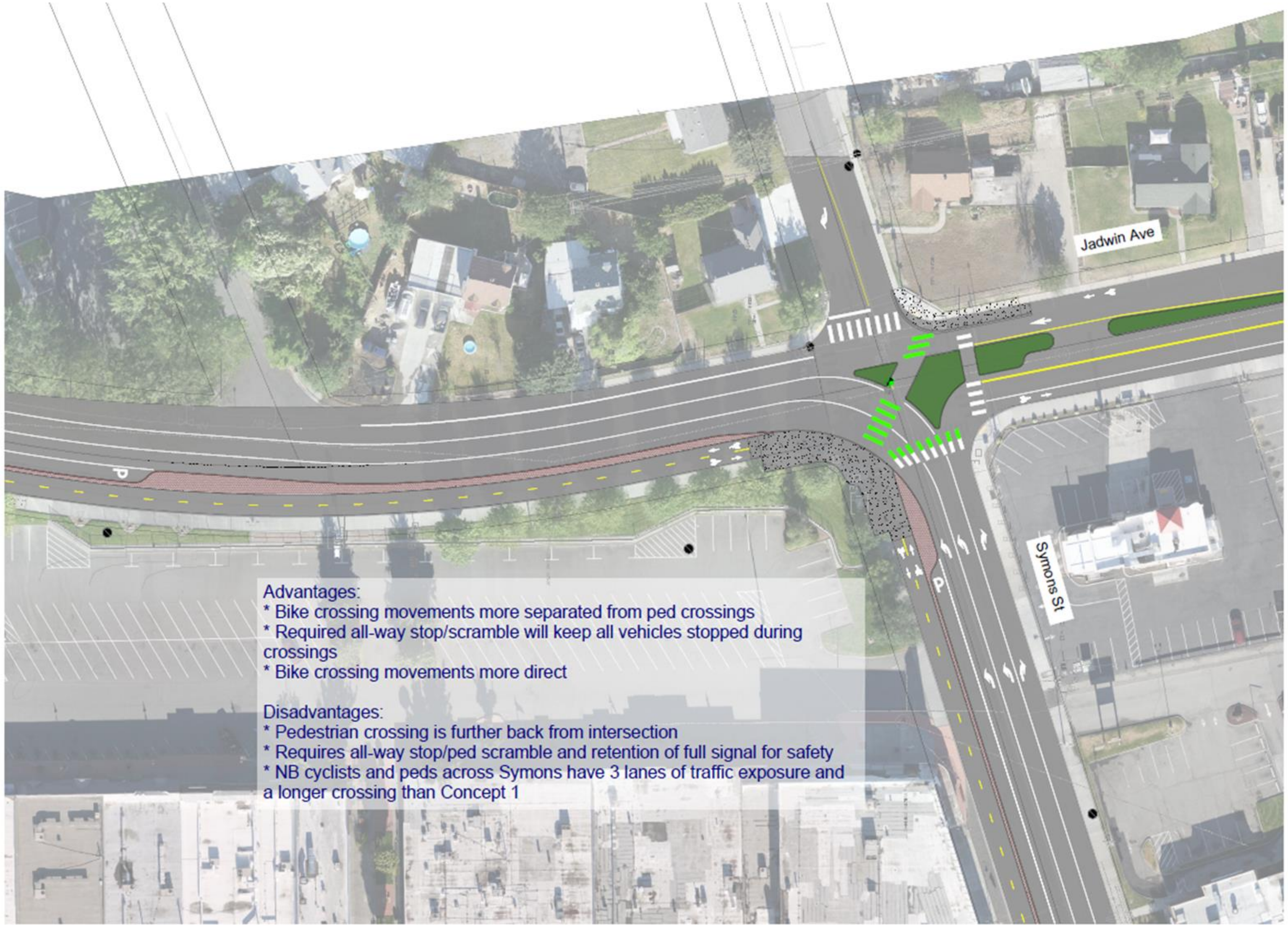
Downtown Connectivity Project GW Way / Jadwin



Downtown Connectivity Project George W. Way / Symons



Downtown Connectivity Project Jadwin / Symons



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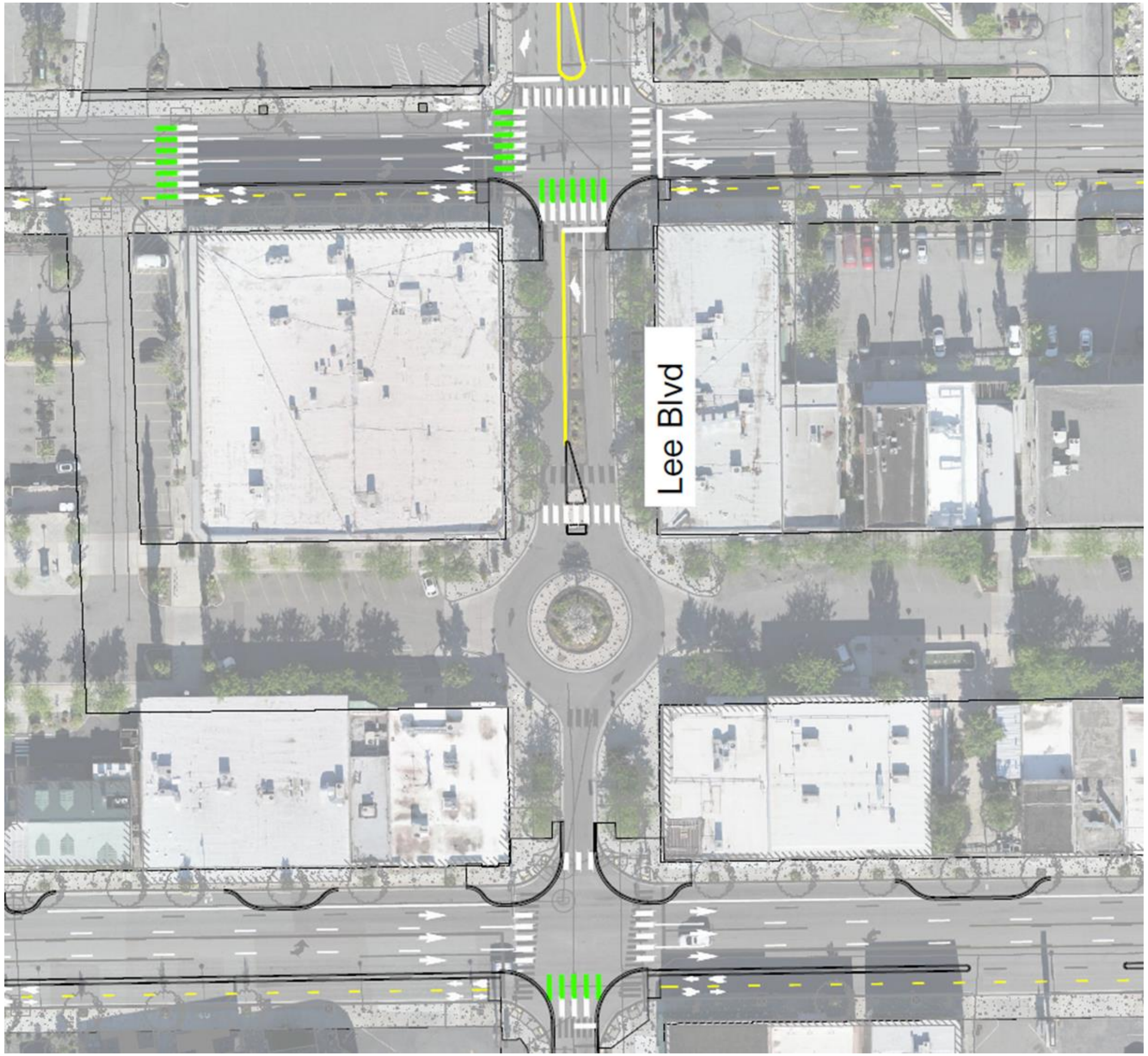
Downtown Connectivity Project Lee Blvd. / Parkway



Downtown Connectivity Project – Implementation

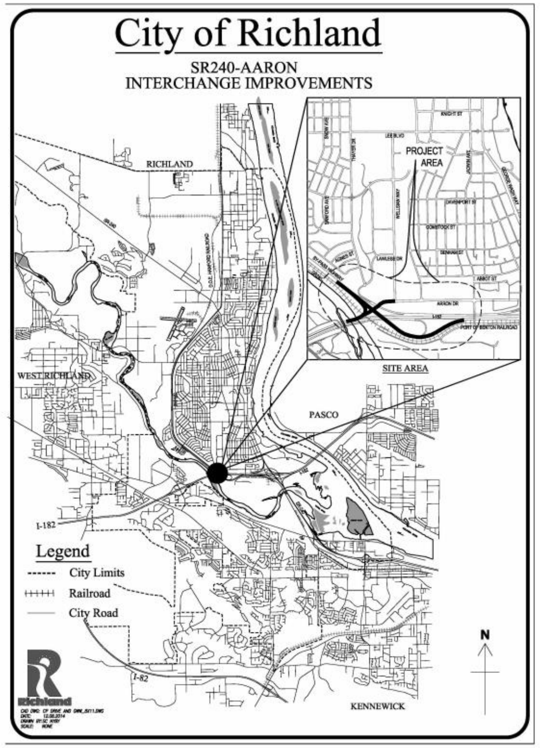
- 2023
  - Complete Design
  - Acquire right of way
  - Seek additional grant funds
- 2024 – 2025 – Construct

Downtown Connectivity Project – Funding

- $16,000,000 Preliminary Cost Estimate
  - To be refined through design
- Grant Funds
  - BFCOG – 2022 - $500,000
  - TIB – 2022 - $3,500,000
  - BFCOG – 2023 request - $1,000,000
  - Ecology – 2023 request - $2,000,000
- City Funds
  - $1,100,000 – committed to date
  - $775,000 – 2024 Pavement Preservation
  - $10,400,000 2024 – 2025 construction
    - Pending 2023 grant requests and final design elements and cost estimate

SR-240 / Aaron Drive - Planning

- 2017 BFCOG Regional Transportation Plan identifies existing and growing congestion as regional priority
- 2019 North South Travel Capacity Study prioritizes improvements
  - Council Resolution No. 156-19 adopts findings
- 2019 BFCOG funding award for planning
- 2022 City, WSDOT, FHWA approve improvement concept

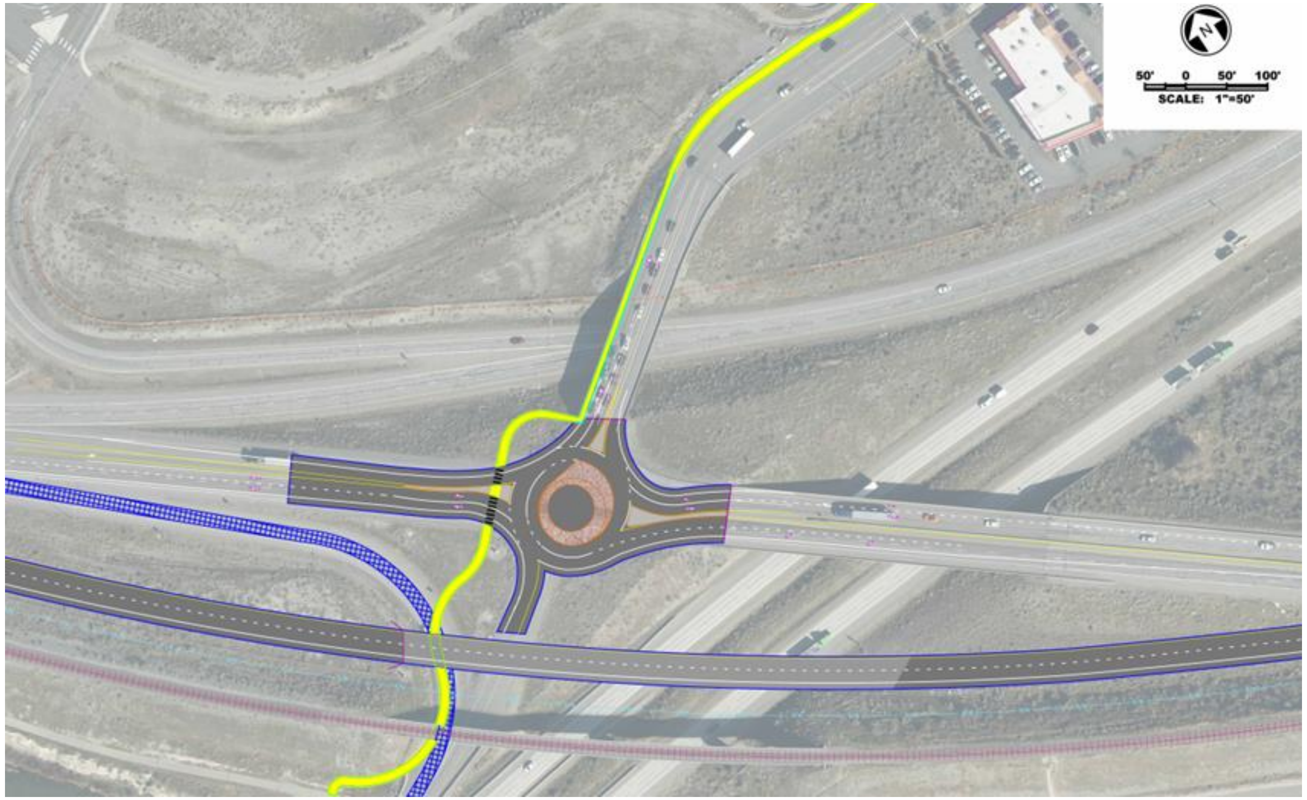


SR-240 / Aaron Drive

Project Description

The SR-240 / Aaron Drive Complete Streets Improvements Project will correct deficiencies in the existing I-182 / SR-240 / Aaron Drive interchange that have existed for approximately 40 years. These deficiencies impact Active Transportation, vehicular capacity, and freight mobility.

- Grade separate southbound SR-240 traffic from SR-240 / Aaron intersection
- Install roundabout intersection at SR-240 / Aaron ramp terminal intersection
- Add Active Transportation trail segments to Aaron Drive and across SR-240 right of way to regional trail system parallel to Yakima River



SR-240 / Aaron Drive - Implementation

- No established schedule
- Requires funding beyond capacity of available grant programs
  - $35.5 million estimate in 2022 dollars
- State Legislative Advocacy required
  - Council role

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Island View to Vista Field - Planning

- BFCOG plans identify significant barriers to pedestrian and bicycling in the Columbia Center Boulevard / SR240 area
- 2021 Planning Study led by Richland and Kennewick with funding from BFCOG
- Identifies package of improvements to overcome existing barriers

Island View to Vista Field

Project Description

This project will address the most pressing Active Transportation barriers in the Tri-Cities region by connecting city streets in Richland and Kennewick.

- New pedestrian / bicycle bridge crossing of SR 240 and the Columbia Irrigation District Canal
- New pedestrian / bicycle bridge will cross Columbia Center Boulevard
- New pedestrian / bicycle bridge will cross Steptoe
- On and off-street Active Transportation facilities in Richland, Kennewick, and Benton County will complete the system

Island View to Vista Field - Implementation

- No established Schedule
- Requires funding beyond capacity of available grant programs
  - $20 million estimated for three bridges in 2021 dollars
- State legislative advocacy required
  - Build on 2022 $5,000,000 award
  - Council Role

COUNCIL WORKSHOP COVERSHEET

Council Date: 3/28/2023 Department: Deputy City Manager

Core Focus Area 1 - Promote Financial Stability & Operational Effectiveness

Subject:
Development Permit Process Performance Audit Review (Matrix Report)

Summary:
The City strives to offer efficient and effective government services. One such service is the issuance of permits. The City recently engaged Matrix Consulting Group (Matrix) to evaluate the City's permit process using an audit approach consisting of interviews, document and code review, and best practices comparison. The resulting document is not intended to be a planning study resulting from a collaborative process. It is an independent audit. The audit observations and recommendations are non-binding opinions made by subject matter experts.

The City issues a number of permit types for construction, land use, and work in the right of way. Permits are reviewed by several parties including; internal departments (Development Services, Public Works, Fire, Energy Services), external agencies and utilities, boards and commissions, and the Richland Hearings Examiner.

Matrix is a class leading consultant in this industry and has helped numerous public agencies with their permit processes. In our case, we asked Matrix to work with our local development community and internal staff to receive feedback and provide existing state data. External input is included in the document in Appendix B. Other notable elements are management and oversight, process evaluation and improvements, technology, customer interaction, staffing, and financial review.

The audit is a point in time and several elements have already been addressed. Staff will highlight early accomplishments and new conditions that have developed since this draft was delivered.

Attachments:
1. Draft Matrix Report - Council Packet

Development Process Performance Audit Final Report

RICHLAND, WASHINGTON

DRAFT

January 4, 2023

matrix consulting group

Table of Contents

1. Project Introduction and Executive Summary

Matrix Consulting Group was retained by the City of Richland to perform an audit of the development review, permitting, and inspection functions, and to conduct a comparative assessment of the City's fee structure. The study covered operations in the following departments: Development Services, Public Works, Fire, and Energy Services.

The City conducted this study to evaluate the development review, permitting, and inspection processes and identify service improvement opportunities. As part of this assessment, the City requested a thorough review of staffing, organizational structure, processes, and technology. The City wanted to identify operational changes that increase efficiency and improve customer service while continuing to fulfill the City's regulatory responsibilities. Additionally, this study evaluated the City's development fee structure compared to other similar jurisdictions in Washington and the financial practices associated with the collection of development fees.

This study includes a detailed evaluation of current development review and related operations as well as a roadmap to enhance services. The roadmap contains the identification of process, code, and technology improvements and staffing needs.

1. Study Scope and Methodologies

The Matrix Consulting Group's project team utilized a wide variety of data collection and analytical techniques, including the following:

- **Key Issues.** Developed an in-depth understanding of key issues impacting key areas of the development review, permitting, and inspection processes. Conducted multiple interviews with staff representatives from each functional area. Interviews focused on determining roles and responsibilities of staff, levels of services provided, resources available to perform said services, and current or potential issues.
- **Current State Assessment.** The project team developed a current state assessment that captured staffing levels, roles and responsibilities, workload, and performance metrics for each operational area. This document was utilized as a base point of comparison for future analysis to demonstrate how the changes recommended differed from existing practice.
- **Stakeholder Survey and Focus Groups.** The project team surveyed past and present customers familiar with the development review process. The survey allowed these customers to share their thoughts on the strengths as well as opportunities for improvement of current processes. In addition, four stakeholder focus group meetings were held in person in Richland to hear from prior

development review customers to gauge their perception of the services provided by the City.

- **Best Management Practices.** A best management practices assessment was conducted. This compared current department practices to industry standards. The project team focused on best management practices for management and administration, process, staffing levels, organizational structure, policies, and technology utilizations.
- **Recommendations.** Based on the project team's activities and initial findings, the team analyzed issues, explore alternative service delivery options, and developed recommendations for a more effective process. These recommendations extend to staffing, services, processes, and technology usage with the goal of identifying resource, operational, and organizational needs to assist the City in reaching its goals.

The report is divided into the following chapters:

- Management and Oversight
- Process Evaluation and Improvement
- Technology
- Customer Interaction and Information
- Staffing
- Fee Comparison
- Appendices that include copies of the interim deliverables (current state assessment, best practice assessment, and stakeholder feedback summary).

Each of these sections provide recommendations and insight into City development practices, processes, technology, organizational, and staffing needs to implement the recommendations.

3. Key Strengths and Challenges of the Organization

Although the City's current permit tracking system is outdated in terms of capabilities, the City has made very good use of the system and other programs to manage the permitting process. The majority of building permit applications and plans are submitted, reviewed, and issued electronically and copies of plans (both submitted and approved) are available electronically to reviewers and inspectors.

In addition, the City has plans in place to replace their existing permit management program with a new system that has much greater capabilities – something that would otherwise have been a key recommendation of this report.

The City has a centralized permit center, staffed with Permit Techs who assist with questions about intake and processing of permits, with subject matter expert staff available nearby in case questions arise that cannot be answered by the techs.

Departments and staff involved in the permitting process struggle with communication and coordination across disciplines, with planning, public works/engineering, building, fire, and energy services operating in relative silos. The different review areas also struggle with some issues related to culture and morale, which has likely been a contributing factor to recent high turnover and some increased issues with customer service.

4. Summary of Recommendations

Based on the project team's assessment and analysis, there are several recommendations for each topic covered in this assessment. These are discussed in detail throughout this report. The following table consolidates the recommendations and presents them in the order they are discussed in the report. A priority level of low, medium, or high is assigned to each recommendation, along with a timeline (calendar quarter) for implementation completion.

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
	Management and Oversight		
1	Create a cross-departmental oversight committee with responsibility for overseeing performance of the development review process and for implementing process improvements.	High	Q2 2023
2	Consider establishing a Development Review Committee consisting of all reviewers who typically attend pre-application meetings. This group would work across departmental lines to ensure that the city speaks with one voice when responding to comments and questions from applicants – from pre-application through project close-out.	High	Q2 2023
3	Revise the Development Services Director's role, job description, and job expectations to create greater accountability for the speed and efficiency of the permitting processes that originate within that department.	High	Q2 2023
4	Revise expectations for the Public Works Director to also include those related to the timeliness and efficiency of the development review process for Right of Way permits and other DPW plan review.	High	Q2 2023

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
5	Create and implement a unifying mission for all development and permitting functions and seek buy-in to this mission from elected officials and City management.	High	Q4 2023
6	Establish target timeline for all application types with both internal and external deadlines.	High	Q4 2023
7	As an interim measure until tracking can be automated in the permitting software, track progress against target timelines using a spreadsheet. There should be a single spreadsheet on a shared drive that provides data for all Planning, DPW, Building, and Fire applications and permits.	Medium	Q1 2023
8	As part of the implementation of new permitting software, ensure that the system produces regular reports that can measure performance against targets for all application and permit types	High	Upon software implement ation
9	Centralize permit tech management under a lead tech and expand their portfolio to include assisting with DPW permits, inspections, and occupancy requirements.	High	Q3 2023
10	Cross-train all Permit Technicians for the intake, processing, and permit issuance for all three review disciplines.	High	Q1 2024
11	Implement changes to track and improve employee morale across all development review functions.	High	Q2 2023
	Process Evaluation and Improvements		
12	Revise the pre-application process to require a submittal of basic information about the project in advance of the meeting, require advanced review of this information by staff, and provide written comments after the meeting is concluded.	High	Q3 2023
13	Standardized the approach to providing comments on Planning applications, to include providing comments prior to the application going to public meeting/hearing.	High	Q2 2023
14	Use an internal Development Review Committee to review and discuss complex or controversial applications.	High	Q4 2023
15	Implement policy changes to ensure comprehensive initial plan reviews, and to avoid multiple re-submittals associated with the same application.	High	Q4 2023

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
16	Public Works review timelines for second and third reviews should be the same.	High	Q1 2023
17	Prior to consolidated application comments being sent to an applicant, these comments should be reviewed by the application's project manager to ensure that there is consistency across comments.	Medium	Q4 2023
18	Take in all solar projects as building permits through the Building Division with Energy Services as a reviewer on these projects.	Medium	Q1 2024
19	Assign the Building Official to oversee the Certificate of Occupancy process and ensure smooth coordination with other agencies, especially DPW and Energy Services.	High	Q3 2023
20	For the Hearing Examiner process, revise process so that applicants can know when to expect these decisions to be made.	High	Q3 2023
21	Specifically promote which application types identified in code	Medium	Q1 2024
22	Transition the intake, routing, and issuance of special event permits to the Development Services Department and require submittal through the permitting software system.	High	Upon software implementation
23	For final plats, modify the requirements where only the Public Works and Development Services Directors signature are required.	Medium	Q4 2023
	Technology		
25	Transition to a fully paperless permitting process, including for Right of Way permits.	Medium	Q4 2023
26	Acquire enough licenses for use of Bluebeam by all reviewers.	High	Q2 2023
27	Ensure that staff have the hardware needed to review and mark up plans on a screen or using an electronic plan table.	High	Q2 2023
28	Utilize the permitting software system as a database to store (or link) historic development files/records with the appropriate address or parcel identifiers.	High	Q4 2024

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
	Customer Information and Interaction		
29	Prepare a comprehensive development handbook that provides clear, user-friendly information on each stage of the development process. Given staffing and workload considerations, it is recommended that this be resourced outside of the department, either through a contract or by hiring a communications expert on a contracted basis.	High	Q3 2024
30	Redesign the City's web site to include an online one stop shop that includes an overview of the development process and links to the various review discipline webpage.	High	Q3 2024
31	Expand the type of information regarding about the development process and improve consistency in the type and depth of information provided on each discipline's respective webpage.	High	Q4 2023
32	Implement an annual customer service survey, the results of which should be used to examine strengths and weaknesses in the permitting processes.	Medium	Q1 2024
33	Once available, include reports showing the City's plan review and inspection performance on the web site.	High	Upon Software Implementation
34	Include a decision-making matrix on the City's development webpage.	Medium	Q1 2024
	Staffing		
35	The Planning Division should add one Senior Planner to assist with current planning applications and long range planning efforts.	High	Q3 2023
36	The current allocation of a Building Official, two Plans Examiners, and four Building Inspectors is appropriate.	High	Ongoing
37	Public Works – Transportation and Development Group should accelerate efforts to build redundancy in all areas of plan review.	High	Ongoing
38	Maintain the current allocation of staffing for the development review staff in the Transportation and Development Group.	High	Ongoing

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
39	A total of four Permit Technician (I & II) positions in Development Services is recommended.	High	Ongoing
40	Incorporate the position of a Lead Permit Technician.	High	Q3 2023
41	Revise the Permit Technician employee classification, position descriptions, and hierarchy and incorporate different technical skill sets so staff have advancement opportunities.	High	Q3 2023
42	Move forward with recommendations from prior study related to Fire plan review fees and the hiring of civilian plans examiners to review fire plans.	High	Q3 2023
	Financial Review of Development Services		
43	The City's current structure for Planning and Building fees is in alignment with other cities, but it should regularly review fees against expenses and other cities.	High	Q4 2024
44	The City should conduct an in-depth cost of services or user fee study for Building and Planning Fees to determine the true direct and indirect cost of services and be in alignment with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 82.02.020).	High	Q4 2024
45	The City should consider reevaluating and increasing its Planning-related fees to improve development-related cost recovery.	High	Q4 2024
46	The City should move forward with its plans to implement Fire Development-Related Fees to minimize future subsidization related to Fire Review and Inspections of new and existing development.	High	Q4 2024
47	The Development Services Department should develop a formalized cost recovery policy outlining frequency of updates and specific cost recovery targets by each service area.	High	Q3 2023
48	The cost recovery policy should be used to guide any fee-setting in the future, including updating fees after a fee study analysis or implementing new fees.	High	Q3 2023
49	The City should implement the proposed Fire Fee Structure from the 2019 Fee Study for Building Plan reviews at a minimum.	High	Q4 2023

#	Recommendation	Priority	Timeline
50	The City should consider conducting a fire prevention fee study once the new fire prevention staff (Community Risk Reduction Specialist, Fire Plans Examiner, and Fire Permit Technician) have been hired and staff have been there for a year.	High	Q4 2024
51	The City should revise its % of Expired Permits to be Used for Reinstatement to eliminate the flat fee of $86 if one inspection remains. It should replace it with verbiage "or the current inspection rate per the most recently adopted fee schedule if only one inspection is needed".	Medium	Q4 2023
52	The City should either expand its refund policy from Building Plan Reviews and Permits to include Planning Applications, and other development-related activities or develop separate refund policies for those fees.	Medium	Q4 2023
53	The City should review all policies and procedures every three years to incorporate any operational changes, and a last reviewed date should be added to the policy documentation to document the last time the policy was reviewed and updated.	High	Q4 2024
54	The City should develop a Deferred Building Revenue policy to account for large projects that start in one year but finish in future fiscal years. Monies should be set aside to cover the costs of inspection in subsequent fiscal years.	High	Q4 2024
55	The Development Services Department should set up a procedure to conduct semi-annual (twice a year) audits of its Planning and Building Fees. A handful of applications and permits should be reviewed to ensure all appropriate fees were charged and assessed.	High	Q4 2024

The following chapters provide the details of the analysis and findings that support each of the recommendations.

2. Management and Oversight

Richland's development-related operations are predominantly centered in the Development Services (Building and Planning) and Public Works departments. Other departments and agencies, including the Fire Department and Energy Services, are also involved in some elements of plan review, inspections, and certificate of occupancy issuance. In addition, there is a contracted Hearing Examiner who conducts hearings and hears appeals. The City has a Board of Adjustment, which makes decisions on special use permits, and a Planning Commission which is responsible for recommending changes to the City development regulations.

1. Greater oversight and accountability is needed in the development review process.

Permitting processes necessarily involve a number of different disciplines and areas of expertise, and there are many different ways that these disciplines can be organized in the delivery of development services. Some communities choose a highly centralized model with all or most review disciplines in a single department. Other communities are decentralized with reviewers and inspectors in different departments participating in the process. In practice, neither of these models is right or wrong and either can operate in a way that delivers good customer service – or fails to do so.

Richland has a partially centralized model, with Planning and Building under the Development Services department, Public Works overseeing most issues related to infrastructure, and the Fire Department responsible for fire prevention and fire safety. In order to ensure consistent, efficient, and predictable processes, the City needs to build bridges between review disciplines and divisions. In addition, there needs to be top-down accountability for the process as well as the outcomes.

To address the issue of "silos" within the review process, the City should establish a cross-functional management team (Development Review Oversight Committee) to oversee the overall permitting, inspections, and project close-out process. Initially, this group would also be responsible for ensuring that the recommended workplan of improvements laid out in this report are implemented. Beyond that, the group would monitor the permitting process on an ongoing basis, troubleshoot issues, and address these issues as they arise.

The committee should review performance monthly and track progress on implementation of improvements in process, technology, customer service, and public information/education. The committee should report regularly to the Deputy City Manager and City Manager on progress being made and on current performance, including noting issues that may be negatively affecting performance so that these can be addressed.

This committee would be comprised of the following:

- Development Services Director
- Planning Manager
- Building Official
- Public Works Director
- Transportation and Development Manager
- Assistant Fire Marshal

This group would also be used as a “rapid response” team to address concerns and complaints from applicants in cases where the issues cross disciplines or cannot be easily addressed by a single manager.

To address applications in a way that cuts across functions, it is also recommended that the City establish a Development Review Committee that ensures that the City speaks with one voice when communicating with applicants. This committee would include all reviewers across the City who are invited to pre-application meetings and are routed plans for review. Additional details about the role of this group will be discussed in Chapter 3 Process Evaluation and Improvements.

The Development Services Director position focuses largely on troubleshooting when issues arise and on addressing specific, project related issues. However, this role currently has minimal involvement in either monitoring or addressing customer service, efficiency, or consistency in the Planning or Building review process (except in a troubleshooting role), although the Director is nominally in charge of both. This director’s role, job description, and job expectations should be revised to create greater accountability over the permitting processes that originate within that department, as well as reporting expectations related to performance.

While the Department of Public Works Director has a much broader portfolio than permitting and development, this position should also have accountability over the speed and efficiency of the review and management of Right of Way permits and (which originate in the department) and the portions of other processes (Planning, Building) in which DPW plays a part. Enhanced accountability over applications received and processed by Public Works is critical to ensuring a predictable and customer friendly approach to customer service.

While creating accountability across departments is not easy, many municipalities – even those with highly decentralized development review structures – have successfully used interdepartmental committees and agreements between departments to effectively create accountability.

Recommendation #1: **Create a cross-departmental oversight committee with responsibility for overseeing performance of the development review process and for implementing process improvements.**

Recommendation #2: **Establish a Development Review Committee consisting of all reviewers who typically attend pre-application meetings. This group would work across departmental lines to ensure that the city speaks with one voice when responding to comments and questions from applicants – from pre-application through project close-out.**

Recommendation #3: **Revise the Development Services Director's role, job description, and job expectations to create greater accountability for the speed and efficiency of the permitting processes that originate within that department.**

Recommendation #4: **Revise expectations for the Public Works Director to also include those related to the timeliness and efficiency of the development review process for Right of Way permits and other DPW plan review.**

2. All development review entities should be operating under a single mission.

A key element of effective and efficient development review is a common sense of mission across all review disciplines, whether they are in one department or multiple departments. Creating and communicating such a mission is always challenging within the development review profession because the processes involved cross a number of complex technical areas, aimed at ensuring appropriate development, protecting the environment, maintaining strong infrastructure, and ensuring public safety. The process also can be seen to have multiple "customers" – current and future residents of the city, elected and appointed officials, developers, builders, residents, and others.

Interviews with staff in Richland and feedback from employees indicate that staff believe strongly in the mission of their specific technical specialty (for example, ensuring appropriate land uses, protecting the built environment, and ensuring that connections with city infrastructure are of appropriate quality.).

Management should work with development staff across departments to help ensure that there is an overarching sense of purpose that includes both their specific technical area (e.g., appropriate land use, environmental protection, fire safety, structural integrity) and their role in ensuring that the overall development review process works well. It is also important that this message – the need for both quality and customer service, and the fact that these need not be mutually exclusive – be echoed at the highest levels of the City.

Below is a sample mission statement that was adopted in another community and which served to effectively communicate a unified inter-departmental sense of mission:

Model Development Services Mission

"The mission of the Development Services Department (DSD) is to facilitate appropriate and timely development; deliver a process that is predictable, efficient and understandable to the people who use it; act as a single organization – "One City" – in the delivery of development services; and to protect the quality of public and private infrastructure, the safety and integrity of the built and natural environment, and the livability of the city."

Source: Bellevue, Washington

Important to note in the above sample Mission Statement is the term "one-city." Permit applicants know that there are different experts reviewing different elements of their application, but in the end, most assume that each reviewer is speaking for the City overall. Employees should be aware that while they may focus on a specific technical area, the City should speak with one consistent voice when preparing reports, reviewing and commenting on plans, and inspecting projects. If there are conflicts in the comments between two disciplines (for example, fire and traffic) it is the City's job to reconcile these, not the applicant's responsibility nor the decision makers' such as the Hearings Examiner. A unified mission is important for all staff, especially those who are involved in the development process as a secondary function to their primary duties (e.g., Construction Inspectors under the capital improvement program in Public Works).

Recommendation #5: **Create and implement a unifying mission for all development and permitting functions and seek buy-in to this mission from elected officials and City management.**

3. Performance targets and reports should be implemented.

In order to properly oversee the permitting process across departments, it is critical that target timelines for reviews be established and enforced across departments, and that they be tracked centrally. Currently the approach to establishing deadlines is inconsistent across departments and divisions and is summarized in the following sections:

Planning

In the City's adopted ordinance there are performance timeline related to planning applications. This includes a 28-day completeness review, the applicant having 90 days to resubmit, and a 14-day turnaround on resubmittals. Planning division staff state that their deadlines are in accordance with both state codes (RCW 36.70b), and / or the city code, but they do not produce a performance report. Status on specific applications is tracked using a white board in the Planning Manager's office, and each planner keeps a list of items and deadlines. In addition, each Planning application folder includes status sheets. Interim deadlines are communicated to other departments (e.g., Fire, DPW) on a project-by-project basis.

It is both common and good practice for Planning organizations to have internal timelines and to track and report on them regularly. These timelines should be tracked and reported internally and where appropriate shared with the public.

DPW

DPW has established deadlines for initial reviews and re-reviews: 20 business day turnaround for the first review and 10-day turnaround for the first resubmittal. The re-review threshold for the second and subsequent resubmittals is 25 days– with the goal of discouraging applicants from responding only partially to comments. Under Section 3 of this report, we will recommend alternatives to this approach that will appear less punitive to applicants who are struggling with providing re-submittals that are responsive to the department's comments.

The department does track performance against targets using an internal Excel spreadsheet which is reviewed periodically within the department, but not reported publicly.

Building and Fire

Currently, the Building division and Fire Department do follow the model of inter- and intra-departmental review timelines, with targets for initial and re-review of permit applications that set expectations not only for Building reviewers but also for others who are required to review Building applications.

Deadlines are communicated to reviewers using Outlook; as a result, there is no centralized tracking of actual timeline performance. However, in interviews, staff, managers, and stakeholders indicated that deadlines are "usually" met.

An initial product of the Development Review Oversight Committee should be target timelines for <u>all</u> permit types, in Planning, DPW, Building, and Fire, as well as interdepartmental commitments to meet these timelines. Below is an example of how such commitments and reporting can be structured.

Adopted Timeline and Performance Reporting Example

Planning Applications				
	Reviewed by:	**Completeness Review:**	**Initial Review**	**Re-Review**
Administrative Sign Permit	Planning	5 days	10 days	5 days
SEPA Threshold Determination	Planning DPW Building Fire Energy Services	10 days	Internal: 30 days	20 days
Site Plan Review	Planning DPW Building Fire Energy Services	5 days	20 days	10 days
Short Plat	Planning DPW Building Fire Energy Services	5 days	10 days	8 days
Variance	Planning DPW Building Fire Energy Services	5 days	20 days	10 days
Zone Change	Planning DPW Building	5 days	20 days	10 days
DPW Applications				
	Reviewed by:	**Completeness Review:**	**Initial Review**	**Re-Review**
Residential Infrastructure	DPW	1 day	1 day	1 day
Utility / Road Cut (Simple)	DPW	1 day	1 day	1 day
Utility / Road Cut (Complex)	DPW Fire	1 days	5 days	5 days
Commercial – No Public Infrastructure	DPW Building Planning	1 days	10 days	5 days
ROW Public Infrastructure – Subdivision; Large Commercial	DPW Building Planning		10 days	5 days

Ideally, the City's permit tracking software should include the ability to automatically produce reports that track actual performance against targets. However, this is beyond the capabilities of the current system, and focusing on performance is a high priority for the City. Therefore, it is recommended that a central spreadsheet be created, that can be maintained by permit techs in Building and Planning and by administrative staff in DPW.

For Planning permits, a spreadsheet entry should be created at the time of permit submittal, and dates entered for key milestones. This could be done at the same time that entries are made in writing on project folders. While staffing capacity is tight, once established, maintaining this information should not require significant effort or time.

Performance should be reviewed monthly by managers of each function, and regularly by the oversight committee. Based on actual versus target timelines managers should examine options to address any shortfalls. Options include:

- Streamlining processes or simplifying reviews,
- Adding resources (staff or contracted), or
- Changing the performance expectations if unrealistic.

Recommendation #6: **Establish target timeline for all application types with both internal and external deadlines.**

Recommendation #7: **As an interim measure until tracking can be automated in the permitting software, track progress against target timelines using a spreadsheet. There should be a single spreadsheet on a shared drive that provides data for all Planning, DPW, Building, and Fire applications and permits.**

Recommendation #8: **As part of the implementation of new permitting software, ensure that the system produces regular reports that can measure performance against targets for all application and permit types.**

4. The role of the Permit Technicians should be modified.

Permit Techs are an important resource in providing the "big picture" of the permitting process to applicants. They also have strong relationships with all review agencies and departments as the central point of contract in distributing application, plans, and collecting and consolidating comments.

While it is sometimes beneficial for permit techs to specialize in one area (e.g., the current planning tech does a lot of management for public meetings and public noticing), it is also beneficial for permit techs to be cross-trained and managed centrally. This approach helps ensure that the techs have complete information about how each department and division operates, what their requirements are, and how best to communicate these requirements to applicants.

Currently, Permit Techs can call on DPW staff if a question comes up regarding engineering requirements, but the Right of Way process is not managed or directed by a permit tech, and both staff and permit applicants indicate that there are issues with communication between applicants and DPW, especially during the Certificate of Occupancy process.

To overcome some of these operational challenges and to better utilize staff, it is important for all Permit Techs to be cross trained on building, planning, and engineering application processes and their general requirements.

These changes will require a revision to the current approach of having separate Planning and Building Permit Technicians. All Permit Technicians should be fully cross-trained and process all development review applications. Also, Permit Technicians may specialize in one of the review disciplines more than others and focus on supporting that team, but they should rotate consistently to ensure they retain the skill set and knowledge to process all application types and assist customers. The City should continue to support staff's professional development including encouraging ICC certifications for all Permit Technicians.

Recommendation #9: **Centralize permit tech management under a lead tech and expand their portfolio to include assisting with DPW permits, inspections, and occupancy requirements.**

Recommendation #10: **Cross-train all Permit Technicians for the intake, processing, and permit issuance for all three review disciplines.**

5. Improving staff morale and addressing high turnover should be a priority.

Information volunteered by staff and managers in individual and group interviews, during Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat analyses with departments, and even with stakeholders indicated concerns about low morale within the Development Services Department. The Department has also experienced significant staff turnover within the last year including the departure of two Building Officials, their senior Plans Examiner, and two Permit Techs. Some stakeholders also expressed concern that well-qualified employees who had not left the department were actively seeking to find work elsewhere.

The following are actions that should help address these morale issues and that are recommended for any organization that undertakes a regulatory function. These should be implemented within DSD, DPW, Energy Services, and the Fire Department.

- In conjunction with developing a cross-functional mission statement, communicate a clear recognition that the technical work staff do is critical to the city's safe and appropriate development, and that this work is valued.

- Assure staff that customer service goals should never undermine the quality of the review done by staff or the quality of development in the city.

- Focus and evaluate staff on customer service, speed, and efficiency (as well as technical skills) but avoid political interference in the substance of decisions made by staff.

- Involve staff at all levels in the efforts outlined in this report to improve the development review and permitting process.

- Conduct 360 reviews of managers that take into consideration their leadership and management skills as perceived by their staff, staff in other departments, and their peers.

- Regularly survey staff on issues related to morale. Specific topics that can be surveyed include:
  - I believe the mission of my work is important.
  - I have the resources I need to do my job effectively.
  - I have received positive feedback on my work in the past month.
  - My manager supports me even if I make mistakes.
  - I feel empowered to take risks.

- Provide management and leadership training to all supervisory personnel.

Implementation of these changes will help improve the culture of the organization, improve accountability, and provide effective leadership and oversight of the development review functions.

Recommendation #11: **Implement changes to track and improve employee morale across all development review functions.**

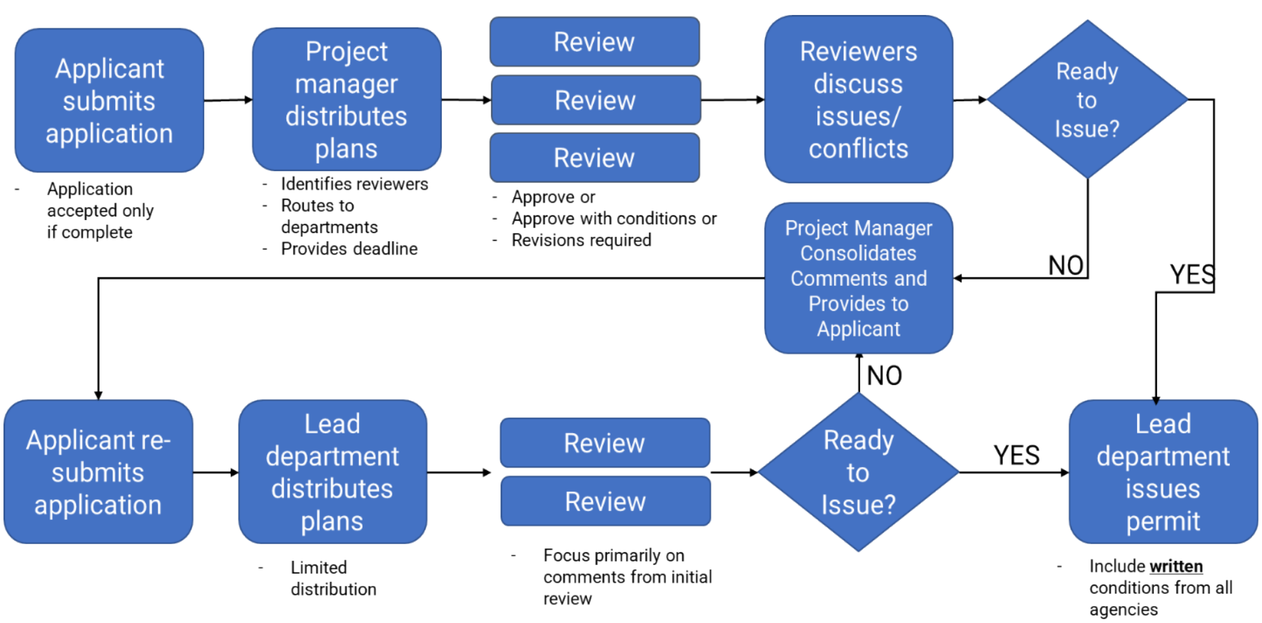
3. Process Evaluation and Improvements

This chapter evaluates the City's current development review, permitting, and inspection practices and identifies specific improvement opportunities.

1. Overview of current development practices.

The permitting process should be designed in a way that allows for a predictable, consistent approach with the city speaking in a single voice even when reflecting input from a number of different review disciplines (e.g., building, fire, traffic, utilities, stormwater, planning). A "best practice" approach, outlined below, should generally be followed by all divisions, although the complexity may be greater (for example, if public hearings are involved) or less (for example, a permit that requires only one reviewer).

For each permit type, one department or division acts as a single point of contact to ensure that critical issues across the organization are addressed. For example, Planning consolidates input from Fire, DPW, and others and ensures that approvals and conditions of approval reflect this input. Building similarly is responsible for ensuring that fire, zoning, and occasionally other requirements are addressed before the building permit is issued. Conflicts between comments or perspectives are resolved by Permit Techs before comments are provided to applicants.



Pre-Application

Richland's pre-application process is required for all Type II, III, and IV planning applications (although it may be waived by the administrator if staff and the applicant agree that a meeting is unnecessary. The meeting is optional but encouraged for some complex Right of Way and Building applications. The meeting is provided at no cost and brings together major disciplines (building, planning, energy services, fire, traffic, utilities, etc.) to provide preliminary input into a potential project.

Applicants are required to provide a preliminary site plan and vicinity map, and preliminary building elevations and floor plans if applicable. Applicants may request generic information at the end of the meeting (application requirements, permit processing procedures, codes and development standards, design guidelines). However, they are not provided specific written comments related to their project.

Planning Application Management

Under the Richland development code, there are four major types of applications (generally from simplest to most complex), with Type I being decided by the Planning Manager and Types II-IV going to the Hearing Examiner, Board of Adjustment, or City Council depending on the nature of the application. As noted earlier, pre-application meetings are available for all application types and required for some types. Applications go through a completeness review, and then are distributed to other departments and divisions for review. Comments from other reviewers are used in the development of a staff report. If the project requires approval from the Hearing Examiner, Planning Commission, and/or City Council, the information in the staff report is used to inform the resulting public hearings and decision-makers.

According to the flow charts developed in preparation to Richland's transition to Energov, most planning applications, once accepted as complete, appear to be either approved with conditions or denied, without a more traditional staff "feedback loop" during which the applicant can receive a first round of comments and revise the application before it goes to the decision-maker or to public hearing. However, a review of letters from the Planning division to applicants indicates that in practice, the Planning division does send comments and correction items to applicants for at least some applications. However, this approach is not consistent for all planning applications.

DPW Permits

Public Works is a reviewer on Planning and Building applications, and also issues Right of Way permits, which vary widely in complexity from those for stormwater and erosion control on single-family properties to large, complex commercial projects and residential subdivisions.

Pre-application meetings are offered for Right of Way projects. Most Right of Way permits are reviewed by multiple reviewers, including different disciplines within the DPW and engineering (traffic, stormwater, utilities, etc.). The department provides a set of consolidated comments to applicants, who re-submit based on the comments provided. DPW only reviews pages on which corrections or changes have been made, and only charges review fees for those pages requiring a re-review. While some stakeholders claimed that second and third reviews often included "new" comments, this claim is inconsistent with the DPW's clear policy of only reviewing pages on which changes have been made.

DPW staff are routed planning and building applications for their review. These applications are routed through email directly to staff. Comments are provided to the respective discipline via email.

Fire Permits

Fire is a reviewer on commercial building permit plans and issues separate permits related to building permits (for example, for fire suppression and sprinkler systems). All permit applications (including fire-only permits) are submitted through building and taken in by the permit techs within the building division. Plans that require Fire review are routed electronically to the Fire department using the BlueBeam software system. Fire-related inspections are also logged through BlueBeam.

Building Permits

The Building permitting process is coordinated by the building Permit Tech staff, who receive applications electronically, check them for completeness, and then route them electronically to Planning, Fire, DPW, and other agencies as needed. As part of this process each reviewer is given a deadline by which to return the application and the Permit Tech has two days to consolidate comments and provide them to the applicant. Comments from reviewers are combined into a consolidated comment letter provided to the applicant. Upon re-submittal, applications are re-routed to reviewers who had comments.

1. The Preapplication process should be modified to increase effectiveness.

The approach communities use on pre-applications meetings varies widely in terms of:

- The level of information required from the applicant,

- Whether there is a fee or not for the meeting,
- Whether the meeting is required, strongly urged, or suggested (and if so, for what types of application),
- The level of feedback provided by municipal staff during and after the meeting, and
- Whether written comments are provided.

The model used by Richland's Planning division has some strengths which should be maintained.

- The City does not require detailed, fully engineered drawings at the pre-application phase but instead requires a preliminary site plan and vicinity map which is adequate to allow staff to provide initial feedback and is not costly for the applicant to prepare.
- All potential reviewers, across multiple agencies, are invited to participate in the meetings.
- Documentation from the applicant may be submitted electronically and is provided ahead of time for staff review.

However, the process can be improved to be more efficient for staff and meaningful for applicants. Below is a list of recommended improvements.

- A single process and submittal form should be used for all pre-application meetings, whether these are for Planning, Right of Way (DPW), or Building applications.
- A virtual meeting should be scheduled with the potential applicant immediately to discuss the concept. This meeting should be held within one to two weeks of receiving the application. The current timeline is six weeks and this proposed timeline may require additional resources to fully implement.
- To simplify scheduling, Richland should consider creating specific time blocks for the pre-application meetings, and hold them back-to-back, with time blocks of 20-30 minutes per project depending on the complexity of the project.
- Reviewers should be required to conduct a brief review of the plans prior to the pre-application meeting in order to maximize the quality of the feedback that they can provide.
- Upon conclusion of the pre-application meeting, each reviewer should provide basic comments to the planning tech (or entered into the permitting software system once implemented) within one business day.
- Comments should be consolidated into a single communication (electronic through software system or by e-mail) to the applicant that lists basic feedback on

any major issues identified by the project. Standard requirements should be shared with the applicant at this time as well.

Stakeholders who had participated in previous pre-application meetings indicated a strong preference for in-person meetings. While this approach does help build bridges between applicants and reviewers, it can require more time if the meetings are not strictly scheduled and all adherents are held to these schedules (e.g., XY plan will be discussed from 10:30-10:25, with the applicant vacating the room in time for AB plan to be discussed at 10:30.)

Richland staff are reluctant to put comments in writing at the pre-application phase, but, phrased correctly, these can provide valuable feedback to the applicant without committing the City to any decisions that require additional information. The comments should note that these are preliminary and not based on a complete review and that additional issues may arise later once a more complete submittal is received and analyzed.

While this approach may appear more onerous, the submittal and review of basic information ahead of time should help focus the meeting, reducing the time required to discuss the project in the meeting. In general, 30 minutes of discussion with a written follow-up should be adequate.

Recommendation #12: **Revise the pre-application process to require a submittal of basic information about the project in advance of the meeting, require advanced review of this information by staff, and provide written comments after the meeting is concluded.**

2. Planning processes should formalize the feedback loop step in plans review.

As noted above, Planning does not have a formal process for completing a round of review and submitting a list of consolidated corrections to the applicant for revision, although they do appear to do this sparingly in practice. It is recommended that this process be formalized, so that the applicant can expect one opportunity to revise their application before a decision is made, especially for applications that are going to a public meeting/hearing. This allows the applicant to address issues that otherwise would need to be addressed through approval conditions, a much more complex approach.

As part of this change, Planning should also formally track the number of times a project must be resubmitted before a final approval or public hearing. The goal should be to ensure that the initial round of comments is complete enough that the re-submittal can proceed to decision, and the tracking should allow Planning to identify and report on how many resubmittals have been required for a project.

Recommendation #13: Standardized the approach to providing comments on Planning applications, to include providing comments prior to the application going to public meeting/hearing.

3. A Development Review Committee should be implemented.

Planning does not currently use a Development Review Committee (DRC) or Technical Review Committee process to review and reconcile comments. A Development Review Committee provides an opportunity to ensure that input from all reviewers and disciplines is received and processed, that potential conflicts between comments are resolved, and that coming out of the DRC the City is speaking with one voice.

The DRC meeting should be on a consistent day or time and can be held virtually or in person. Such an approach allows the plans being discussed to be displayed on a screen, which is viewed by all, while comments are discussed.

Below are successful elements of an effective DRC process:

- One individual manages the DRC agenda, including invitations. Invitations are sent to all entities who are part of the plan review. This can be conducted by a Permit Technician.
- Reviewers should send their comments to the project manager (or attach to the application in the permitting system when applicable) prior to the DRC meeting. They must indicate in writing if they have no comments, and if they do have comments, must either attend the meeting or delegate attendance to someone else to ensure their issues are discussed.
- The agenda should be organized from most complex projects to least complex projects. That allows reviewers who are not involved in simple projects to only participate in the portion of the meeting relevant to them.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, the application project manager prepares a consolidated set of comments that addresses all outstanding comments, ensuring that none contradict each other.

Cities differ on whether they prefer to include clients in the DRC meeting. It appears more typical in Washington that clients participate in these meetings (see https://www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/departments/community-development/permitting-building/development-review). However, for Richland we recommend that these initially be established as staff-only meetings so that staff can compare notes and identify outstanding issues before communicating with the applicant.

Recommendation #14: Use an internal Development Review Committee to review and discuss complex or controversial applications.

4. Modify the Resubmittal Process and the Public Works Resubmittal Timeframes.

For Planning, Right of Way, Fire, and Building applications, managers should track the number of times a project application is re-submitted and put in place mechanisms to limit multiple resubmissions. The following practices are important to limit the number of times a project is re-submitted:

- Once an application is accepted as complete, it should be fully reviewed by all potential disciplines, so that issues are not identified later that could have been brought up upon initial review.
- Establish an explicit policy that limits reviews of revised applications primarily to issues identified during the initial review, unless changes made by the applicant trigger new issues or in the case of serious code violations that were inadvertently overlooked on the first review.
- Only accept resubmittals if the applicant affirms that all comments have been addressed.
- If a third resubmittal is required (for any project), the applicant should be required to participate in a mandatory meeting with all relevant review staff.
- Consider charging a fee for resubmittal for each review after the second review if the need for additional resubmittals is due to ongoing omissions by the applicant.

It is important to note that some of these practices are currently in place in Richland for some application types; however, they are not policy across all development review disciplines.

As discussed in Chapter 2, DPW’s current approach of increasing the timeline to 25 days for 3rd reviews is unpopular with applicants, who believe they are being unfairly penalized in cases of highly complex projects or projects where new comments were introduced in the second review. Because of this, it is recommended that DPW’s target review timelines be the same for 2nd and 3rd reviews but use the measures above to discourage incomplete responses to comments.

Recommendation #15: **Implement policies changes to ensure comprehensive initial plan reviews, and to avoid multiple re-submittals associated with the same application.**

Recommendation #16: **Public Works review timelines for second and third reviews should be the same.**

5. Project Managers should review consolidated comment letters for consistency, coherency, and to address any conflicts before they are distributed to applicants.

Both stakeholders and Richland staff members cited instances where comments provided back to the applicant included contradictions across disciplines or required the applicant to obtain approvals from other departments (where such approvals had already been provided). This can be avoided by using the DRC process (for larger projects) where comments are discussed collectively and then compiled by the project manager. Also, by having a project manager with subject matter expertise (rather than a permit tech) review comment letters and reach out to reviewers if any contradictions are identified.

For Building permit applications, the issue of inconsistent comments seems to stem largely from recent turnover in the Building Official position and from the use of contract reviewers who lack relationships with Planning, Fire, and DPW. Most recently, the interim Building Official has been working more closely with the contract plans reviewers to address this issue. While the division navigates staff turnover and staffing shortages, the Building Official should continue to play this role.

For DPW applications, claims regarding inconsistencies in review were mostly anecdotal, and may not be accurate. However, this claim should be addressed by DPW and if valid resolved through an explicit policy that review comments should be provided to the applicant only once all reviews have been completed and then reviewed by a manager/engineer.

The department or division responsible for issuing the permit or facilitating the application review should have their primary reviewer serve as the application project manager. This approach will require the primary reviewer to review all review discipline comments prior to issuing the comment letter.

Recommendation #17: **Prior to consolidated application comments being sent to an applicant, these comments should be reviewed by the application's project manager to ensure that there is consistency across comments.**

6. The Solar Array process should be modified.

While streamlining the permitting process for solar arrays is a high priority for many jurisdictions, this process still typically originates with a Building department, even if there is an electrical utility (as in Richland) involved. In contrast, in Richland, some projects are brought in as part of a larger building permit (e.g., new construction with solar) and are submitted to building and others are brought in as stand-alone permits and are e-mailed directly to Energy Services.

There are a number of issues with the current approach:

- Applications submitted directly to Energy Services are not tracked as part of the permit tracking system.

- Energy Services does not have the skills to review "retrofits" to ensure that the structure they are being placed on has the integrity to hold the system, and that it doesn't compromise access for firefighters or emergency personnel.

- Unless part of a larger building permit, the installations are not inspected by the City to ensure that what was approved is the same as what was built.

By moving the submittal of solar array applications to Building, it will centralize all vertical construction applications through a single department/portal, better ensure all appropriate disciplines review the application, and ensure that all facilities are inspected. The application submittal and permit issuance for solar arrays should be through the Building Division.

Recommendation #18: **Take in all solar projects as building permits through the Building Division with Energy Services as a reviewer on these projects.**

7. The Certificate of Occupancy process should be modified.

The current Certificate of Occupancy process is largely managed by the Permit Techs, and both staff and applicants have indicated that there are a number of communications breakdowns in this process. For example, applicants anticipating a Certificate of Occupancy have had this delayed because of comments provided late in the process by reviewers outside of the Building Division. Because it involves numerous complex requirements and conditions imposed across City agencies, the Certificate of Occupancy process is more traditionally overseen by a building official or assistant building official, who has the technical knowledge to understand what requirements must be satisfied prior to Certificate of Occupancy issuance, and to ensure that these are satisfied in the proper order. While Permit Techs may set up Certificate of Occupancy requirements in the permit tracking software, someone with construction review experience should also be involved to ensure a smooth process.

- An official should review the entire project file to identify any conditions of approval and ensure that they have been met. If necessary, this official should reach out to planning, engineering, and fire with questions to ensure that all are satisfied that the project is complete.

- The Building Official should work with DPW and Energy Services to ensure that all checklist items are clearly communicated to the applicant well in advance of the CO process.
- Where possible, fire, building, and DPW should coordinate their final walk-throughs to ensure that they are properly sequenced.

The ownership of the Certificate of Occupancy process should fall to the Building Official or a designee who is well versed in the requirements prior to issuance. This will enhance the level of service provided to the community, ensure subject matter experts are reviewing permits prior to issuance, and appropriately assigned these duties within the City.

Recommendation #19: **Assign the Building Official to oversee the Certificate of Occupancy process and ensure smooth coordination with other agencies, especially DPW and Energy Services.**

8. The Hearing Examiner process should be clarified.

Richland is similar to other jurisdictions in Washington and utilizes the Hearing Examiner process to for certain planning applications. Per the City code, the Hearing Examiner has 10 days to make a determination after the final Hearing. Both city staff and stakeholders indicated that the timeline for receiving decisions from the Hearing Examiner was unpredictable and longer than desirable. One reason for this unpredictable was related to multiple hearings held for per application, which occurs on a consistent basis. With a lack of clear tracking and reporting on planning application timelines, the project team was unable to review historic records regarding the timelines of services and confirm this is happening frequently.

Recently, as a way to address the timeline of service provided by the Hearing Examiner, the City conducted an RFP process, seeking an additional Hearing Examiner, but did not receive any responsive proposals. The hearing examiner process is strongly supported within the city, as the Hearing Examiner is knowledgeable about land use law and processes, objective, and not subject to political pressure. In fact, some staff would like to expand the Hearing Examiner's portfolio to include items that currently go to the Board of Adjustment. Before this can be considered, the City should work with the Hearing Examiner to find creative ways to make the timing of decisions shorter and more predictable. These could include hiring or contracting with a land use expert who would support the Hearing Examiner in conducting research and writing decisions or revising ordinances to reduce the number of continuances per application. Alternatively, there may be an opportunity to better define the applications are reviewed by the hearing examiner.

The project team was provided with an application matrix that outlines the review disciplines and if the application is reviewed by the Hearing Examiner, Planning Commission, or City Council. This document indicated several application types that sometimes goes to the Hearing Examiner for their review. When applications may go to the Hearing Examiner, it injects greater uncertainty about the overall review process and who ultimately approves the application. The following application types occasionally go to the Hearing Examiner.

- Binding Site Plan
- Critical Areas
- Plat Vacation or Alteration
- Shoreline Substantial Development
- Site Plan Review
- Specific Use Permit
- Subdivision Amendments
- Zone Change

To develop a more predictable process, the City should specifically promote which application types identified in code go to the Hearing Examiner for their decision. For any applications that will be going to City Council for decision, these applications may not need to go to the Hearing Examiner. The criteria for applications that go to Hearing Examiner should be specifically outlined so that this information is easily attainable by the public in order to set expectations for the review process early in the application process.

Recommendation #20: **For the Hearing Examiner process, revise process so that applicants can know when to expect these decisions to be made.**

Recommendation #21: **Specifically promote which application types defined in code always go to the Hearing Examiner for a decision or referral.**

9. Special event permits should be facilitated by Development Services.

The special event permitting process is facilitated by Parks and Recreation. Staff from Development Services and Engineering are not consistently included in the review of special event applications.

Development Services will serve as the City's one stop shop for all development application submittals once the recommendations of this study are implemented. As such, special event applications should also be submitted through Development Services and the online application portal and will be routed to all review entities. This approach will require an additional workflow in the permitting system. Parks and Recreation staff will be a reviewer of the application versus the facilitator.

Recommendation #22: **Transition the intake, routing, and issuance of special event permits to the Development Services Department and require submittal through the permitting software system.**

10. Modify the signature requirements for final plats.

The Final Plat process includes routing the application to City Council for approval of the final plat and accompanying resolution. Upon adopting the resolution, the final plat is be signed by the City Manager and Public Works Director. The signature process varies from the Final Short Plat process which requires the Public Works Director signature only. For greater consistency in both processes, the final signature should be the Public Works Director only. Requiring the City Manager's signature is an additional step which may require additional time to obtain the signature before the plat is completed. By eliminating the need to route the plat to the City Manager for signature will streamline the process.

Also, it was noted that the timeline to get a final plat on a City Council agenda requires at least two additional weeks prior to the actual meeting to have the plat application added to the agenda management system. Plats are placed on the consent agenda because it must be accepted by City Council before they can be approved, and City Council has limited authority to require changes for plats if they meet code requirements

Recommendation #23: **For final plats, modify the requirements where only the Public Works Director signature is required.**

4. Technology Analysis

This chapter evaluates the use of technology in the development process.

1. Overview of Current Technology Systems and Optimal Functionality.

Richland has purchased a software system (Energov) that is considered best in class in the management of permitting processes but has not yet implemented the system. Therefore, most of the recommendations in this chapter relate to ensuring that the system is properly implemented.

Richland also has BlueBeam, which is used for intake and collaborative review of site plans and architectural plans. The following table outlines current technology utilization as well as what systems will be replaced by Energov.

Existing Software	Use	Replaced by EnerGov	Notes
BluePrince	Permit and inspections tracking	Yes	Used to manage intake and routing of permit applications, scheduling of inspections, and posting inspection results. Will be replaced by EnerGov. Used by Development Services, Public Works, Fire, and Energy Services.
iWorq	Code enforcement	Yes	Used to track code enforcement cases.
BlueBeam	Plan markup	No	Used for collaborative review and markup of plans. Currently only a single version is licensed, but will be rolled out broadly to all departments doing plan review.
Outlook	Calendar and task tracking	Partially	Used to track due dates and schedule BluePrince related deadlines. Also used to notify users of tasks. EnerGov will replace these functions
Word	Word processing	Partially	Used to create notices and letters that can be generated automatically in EnerGov.
Excel	Data analysis	Partially	Used to capture and manipulate data manually (not integrated with applications).
Futura GIS	Energy Services	No	Used by Energy Services for GIS, including for planning and permit review.
ESRI / ArcGis	Geographic information	No	Geographic information system used by all departments to verify and track geographical information related to planning and permitting

Existing Software	Use	Replaced by EnerGov	Notes
Seamless forms (GovOS)	On-line forms	Yes	These are used to gather some data for solar applications right now. Should be ultimately replaced by EnerGov.
Paymentus	Payments	Yes	Payment processor for fees
EnerGov	Permit tracking	n/a	Will be used for permit intake, routing, tracking, and issuance.
iG Workforce	Code enforcement	Energov product	Will replace iWorq to track code enforcement cases.
Executive Insights	Reporting and data analysis	Energov product	Will be used to analyze permitting data in EnerGov system.
EnerGov CSS	Citizen self service	Energov product	Is part of the Energov family of systems Citizen self-service portal for submitting applications, making payments, looking up comments and inspection results.

High-performing permitting organizations deploy technology in a way that provides quick and easy access to information for reviewers, inspectors, and staff across all divisions and departments involved in the permitting process. They also allow permit applicants to interact with the process smoothly, and easily access needed information electronically.

The below table outlines how a permit process works with full software deployment.

Best Practices in Permitting Technology Utilization

Process Step	Best Practices
Intake	The applicant submits a full application electronically, including all attachments. Documents that require an engineer or architect stamp or seal are affixed with an electronic stamp or seal. The full record including site plan and supporting documents are either attached or linked to the permit record in the tracking system. Upon acceptance of the application, the applicant can pay initial fees electronically through the permit hub.

Process Step	Best Practices
Distribution and Review	Plans are electronically routed to plans reviewers who mark-up documents on-line. Reviewers of different disciplines can see each-others' comments and mark-ups. Any written comments / reports are electronically attached to the application record. Reviewers can electronically access any permit history on the project, including past permits issued, conditions associated with prior approvals, and special conditions associated with the property.
Comments to Applicant	The applicant is notified via e-mail when comments are available and can follow an electronic link to see comments and (where relevant) marked up plans.
Applicant Resubmittal	The applicant uploads a re-submittal once all comments have been addressed.
Re-Review	Reviewers can go online to compare the re-submittal with the original submittal. All records related to the project and property history can be accessed electronically, avoiding the need to locate / retrieve paper files.
Public Hearings	A copy of the full application packet can be posted on-line as part of the agenda for the meeting where this item is being discussed. Because documents are provided electronically, there is no need to scan paper.
Permit Issuance	The applicant receives a permit or approval letter electronically along with an electronic version of the approved plans and/or any conditions of approval. Approved plans / approval letter is uploaded to the permit tracking system as record of the final issued permit. All conditions of approval are included in the on-line record to be checked prior to project completion / sign off.
Inspections	The applicant can schedule requests electronically and be notified electronically of the scheduled inspection time. Inspectors can retrieve the approved plans electronically and enter inspection results into the record. Results are automatically emailed to the customer.
Final approval / COO	For final project approval and for projects requiring a CO, reviewers can sign off to confirm that all conditions of approval have been met.
Reporting	The system automatically generates management reports and reports for the public that provide meaningful, clear information regarding timelines, workloads, and can be used to compare performance over time.

1. Implement a fully paperless, integrated process across all reviewing entities.

Much of Richland's permitting process is already paperless, which is an exceptional accomplishment given the limited capabilities of the current software program being used. The one major exception is Right of Way permits, which often require multiple paper copies of full-sized plans. This is both cumbersome for the applicant and challenging when multiple reviewers are examining and commenting on these plans.

With the implementation of Energov, accompanied by Bluebeam for plan mark-up, the entire process should become paperless, including plan review. Managers should set an expectation from the beginning that all permit applications will be through Energov and Bluebeam and that mark-ups will be electronic.

In reviewing flow charts related to the software implementations, it was noted that Right of Way permit flow charts were not included. If these have not been created, flow charts should be augmented to include these permit types.

Although some staff indicate that they "prefer" reviewing paper plans, experience in other communities shows that if staff are given adequate hardware and training, they can make the transition to electronic plan review. Electronic review simplifies many aspects of the review process including measuring distances, presenting and reconciling comments from multiple reviewers, and confirming that an applicant has addressed comments in their re-submittal.

In most cases, two computer screens, at least one of which is 27 inches, is adequate for reviewers. However, given the relatively low cost of hardware the City should be flexible in equipping staff so that they are comfortable reviewing plans on screen. For dedicated plan reviewers, the City may also want to purchase digital plan review tables, although these can be expensive and are often not always utilized as much as anticipated. Examples of digital plan review tables are provided at the following links:

https://www.volantidisplays.com/plan-review-tables.html

https://www.rpg.com/product/rpg-planview-plan-table-w-controller/

https://digitaltouchsystems.com/products/touch-screen-drafting-table/

Recommendation #25: **Transition to a fully paperless permitting process, including for Right of Way permits.**

Recommendation #26: **Acquire enough licenses for use of Bluebeam by all reviewers.**

Recommendation #27: **Ensure that staff have the hardware needed to review and mark up plans on a screen or using an electronic plan table.**

2. Energov should be used as a database for all development related activity.

The current permitting software system stores permit and inspection data related to each permit and address/parcel identifier. However, it is not used as a database to store permit application materials for each permit or record. Approved plan sets and other documentation is stored on the City's servers. This approach requires staff to access two different software systems when researching historical development and permitting information. Records for large developments can be complex and difficult to find if not properly indexed and tied to the parcel properly.

Energov is a cloud base platform that has the ability to store documentation directly with the permit record or it can be fully integrated with a document management platform. The City should utilize these features to enhance the availability of historic information and for greater operational efficiencies.

Recommendation #28: **Utilize the permitting software system as a database to store (or link) historic development files/records with the appropriate address or parcel identifiers.**

5. Customer Information and Interaction

This chapter focuses on how the City provides information to and interacts with customers of the development process.

1. Current stakeholder perceptions on the development review and approval process are generally favorable.

Providing applicants with clear information regarding the City's requirements benefits customers by making the project more predictable and helps staff by reducing errors and omissions in permit applications. The stakeholder survey taken as part of this project indicated that the vast majority of applicants believed they had the information that they need to navigate the permitting process, but a small percentage of applicants felt they did not have necessary information.

Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Planning			
I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	69.2%	15.8%	15.0%
I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	71.7%	13.3%	15.0%
Building			
I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	70.4%	17.6%	12.0%
I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	67.6%	17.6%	14.8%
Energy Services			
I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
Fire			
I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	80.6%	6.5%	12.9%
I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	80.6%	6.5%	12.9%

Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Public Works			
I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	55.4%	19.6%	25.0%
I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	63.6%	12.7%	23.6%

While the majority of survey respondents believe they understand the requirements for their applications and the permits required, there is additional opportunity to streamline the development process and improve the consistency between City departments.

2. Permitting information is relatively comprehensive but does not provide an overview of the entire permitting process.

The Richland website has a broad range of information regarding codes, standards, requirements, and processes. This information is disjointed and it is difficult for an applicant to get the "big picture" of how a project would move through the Richland system, from idea through entitlement (planning approval) to construction and issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy. While some applicants may only need to understand a portion of the process (for example, obtaining a Right of Way approval or a Building permit), for many a broader picture of how the different permit processes interact and overlap is important to understanding how to interact with the City.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the process, Richland should create a Development Handbook that provides a more comprehensive view of the process. Preparation of such a handbook is often helpful in clarifying processes, not just for applicants but for staff as well.

Below are some strong examples of development handbooks that could be used as a starting point:

Aurora, Colorado: Aurora Handbook

Campbell River, California: Campbell River Handbook

Boise, Idaho (Planning only): Boise Planning Handbook

Longmont, Colorado: Longmont Handbook

Recommendation #29: **Prepare a comprehensive development handbook that provides clear, user-friendly information on each stage of the development process. Given**

staffing and workload considerations, it is recommended that this be resourced outside of the department, either through a contract or by hiring a communications expert on a contracted basis.

3. All permitting information should be available at a central location on the City's website.

As is common for many city websites, Richland's pages are organized by department and not by function. This can pose a challenge when functions span multiple divisions and departments. Building and Planning are both under the Development Services heading but have different pages. Information regarding DPW requirements, including Right of Way permits and Record Drawing requirements, are found on the Public Works web page but are not intuitive to find.

The following recommendations are made regarding the City's development related webpages:

- Create a centralized development review webpage. Elements on this webpage should include:
  - An overview of the entire development process.
  - Link to the comprehensive development guide.
  - A development review authority matrix.
  - Narrative for responsibilities of the respective departments/divisions involved in the development review process.
  - Link to the City's GIS system and other pertinent maps.
  - Webpage link to the City's adopted ordinances, design standards, and regulations for all disciplines.
  - Central fee information (including a calculator for fees that are not automatically calculated).
  - Performance reports (when available).
  - Frequently asked questions.
- Establish a consistent approach to including application overview information - either within the application PDF or as a separate document. (e.g., flowchart, narrative, or other graphic representation).
- Development staff contact information should be provided on each departmental webpage. Information should include name, title, email address, and phone number.
- Each department's webpage should provide an overview of the processes that it manages.

- Designate an individual staff member from each development review department to maintain their respective webpage.
- Establish a consistent approach to providing development information links on departmental webpages. Include a consistent depth of information on the primary information page and provide links to secondary sources.
- All development webpages should have a link to take the user back to the centralized development webpage.

Incorporating these elements on the City's website will provide greater information to the public and customers. A strong web presence is important for the City as most individuals will begin their research on the City's website prior to contacting the City.

Recommendation #30: **Redesign the City's web site to include an online one stop shop that includes an overview of the development process and links to the various review discipline webpage.**

Recommendation #31: **Expand the type of information regarding about the development process and improve consistency in the type and depth of information provided on each discipline's respective webpage.**

3. Communication with customers should be expanded and improved.

Understanding the permitting and inspections process from the perspective of an applicant is critical to addressing roadblocks to a predictable, efficient process. Collecting regular feedback from applicants and using that feedback when considering how to improve operations, will ensure that time and effort are appropriately allocated.

As part of this study, the consultants conducted a survey to obtain feedback from applicants. Richland should implement an annual stakeholder survey, sending it out to all applicants who obtained a permit or approval in the previous year. This survey should ask consistent questions with the goal of improving scores on a number of these, such as:

- Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.
- I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.
- The City's website had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.
- Submitting my application was efficient.

Some questions asked in this survey, and that should be asked in subsequent surveys, also set expectations for staff:

- Comments and corrections received on my application were clearly based on the city's building code or other clear legal standards.
- After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.

The data on the survey undertaken for this project is provided in Appendix B. A similar annual survey could be undertaken in house with a relatively low level of effort using an on-line survey tool.

Recommendation #32: **Implement an annual customer service survey, the results of which should be used to examine strengths and weaknesses in the permitting processes.**

4. Performance data and report regarding plan review and inspection functions should be developed and posted.

Upon implementation of the Energov system and related reporting capabilities, the City should develop and post public reports that identify the overall timelines for different permit types. This is for the benefit of permit applicants so that they can understand how long a permit typically takes from submission to issuance.

Below are several examples of online reports provided by other agencies as an example of the type of information that should be provided on-line.

Target: city staff strives to issue 80% of permits within two or fewer review cycles (and one abbreviated review, or ASAP) by providing clear comments and guidance to applicants. Since the submittal/review process involves the city and the applicant, city staff do not have full control of this performance metric.

Reporting period	# of permits issued after			% on Target	Total permits (site & subdivision)
	1 review	2 reviews	3+ reviews		
Q3 2022	2	4	8	43%	14
Q2 2022	5	7	11	52%	23
Q1 2022	3	10	9	59%	22
Q4 2021	4	3	7	50%	14
Q3 2021	5	9	7	67%	21
Q2 2021	4	9	3	81%	16
Q1 2021	11	5	6	72%	22
2021	24	26	23	68%	73
2020	7	34	31	57%	72
2019	16	26	20	68%	62

Source: Round Rock, Texas

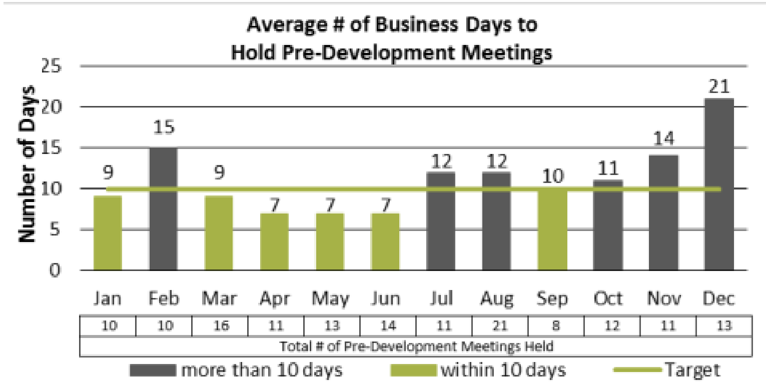
Bellevue
Fast, Predictable One-City
Development Services

Development Services Oversight Reports
Processing Days By Application Type grouped by Activity Type
Completed 8/29/2021 to 8/29/2022
excludes OTC permit types
NOTE: Activity Types were globally changed July 2013.
The obsolete ones will disapper as older applications are completed.

	Repair or Replacement	Total Activity Type Completed	1	Average Days Median Days	48 48	Average Weeks Median Weeks	6.8 6.8
FC	Single Family Fire Sprinklers	Total Completed	163				
	Addition to Existing Structure	Total Activity Type Completed	3	Average Days Median Days	24 10	Average Weeks Median Weeks	3.4 1.4
	New Structure	Total Activity Type Completed	160	Average Days Median Days	19 10	Average Weeks Median Weeks	2.6 1.5
FD	Underground Sprinkler Mains	Total Completed	19				
	New Structure	Total Activity Type Completed	18	Average Days Median Days	119 82	Average Weeks Median Weeks	17.0 11.8
	Repair or Replacement	Total Activity Type Completed	1	Average Days Median Days	29 29	Average Weeks Median Weeks	4.1 4.1
FE	Fire Service Systems	Total Completed	23				
	Building Radio Coverage	Total Activity Type Completed	17	Average Days Median Days	92 43	Average Weeks Median Weeks	13.1 6.2
	Firefighter Air Systems	Total Activity Type Completed	6	Average Days Median Days	250 179	Average Weeks Median Weeks	35.7 25.6

Source: Bellevue, Washington

Pre-Development Meetings



YTD

11

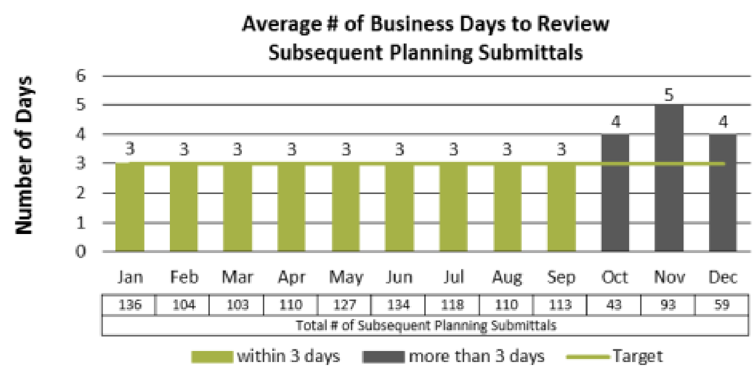
target: 10 days

Plan Review Responsiveness

YTD AVERAGE

9

target: 10 days



YTD AVERAGE

3

target: 3 days

Source: Source: McKinney, Texas

This report should encompass all permit types and review disciplines.

Both reports for the public should be produced by Energov, not manually. While it can be fairly time-consuming to design such reports and set them up in the software system as standardized reports, once they are designed there is much less work involved in reproducing them on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. These reports may be set up to automatically generate and email to specific staff.

Recommendation #33: Once available, include reports showing the City's plan review and inspection performance on the web site.

5. Identify the review disciplines and final decision maker by application on the City's website.

To make the application review process more predictable, it is important to establish customer's expectations early on. One opportunity to provide more information to the customer is by putting an application matrix on the City's development webpage that identifies each review discipline and who ultimately approves or denies the application (e.g., staff, hearing examiner, planning commission, council, etc.). The following is an example of a suitable matrix.

Decision Making Matrix Example

Application Type	Issuing Entity	Building	Planning	Engineering	Fire	Decision Entity
Annexation Petition	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	Council
Building Commercial	Building	✓	✓	✓	✓	Staff
Building Residential	Building	✓	✓	✓	✓	Staff
Demolition	Building	✓				Staff
Factory Assembled Structure	Building	✓	✓	✓	✓	Staff
Final Plat	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	Council
Fire Protection - Commercial	Fire				✓	Staff
Grading	Building	✓	✓	✓	✓	Staff
Lot Line Adjustment	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	PLN Commission
Mechanical	Building	✓				Staff
Planned Unit Development	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	PLN Commission
ROW - Right of Way	Public Works		✓	✓	✓	Staff
Sidewalk Use License	Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	Staff
Variance - Major	Planning		✓			BOA
Zoning Text Amendment	Planning		✓	✓	✓	Council

Recommendation #34: Include a decision-making matrix on the City's development webpage.

6. Staffing

This chapter analyzes the staffing needs for the staff assigned to the development review, permitting, and inspection processes.

1. Analysis of the Planning staffing needs.

Planning is current comprised of a Planning Manager, a Senior Planner, a Planner, and a Planning Permit Technician. Accurately estimating workload requirements for processing of planning applications is challenging because even within one application type the number of hours required to conduct the review can vary significantly. Therefore, the estimated hours required for each application type is used to determine approximate workload hours by application.

The following table lists the number of applications by type for year for 2020 and 2021 and estimates the number of staff hours required to work on these applications.

Planning Application Workload Analysis

Application Type	Avg Staff Hours Per Application	2020 Applications	2021 Applications	Avg Workload / Year	Average Hours/Year
Annexation	60.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	120.0
BLA/Parcel Combination	10.0	24.0	20.0	22.0	220.0
Binding Site Plan	50.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	100.0
Code Amendment	25.0	3.0	20.0	11.5	287.5
Comp Plan Amendment	25.0	3.0	6.0	4.5	112.5
Floodplain	10.0	10.0	2.0	6.0	60.0
Final Plat	30.0	0.0	10.0	5.0	150.0
Land Division Exemption	8.0	4.0	6.0	5.0	40.0
Miscellaneous	20.0	7.0	12.0	9.5	190.0
PUD	40.0	0.0	2.0	1.0	40.0
Plat Amendment	20.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	20.0
Preliminary Plat	40.0	3.0	7.0	5.0	200.0
SEPA	25.0	34.0	43.0	38.5	962.5
Shoreline	25.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	150.0
Short Plat	20.0	8.0	6.0	7.0	140.0
Sidewalk Use	4.0	1.0	8.0	4.5	18.0

Site Plan	20.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	20.0
Special Use	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Variances	20.0	1.0	2.0	1.5	30.0
Zoning Map / Text Amendment	25.0	5.0	8.0	6.5	162.5
Total Workload Hours					**3,023.0**
Workdays Per Year					377.9
Staff Availability (220 Days) Per Year					*220.0*
Staffing Required					**1.7**

Based on this assessment, approximately 1.7 staff are needed to handle the historic planning application workload. However, this calculation is only for planning applications and does not take into account building application reviews, long range planning efforts, and other general work completed by staff (e.g., zoning verification letters, public inquiries, pre-application meetings, etc.).

In addition, one staff member is dedicated primarily to review of building permit applications. The department conducts approximately 1,645 plan reviews per year, of which approximately 75% may require zoning review. If this zoning review takes 1 hour on average (again, the total amount can vary widely), this equals 1,645 hours or 206 working days for review of building permits. Which is equivalent to almost one full time planner position. Based on the total workload for Planning, 2.7 staff are needed to handle the current workload.

Richland has historically expended very little effort on long range planning efforts such as updating the comprehensive plan, leading special projects, conducting public engagement/outreach, revising the adopted code, ordinances, and standards, etc. The addition of one planner position would provide greater flexibility for the existing planning staff, take a portion of the application workload off the manager so they can provide greater administrative/managerial support to the team and department, and provide capacity for greater long range planning efforts. Due to the high-level duties that will be assigned to this position, specifically long-range planning activities, it should be classified as a Senior Planner.

Overall, Planning should be comprised of a Planning Manager, two Senior Planners, and one Planner.

Recommendation #35: **The Planning Division should add one Senior Planner to assist with current planning applications and long range planning efforts.**

2. Analysis of Building Division Staffing.

Richland currently has one building official (interim) and two approved Plans Examiner positions, one of which was vacant at the time of this study. Currently the City is out-sourcing building plans review to NW Code Professionals as it seeks to fill the vacancy. The following table summarizes the historic building plan review workload and staffing analysis.

Building Plan Review Workload Analysis

	2020	2021	Average Workload / Year	Hours Per Review	Total Hours Required
Plan Reviews	1,320	1,803	1,562	2	3,123
Total Workload Hours					**3,123**
Required Workdays Per Year					390
Staff Availability (220 Days) Per Year					220
Total Plans Examiners Required					**1.8**

The current allocation of two Plans Examiners is appropriate to handle the current plan review workload. Alternatively, the City may consider utilizing the Building Official half time for plan review, one internal plan reviewer, and continue to outsource plan review when the workload is higher, and staff are on vacation.

The City has four building inspectors - one Building Inspector II and three Building Inspector I positions. The City commits to providing next day inspections, and currently inspectors conduct between 15 and 20 inspections per day. Inspectors indicate that they will go above this number if required to meet their next day commitment.

The following table summarizes the staffing needs for Building Inspectors assuming 17 inspections conducted per day, with inspectors working 220 days per year.

Building Inspection Workload Analysis

	2020	2021	2020/2021 Average
Building Inspections	14,168	15084	14,626
Avg Number of Inspections per Day by Inspector			17
Required Workdays Per Year			860
Annual Workdays Available per Inspector			220
Inspectors Required			**3.9**

Recommendation #36: **The current allocation of a Building Official, two Plans Examiners, and four Building Inspectors is appropriate.**

3. Many DPW staff are involved in the development process both as a primary and ancillary responsibility.

Public Works staffed involved in the development process, primarily comes from two work groups: Transportation and Development and the Capital Improvement teams. In Transportation and Development, the following positions are engaged with development:

- Manager (approximately 50% of time)
- Traffic Engineer
- Civil Engineer I
- Engineer Technician IV
- Engineer Technician II (2)

The Civil Engineer I, Engineer Tech IV, and one Engineer Tech II positions are physically located in the Permit Center. The other positions are in City Hall but on a separate floor. With the exception of one Engineer Technician II position, this team is primarily involved in the development review and permitting process. The Civil Engineer I position is a newly funded position to focus on increasing the technical skill set and service in the Permit Center and to alleviate some of the review workload for the Traffic Engineer. This position also helped to create redundancy for the team.

In the Capital Improvement Group, there is a Civil Engineer I, three Engineering Technician III, and one Engineering Tech II positions. The Civil Engineer supports development review by conducting stormwater plan review. The Technician positions are responsible for right-of-way and infrastructure inspections. The Capital Improvement Group's primary function is not development related.

The following table summarizes the workload and staffing needs for Engineering.

Engineering Workload Analysis

	Annual Average	Average Workload Per Application	Total Hours
Planning Applications	140	20	2,800
Building Plan Review	1,562	2	3,124
Total Workload Hours			5,924
Required Workdays Per Year			741
Staff Availability (220 Days) Per Year			220
Staffing Required			**3.4**

The current allocation of four total staff (three staff dedicated to the Permit Center and the Traffic Engineer) is appropriate for the current workload. The Traffic Engineer does not provide full time support to the development review process, and therefore rounding up to four total staff is appropriate.

The Engineering staff is highly specialized and their knowledge and skill set, which provides a comprehensive review of applications. Several staff members are long tenured in their role so a key area for the team to address is developing a succession plan for all staff members. This will provide greater staff redundancy and ensure continuality of operations when staff are on vacation or if positions are vacated.

Recommendation #37: **Public Works – Transportation and Development Group should accelerate efforts to build redundancy in all areas of plan review.**

Recommendation #38: **Maintain the current allocation of staffing for the development review staff in the Transportation and Development Group.**

4. The allocation of four Permit Technicians is appropriate but roles and responsibilities need to be modified.

There are a total of four Permit Technician positions current budgeted in Development Services. The positions include a Planning Permit Technician, a Permit Technician II and two Permit Technician I positions in Building. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, there is a need to cross-train Permit Technician positions to facilitate the intake, review, and permit issuance process for Building, Planning, and Engineering applications.

The following table summarizes the Building and Planning workload and staffing analysis for Permit Technicians.

Permit Technician Workload Analysis

	Annual Average	Average Hours Per Application	Total Hours
Planning Applications	140	3	420
Building Plan Review	1,562	1	1,562
Building Permits Issued	2,258	1	2,258
Total Workload Hours			4,240
Workdays Per Year			530
Staff Availability (220 Days) Per Year			220
Staff Total			**2.4**

A total of 2.4 Permit Technicians are needed to process the applications and issue permits. This calculation does not take into account other workload and support these positions provide to staff and the public. The current allocation of three Permit Technician I positions is appropriate.

The Permit Technician II position should be the lead for the Permit Technician team and also serve as the primary permitting software liaison/facilitator. For the implementation and continued use of a permitting software system to be most effective, it is important to have an internal resource overseeing the primary operation of the software system. While the City's IT staff and vendor will be the primary network support for the operation, an internal staff member should be tasked with training staff how to operate the system, identifying challenges and issues with the software system, and working with IT staff to update the workflows (as needed) in the system. The Lead Permit Technician position will also be responsible for updating the development webpage.

Finally, the City should evaluate the employee classification of Permit Technicians to provide greater staff growth and development and advancement opportunities. The need for a Lead Permit Technician has been discussed above and in Chapter 2. However, there is a need to maintain the Permit Technician I and II classifications with modified job descriptions that incorporates cross training. For example, the Permit Technician I classification will serve as the entry level classification and will primary serve only one of the review disciplines initially. As this position gains skills and is trained on all review disciplines, they can promote to a II classification. This will require a modification to the existing classifications to incorporate greater cross training and skill sets needed for both positions. The Permit Technicians I and II will report to the Lead Permit Technician.

Recommendation #39: **A total of four Permit Technician (I & II) positions in Development Services is recommended.**

Recommendation #40: **Incorporate the position of a Lead Permit Technician and have the other Permit Technicians report to this position.**

Recommendation #41: **Revise the Permit Technician employee classification, position descriptions, and hierarchy and incorporate different technical skill sets so staff have advancement opportunities.**

5. The Fire Department's recent study of workload in Fire Prevention should serve as a guide for staffing Fire positions.

The Fire Department conducted a separate staffing and fee study to look at how Fire Prevention should be staffed, managed, and funded in the future. Because Fire Prevention includes elements outside of the development review and permitting process, this more comprehensive report should be a guide in implementing changes in staffing for fire review and inspections. Potential changes include the transition to civilian plans examiners and inspectors.

Recommendation #42: **Move forward with recommendations from prior study related to Fire plan review fees and the hiring of civilian plans examiners to review fire plans.**

7. Financial Review of Development Services

The Richland Development Services Department primarily charges fees for Building Permits and Planning applications. The purpose of our analysis was to review the following components:

- Current Fee Schedule to ensure it is in alignment with surrounding jurisdictions and best practices.
- Cost recovery level based upon existing workload and costs.
- Fire Plan Review fees in support of building and planning applications.
- Financial Policies and Procedures related to development fees.

The following subsections discuss each of these components and provides opportunities for improvement.

1. Fee Schedule and Fee Structure

In regard to the Development Service Fee Schedule and Fee Structure, there were two primary focuses: Alignment with Best Practices and Comparison with Other Surrounding Jurisdictions. The City of Richland identified the following seven jurisdictions in Washington State for comparison: Kennewick, Pasco, Spokane Valley, Walla Walla, Wenatchee, West Richland, and Yakima. The project team then reviewed public documents (i.e., agenda items, staff reports, budgets, fee schedules, and ordinances) and/or contacted jurisdictions to get comparative information.

The project team conducted a survey of how a sampling of the City's current fees compare to other jurisdictions. In order to provide additional context to the comparative survey information, the project team collected key descriptive factors for the jurisdictions included. The factors to consider when comparing fees across multiple jurisdictions are: population, budget, workforce size, and recency of a fee study.[1] The following tables rank each jurisdiction from smallest to largest for each of these factors:

Ranking of Jurisdictions by Population

Jurisdiction	2021 Population
West Richland	16,951
Walla Walla	33,927
Wenatchee	35,405

[1] The comparisons include all operating budgets and associated staff within the jurisdictions.

Jurisdiction	2021 Population
Richland	**61,929**
Pasco	78,871
Kennewick	84,488
Yakima	96,578
Spokane Valley	105,905

Ranking of Jurisdictions by Budget[2]

Jurisdiction	2022 Budget
West Richland	$53,585,698
Spokane Valley	$107,856,818
Wenatchee	$141,036,290
Walla Walla	$155,983,238
Pasco	$174,422,429
Kennewick	$174,950,529
Yakima	$293,669,112
Richland	**$320,657,377**

Ranking of Jurisdictions by Workforce Size

Jurisdiction	2022 FTE
West Richland	77.37
Spokane Valley	101.25
Wenatchee	194.00
Walla Walla	224.00
Pasco	384.85
Kennewick	416.70
Richland	**555.90**
Yakima	782.93

Last Fee Schedule Update

Jurisdiction	Response
Kennewick	2022
Pasco	2021
Spokane Valley	2022
Richland	**2022**
Walla Walla	2010
Wenatchee	2019
West Richland	2022
Yakima	2018

As the tables show, Richland ranks in the middle in terms of population, but on the high end as it relates to budget and staffing. The higher budget and staffing numbers are likely

2

due in part to the fact that Richland provides certain services in-house, including the electric utility. The majority of the surveyed jurisdictions have updated their fees within the last two years. However, three of the surveyed jurisdictions have not updated their fees in the last two years, and Walla Walla has not updated its fees in 12 years. This level of information provides additional context when evaluating the comparative fee structure and amount of fees.

The comparative effort was broken down into two components: structure, and fee amount. When comparing the structure of fees, the focus was based upon evaluating if fees assessed by Richland are either similar to other jurisdictions and / or if they are charged in the same manner (i.e., per square foot, per lot, per valuation, etc.). The following graphic shows by Building and Planning Fees for each major fee category – the City of Richland's structure, whether it is different or similar to the surveyed jurisdictions, and any additional notes:

Fee Structure Comparative Analysis

Fee Category	Richland Fee Structure	Variance from Richland	Key Takeaways
Standard Building Permit Fees	Valuation based with top tier at $1 million.	No	
Plan Review Fees	% of Building Permit Fee	No	
Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing	Itemized Fee Schedule	No	
Annexation	Flat Fee per Request	Yes	4 out of the 7 jurisdictions charge for this service.
Appeals	Tiered Appeal Fees	No	Jurisdictions charge tiered fees based upon the decision body being appealed.
Comprehensive Plan Changes	Flat Fee per Request	No	
Final Plat	Flat Fee	Yes	Pasco is the only city which does not have Planning staff perform these activities. The other 4 jurisdictions charge a base or per lot or just a flat per lot fee that increases based upon number of lots.
Floodplain Permit	Flat Fee	Yes	Only 2 other jurisdictions charge a floodplain permit fee.
Plat Exemption / Lot Line Adj.	Flat Fee	No	

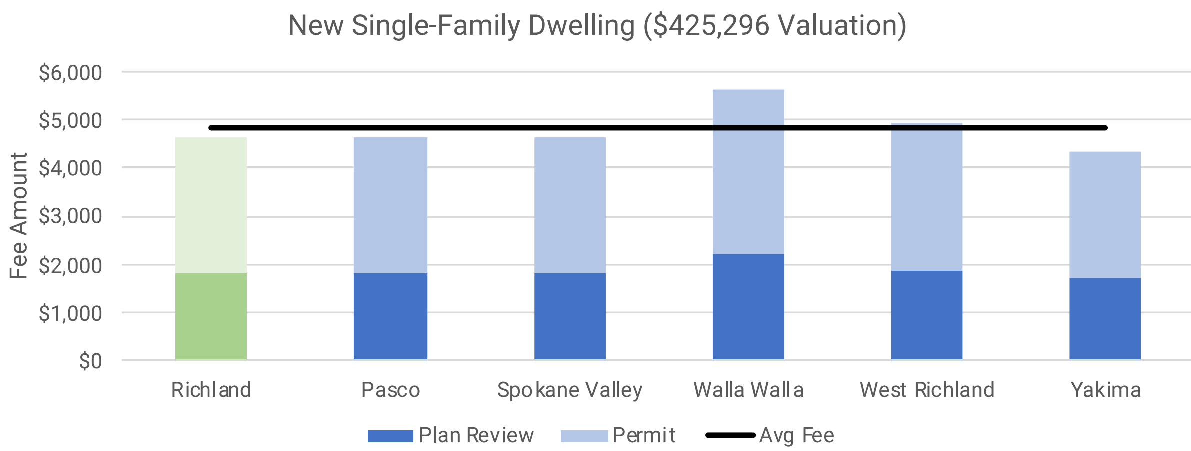
Fee Category	Richland Fee Structure	Variance from Richland	Key Takeaways
Plat Vacation or Alteration	Flat Fee	No	
Preliminary Plat	Per Lot	Yes	3 jurisdictions charge flat fees, and 2 charge a base fee and a per lot fee, rather than simple per lot fee.
SEPA Review	Flat Fee	No	
Shoreline Exemption Letter	Flat Fee	No	Only 2 jurisdictions don't charge for this service.
Shoreline Substantial Development	Flat Fee	No	Only 1 jurisdiction does not charge for this service.
Short Plat	Flat Fee	Yes	3 jurisdictions charge for this service based on a per lot or ranges of lots.
Special Use Permit	Flat Fee	Yes	4 of the surveyed jurisdictions charge for this service.
Variance	Minor and Major	Yes	4 of the 7 surveyed jurisdictions do not distinguish between variance type.
Zone Change	Flat Fee	No	
Zoning Text Amendment	Flat Fee	No	

As the table indicates, the City's current fee structure is generally in alignment with other jurisdictions. For Building Fees, there is no difference as all surveyed jurisdictions are assessing fees based upon similar criteria. There are some opportunities to alter the fee structure such as capturing per lot fees or eliminating the categories of variances. However, as each City has a unique development code, the City's fee structure should mimic the requirements of its ordinances and municipal code.

In addition to conducting a comparison of the fee structure, the project team also developed sample projects and applications to visually demonstrate the difference in fees charged by jurisdictions. The following subsections provide a comparative look at several fee-related services provided by the City versus the surveyed jurisdictions.

1. New Single-Family Dwelling ($425,926 valuation).

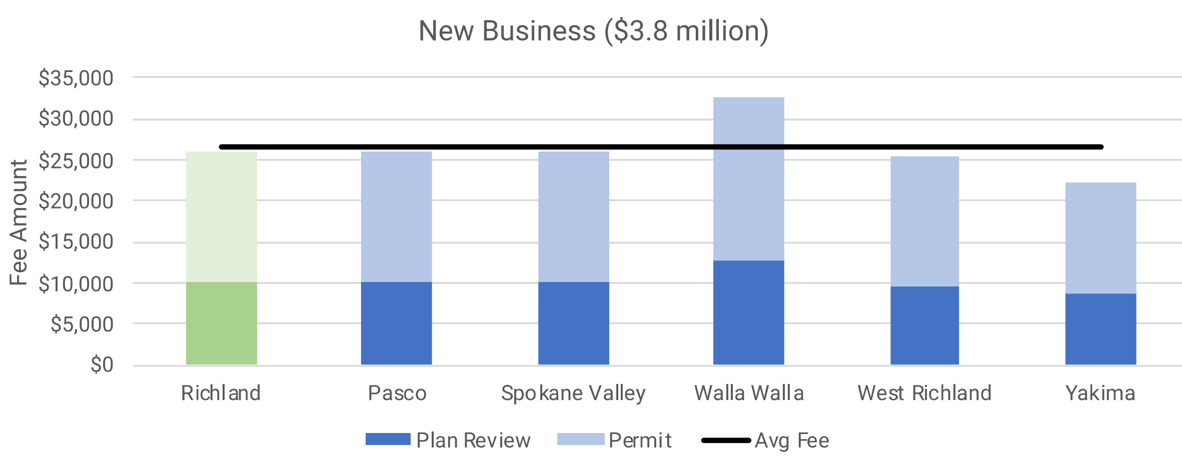
The City of Richland currently assesses building plan review and permit fees of approximately $4,645 for a New Single-Family Dwelling valued at $425,926. The following graph compares how the City's current fees compare to the surveyed jurisdictions.



Of the seven jurisdictions surveyed, two jurisdictions did not have publicly available fee schedules (only permit estimators online for established applicants in the City). Of the remaining five jurisdictions that did have fee schedules available, two others (Pasco and Spokane Valley) charge the exact same fees as Richland. Walla Walla and West Richland charge slightly higher fees, and Yakima charges slightly lower fees. When looking at the average fee ($4,842), the City of Richland is just below the average fee.

2. New Commercial Development ($3.8 million valuation).

The City of Richland currently assesses building plan review and permit fees of approximately $26,088 for a New Commercial Development valued at $3.8 million. The following graph compares how the City's current fees compare to the surveyed jurisdictions.

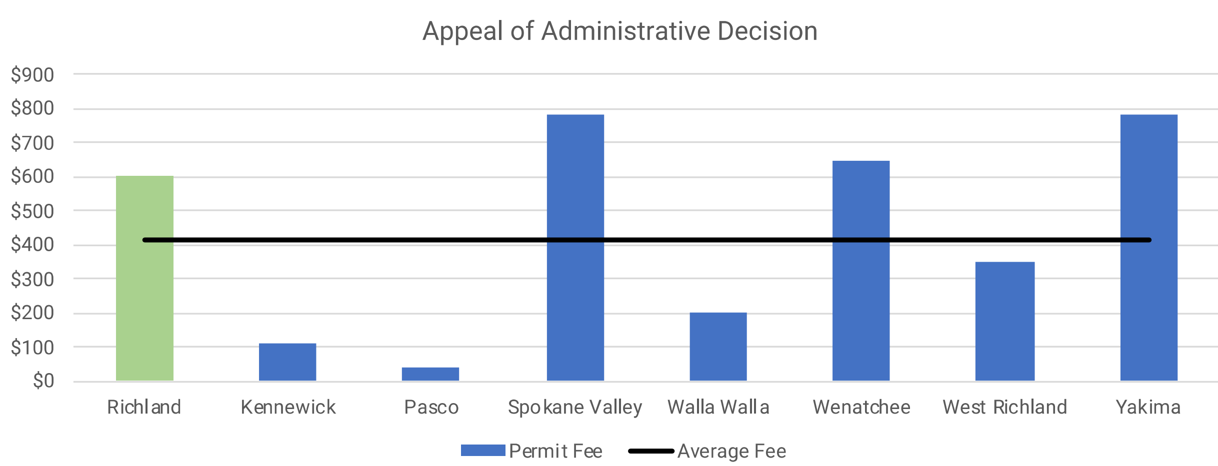


Of the seven jurisdictions surveyed, two jurisdictions did not have publicly available fee schedules (only permit estimators online for established applicants in the City). Of the remaining five jurisdictions that did have fee schedules available, two others (Pasco and

Spokane Valley) charge the exact same fees as Richland. Walla Walla charges slightly higher fees, and West Richland and Yakima charge slightly lower fees. The key difference for West Richland is that it is the only jurisdiction that assess a Plan Review fee at 60% of the building permit, instead of 65% of the building permit. When looking at the average fee ($26,512), the City of Richland at $26,088 is just below the average fee.

3. Appeal of Administrative Decision.

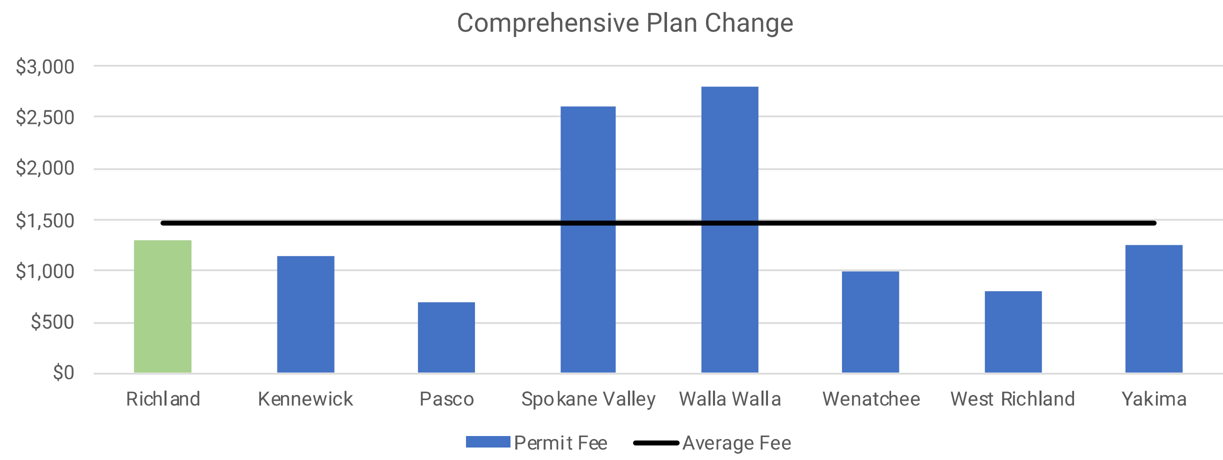
The City of Richland currently charges $600 for an Appeal of an Administrative Decision. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All surveyed jurisdictions charge an appeal fee. The City's current appeal fee ($600) is higher than the average fee of $417. The City of Pasco charges the lowest appeal fee at $43, whereas the cities of Yakima and Spokane Valley charge the highest fee at $780. Appeal fees can require a significant time of effort by City staff; however, appeal fees are commonly subsidized by many jurisdictions, as the intent is to make this affordable for neighbors and residents to appeal projects without it being financially prohibitive.

4. Comprehensive Plan Change.

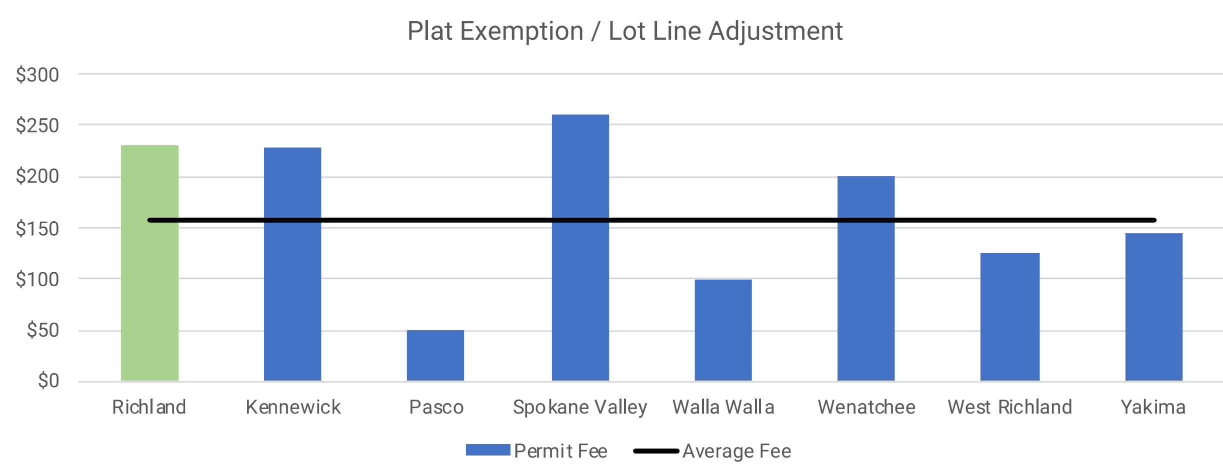
The City of Richland currently charges $1,305 for a Comprehensive Plan Change. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All surveyed jurisdictions charge a fee for Comprehensive Plan Change. The City's current fee ($1,305) is lower than the average fee of $1,471. Spokane Valley and Walla Walla charge the highest fees at $2,600 and $2,810 respectively. Similar to Appeal fees, these comprehensive plan changes can require significant staff time and effort. This comparative analysis indicates that the City has the ability to increase its fees to bring it in alignment with other surrounding and similar jurisdictions.

5. Plat Exemption / Lot Line Adjustment.

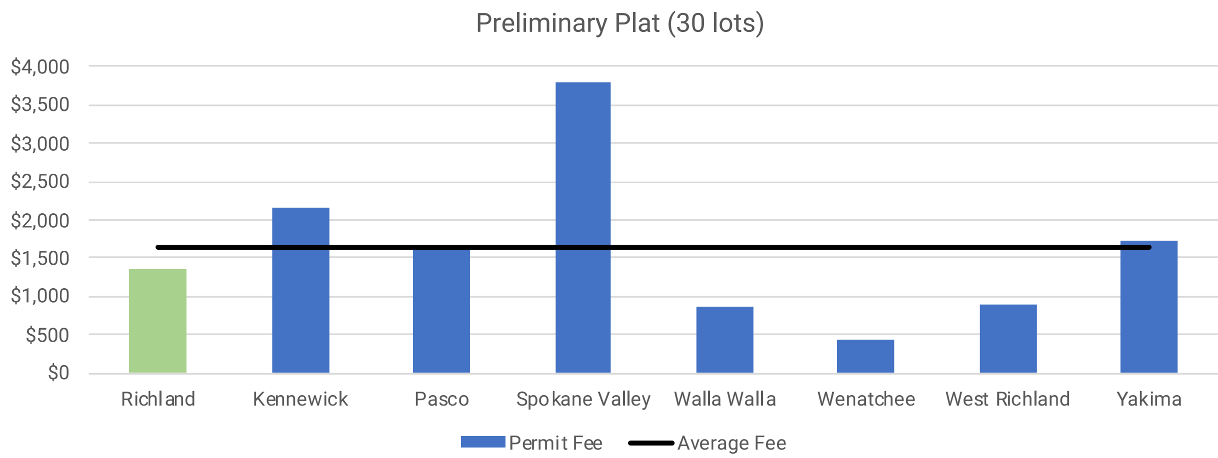
The City of Richland currently charges $230 for a Plat Exemption or Lot Line Adjustment. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All surveyed jurisdictions charge a fee for Plat Exemption or Lot Line Adjustment. The City's current fee of $230 is higher than the average fee of $158. Pasco has the lowest fee amount at $50, whereas Kennewick ($228), Spokane Valley ($260), and Wenatchee ($200), have similar fees to Richland.

6. Preliminary Plat (30 Lots).

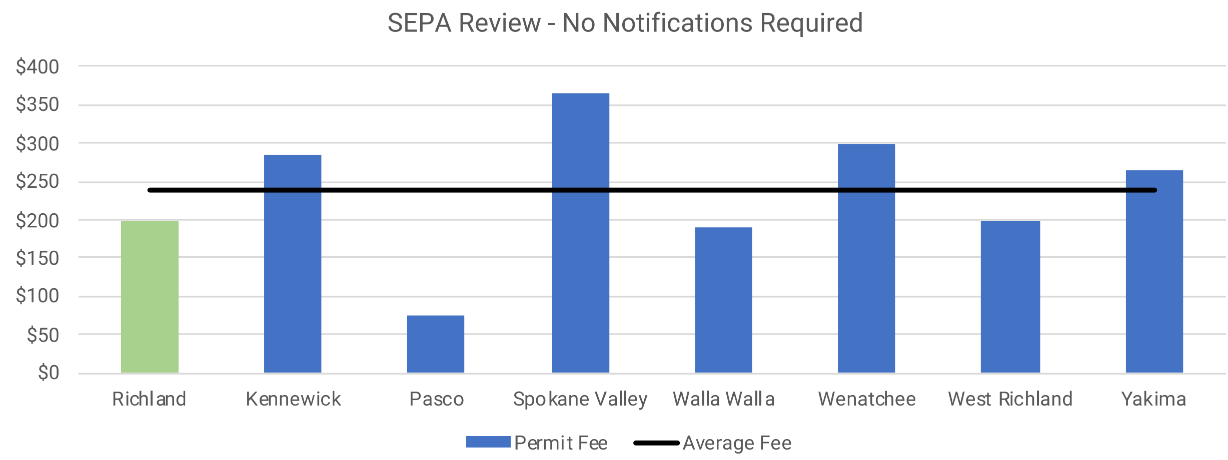
The City of Richland currently charges $1,350 for Preliminary Plat review of 30 lots. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All surveyed jurisdictions charge a fee for Preliminary Plat Review (30 lots). The average fee charged by other jurisdictions is $1,643. As discussed in the structural comparison, this is a fee in which some jurisdictions have a base and a per lot fee. As the graph indicates, those jurisdictions that do have base and per lot (Kennewick, Pasco, and Spokane Valley) generally tend to have higher fees. Even though the City does not have a base fee, it does have a minimum fee based on the per lot fee. However, the City may want to consider eliminating the minimum fee and instead developing a base fee to capture that minimum time and keep the per lot to capture the increased level of review needed.

7. SEPA Review – No Notifications.

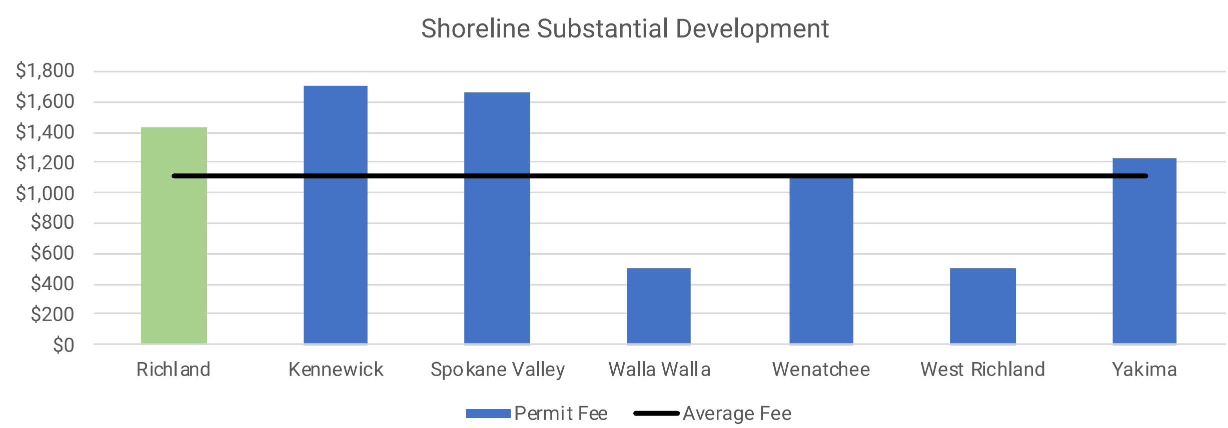
The City of Richland currently charges $200 for SEPA Review – No notifications. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All surveyed jurisdictions charge a fee for SEPA Review – No Notification. Based upon the comparative analysis, the City's current fee of $200 is lower than the average fee of $240 charged by surrounding jurisdictions. Jurisdictions such as Spokane Valley, Wenatchee, Yakima, and Kennewick are all charging higher fees than Richland. Richland's current fee ($200) is the exact same fee as charged by West Richland. This fee is another example of where the City may consider wanting to increase its fee to be in alignment with other jurisdictions as well as better capture staff time and effort for processing these applications.

8. Shoreline Substantial Development.

The City of Richland currently charges $1,430 for Shoreline Substantial Development. The following graph compares how the City's current fee compares to the surveyed jurisdictions.



All but one of the surveyed jurisdictions (Pasco) charge a fee for Shoreline Substantial Development. The City's current fee of $1,430 is higher than the average fee of $1,117 charged by other jurisdictions. The Cities of Walla Walla and West Richland are on the low end of the spectrum at $505 and $500 respectively. The City's current fee of $1,430 is in alignment with Kennewick, Spokane Valley, and Yakima.

9. Fee Schedule Best Practices and Summary.

The City's fee schedule is reviewed and updated annually based upon the Building Valuation table issued by the International Code Council for building fees, and for Planning fees it is updated based upon the annual percentage change in Consumer Price Index. It is a best practice to update fees annually based upon economic factors. The City should continue to update its fees annually. However, this adjustment should be based upon a cost of services analysis, rather than outdated information. The City has not conducted a formalized cost of service or fee study analysis in at least 10 years.

While the scope of this study can demonstrate to the City that certain fees can be increased or potentially decreased to be in alignment with other similar jurisdictions, the City should consider conducting an in-depth and formal cost of services study analysis. In the State of Washington, the ability to charge reasonable fees to cover jurisdictional costs associated with processing applications, inspecting and reviewing plans, or preparing detailed statements is established in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 82.02.020. This code further dictates that fees must be reasonably necessary as a direct result of providing the service. To determine the "reasonably necessary" component a formalized study is required, which calculates the direct and indirect costs associated with processing these permits and applications based upon the City of Richland's cost and not based upon other jurisdiction's fee amounts. This is not met by comparative fee analysis to other jurisdictions – although that information is useful if the City desires to not fully recover costs to ensure competitiveness with surrounding communities.

The formalized cost of services analysis would determine for each fee line item the estimated amount of staff time and / or effort needed to review, inspect, and process each permit or application and set the fee at a level to achieve the desired level of cost recovery. These studies provide an analysis based on the City of Richland's budget, staffing, and development regulations to determine the true direct and indirect cost associated with each individual fee line item.

Recommendation #43: **The City's current structure for Planning and Building fees is in alignment with other cities, but it should consider streamlining its Planning fees such as Variances (Minor and Major) into a singular category as well as review specific fee amounts to determine if certain fees can be increased to be in alignment with other jurisdictions.**

Recommendation #44: **The City should conduct an in-depth cost of services or user fee study for Building and Planning Fees to determine the true direct and indirect cost of services and be in alignment with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 82.02.020).**

2. Cost Recovery

In the State of Washington, the ability to charge reasonable fees to cover jurisdictional costs associated with processing applications, conducting inspections, reviewing plans, or preparing detailed statements is established in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 82.02.020. This code further dictates that fees must be reasonably necessary as a direct result of providing the service. Therefore, it is essential to draw a nexus between the fully loaded cost of providing a service and the fee that is being charged for that service.

Typically cost recovery is calculated based upon an in-depth user fee or cost recovery study that is conducted. For purposes of this analysis, the scope was to conduct a high level review of Development-Related activities and their cost recovery. The Development Services activities reviewed in this cost recovery analysis include:

- Planning Services
- Building Services
- Development Engineering
- Fire Prevention Review and Inspections
- Energy Services (Solar Permits)

Planning and Building are part of the same department (Development Services); however, Development Engineering is located within Public Works, and Fire Prevention within the Fire Department. Energy Services is part of the Energy Services Department. Cost recovery is calculated by comparing the total fee-related revenue to the fee-related expenditures. The fee-related revenue is typically based upon prior year information (2021) compared to current costs (2022). This is due to cost recovery being a snapshot in time. The following table shows 2021 revenue compared to 2022 Development Fee-Related costs for the five different areas compared to the 2022 fee-related costs:

Annual Cost Recovery Analysis

Fee Category	Revenue	Annual Development Cost	Difference	Cost Recovery %
Planning Services	$81,730	$635,861	($554,131)	13%
Building Permits & Inspections	$1,917,481	$1,433,404	$484,077	134%
Development Eng.	$402,366	$488,160	($85,794)	82%

Fee Category	Revenue	Annual Development Cost	Difference	Cost Recovery %
Fire Prevention	$0[3]	$148,041	($148,041)	0%
Energy Services	$113,850	$133,794	($19,944)	85%
Total	**$2,515,428**	**$2,839,260**	**($323,832)**	**89%**

As the table indicates that overall, development-related activities are recovering 89% of their costs or under-recovering by approximately $324,000. The primary source of the deficit is Planning Services at $554,000 and Fire Prevention at $148,000.

For Planning related fees, the cost in the previous table may include some long-range planning activities, which are typically not fee recoverable. As such, the deficit might be smaller when considering only current planning activities.

It is important to note that the City does not currently assess any fees for Fire prevention services. Part of the scope of this analysis is to review and determine if it is appropriate to assess these fees. This analysis indicates that by not implementing these fees, the City is incurring an approximate deficit of $148,000 annually. The large surplus generated by Building Inspections at $484,000 is helping to offset the deficits in the other service areas. However, due to the uncertainty of development activity that surplus may not always exist, as such it is important to ensure that each service area is appropriately recovering for its own costs.

Local governments are providers of many types of general services to their communities. While all services provided by local government are beneficial to constituents, some services can be classified as globally beneficial to all citizens, while others provide more of a direct benefit to a specific group or individual. The following table provides examples of services provided by local government within a continuum of the degree of community benefit received:

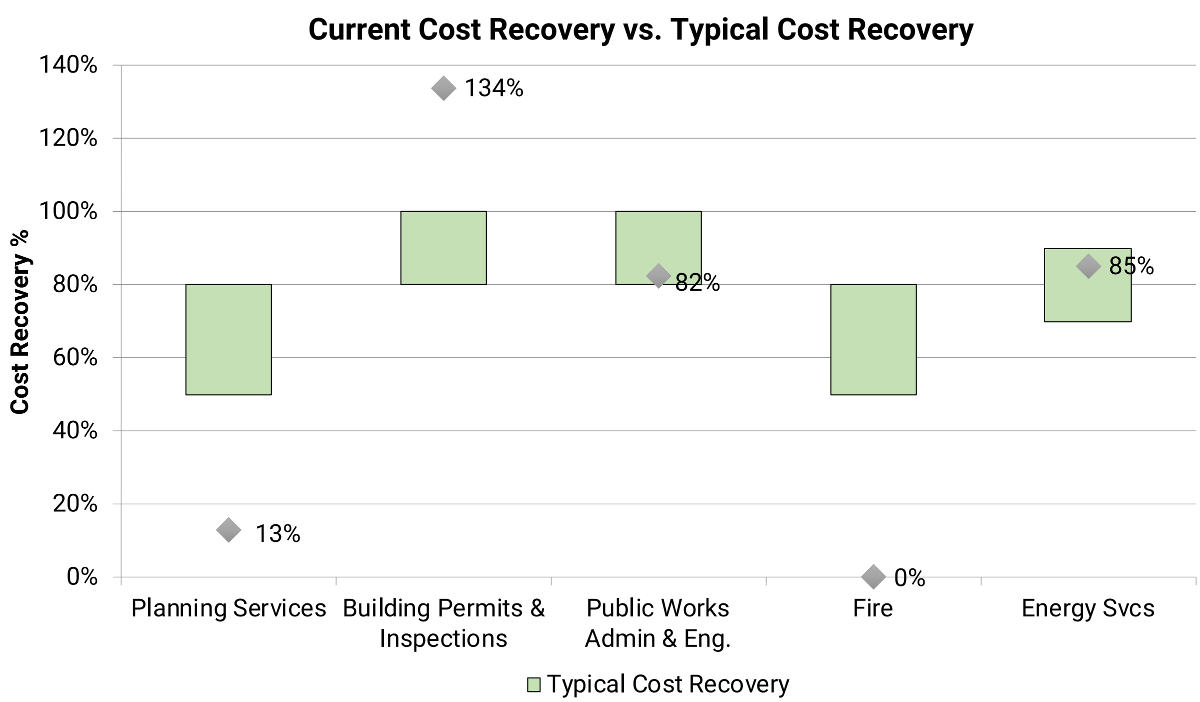
Services in Relation to Benefit Received

"Global" Community Benefit	"Global" Benefit and an Individual or Group Benefit	Individual or Group Benefit
• Police • Park Maintenance • Fire Suppression	• Recreation / Community Services • Fire Prevention	• Building Permits • Planning and Zoning Approval • Site Plan Review • Engineering Development Review

[3] There is $0 revenue for Fire Prevention as the City does not currently assess any Fire Prevention related fees.

Funding for local government is obtained from a myriad of revenue sources such as taxes, fines, grants, special charges, user fees, etc. In recent years, alternative tax revenues, which typically offset subsidies for services provided to the community, have become increasingly limited. These limitations have caused increased attention on user fee activities as a revenue source that can offset costs otherwise subsidized (usually) by the general fund. In the table above, services in the "global benefit" section tend to be funded primarily through voter approved tax revenues. In the middle of the table, one typically finds a mixture of taxes, user fee, and other funding sources. ***Finally, in the "individual / group benefit" section of the table, lie the services provided by local government that are typically funded almost entirely by fee revenue. This is the section that is most applicable to the Development-related fees.***

The following graph compares the City's current cost recovery to the typical cost recovery level seen across the United States.



Planning Services and Fire are significantly below the typical cost recovery levels, whereas Engineering and Energy Services are within their typical range. Building at 134% is above the typical cost recovery level of 100%. It is important to note that due to the nature of Building Services, fees might be collected in one year, but services are performed in future years (e.g., inspections). Therefore, it is very common to see a perceived surplus in one particular when it comes to Building-related activities.

Based upon the cost recovery analysis conducted, the primary focus of the City as it relates to development services should be re-evaluating its Planning Fees and Fire Prevention Fees. For Planning Fees, the focus should be on reviewing fees related to SEPA, Building Plan Review, Land Exemptions, and other miscellaneous activities that result in high volume activity for Planning staff. For Fire Prevention, the focus should similarly be on Sprinklers and Fire Building Plan Reviews and Inspections. Reviewing and implementing these fees will help increase the overall cost recovery for Development-Related Activities. The City is in the midst of considering implementation for these fees, and it is recommended that the City should move forward as soon as possible, to minimize further subsidization of these services.

The Development Services Department should also develop a formalized cost recovery policy associated with its development-related activities. As discussed, the cost recovery for these activities is typically 70-100%. The policy should outline frequency of fee updates, conducting formalized fee studies, and determining the key benefit areas and cost recovery targets by service area. For example, a Water Heater Permit is commonly subsidized as the cost to issue permit and conduct inspection is sometimes greater than the water heater itself. If the cost of the permit is too high, then the homeowner may not pull the permit, and it creates a compliance issue. Therefore, this fee might be set to achieve only 70% cost recovery. Conversely, new construction fees are typically set at 100% cost recovery as there is a stronger individual (developer) benefit, rather than a community benefit. This policy will serve to provide guidance to the Department as it continues to review and set fees in the future.

Recommendation #45: **The City should consider reevaluating and increasing its Planning-related fees to improve development-related cost recovery.**

Recommendation #46: **The City should move forward with its plans to implement Fire Development-Related Fees to minimize future subsidization related to Fire Review and Inspections of new and existing development.**

Recommendation #47: **The Development Services Department should develop a formalized cost recovery policy outlining frequency of updates and specific cost recovery targets by each service area**.

Recommendation #48: **The cost recovery policy should be used to guide any fee-setting in the future, including updating fees after a fee study analysis or implementing new fees.**

3. Fire Plan Review

The Fire Prevention Division within the Fire Department provides support to Development Services through review and inspection. The Fire department commissioned a study in 2019 from FCS to calculate the full cost of fire prevention fees and permits. This included standalone permits or deferred submittals (i.e., alarms, sprinklers, etc.), and plan review fees for Planning and Building Applications. The 2019 FCS Fee Study was conducted based upon the existing Fire Prevention Structure, which consists of a Battalion Chief (Fire Marshal), a Captain (Assistant Fire Marshal) and Firefighter (Deputy Fire Marshal). These positions were filled on a rotational basis.

However, due to the increased workload in development review, it is being proposed that specific positions be added for this function. The positions being proposed include: Community Risk Reduction Specialist, Fire Plans Examiner, and Fire Permits Technician. As these three positions are different than the staffing structure in the 2019 Fee Study, the City should conduct a separate comprehensive Fire Prevention Fee Study, once these new positions have been hired and performing their duties for at least a year. This will ensure that there are clear processes in place and an understanding of the level of effort associated with these activities.

In the interim, until the City can conduct a separate in-depth analysis of Fire Prevention activities, the City can utilize assumptions from the 2019 FCS Fee Study. The focus of this analysis was specifically on Fire's support to Building Permits. The following table shows the structure proposed by FCS in the 2019 Fire Fee Study:

Fire Prevention – Building Plan Review Support Fee Structure (FCS Study)

Fee Category	Fee Type
Single-Family Residential:	
No Sprinklers	Flat Fee
Requires Sprinklers	Flat Fee
Commercial / Multi-Family New Construction or Tenant Improvements:	
$500-$100,000	Flat Fee
$100,001-$500,000	Flat Fee
$500,001-$1,000,000	Flat Fee
$1,000,001-$2,500,000	Flat Fee
$2,500,001-$5,000,000	Flat Fee
$5,000,000+	Flat Fee

There are no inherent issues with the proposed fee structure. The no sprinkler vs. requires sprinklers captures the different level of effort associated with single-family projects; whereas the different valuation ranges serve to capture the complexity of reviews conducted for larger commercial projects. Additionally, the use of flat fees rather than a per dollar valuation or per square foot allows for consistency in fee application.

When the City conducts a fee study in the future, it should reevaluate the commercial fee structure and determine if project valuation is the best basis, or if an alternate methodology such as square footage or percentage of building permit fee can be utilized to better capture the level of effort associated with fire plan review.

It is a best practice to charge separate fire plan review for support of building permits. This ensures that the fee captures Fire support specifically, it is more transparent to the development community, and also is only applicable if and when there is fire review on projects. Many other cities in Washington charge separate Fire Fees: Issaquah, Lakewood, Lynwood, Renton, Tacoma, Sammamish, West Richland, Therefore, the City should consider implementing this fee to be in alignment with other jurisdictions and to ensure that it is recovering its costs for these activities. Especially, as the City intends to hire new positions, it should implement these fees so that those positions are paid for through these new fees.

Recommendation #49: **The City should implement the proposed Fire Fee Structure from the 2019 Fee Study for Building Plan reviews at a minimum.**

Recommendation #50: **The City should consider conducting a fire prevention fee study once the new fire prevention staff (Community Risk Reduction Specialist, Fire Plans Examiner, and Fire Permit Technician) have been hired and staff have been there for a year.**

4. Fee Policies and Procedures

The last component of our financial review was to ensure that the City has appropriate internal controls and policies and procedures as it relates to fee collection and fee refunds. The City has two formalized policies for fee-related activities:

1. **% of Expired Permits to be Used for Reinstatement:** This policy was developed in 2000, and it was created to reduce the permit fee that would be charged against reinstated permits. The key components of the policy are as follows:

    - Permits expire after 180 days if no work has commenced.
    - Between 6 months and 1 year of issuance, the permit can be reinstated for 50% of the cost or $86 if only one inspection is remaining.
    - If more than one year has passed since issuance, then the fee is based on a discounted valuation. The valuation is discounted based upon the amount of work that has been performed.

2. **Refunds:** This policy was issued in 2004 and revised in 2008 and is related specifically to processing refunds for building permits and plan reviews. The policy states that if no work has been done and a refund is requested within 6 months, 80% of the plan review or 80% of the permit fee will be refunded. No fees will be refunded if a project is cancelled or withdrawn (unless within 6 months). If a full building plan review has been completed within the 6 months, then no refund will be issued. However, if any portion of the review has been completed, only that portion (up to the 80%) will be refunded to the applicant.

The only issue with the expired permits that are reinstated is the use of the specific dollar amount of $86. It is recommended that the verbiage be replaced with "or the current inspection rate per the most recently adopted fee schedule if only one inspection is needed". For the refund policy, it is currently only applicable to Building Plan Reviews and Inspections. A broader refund policy should be established that encompasses at a minimum Planning application, if not all development-related activities. Additionally, both of these policies have not been revised in 22 years and 14 years respectively. All policies should be reviewed every 3 years, and even if there are no changes, a last review date should be added to indicate that they have been reviewed. This will enable the City to capture any operational shifts more frequently.

All other fee policies and practices are informal. The City receives an annual audit, and as part of that audit, all fee-related revenue is reviewed and ensured to make sure that it is hitting the appropriate accounts. There have been no concerns presented from City or Development Services staff as it relates to miscounting or misapplication of fees in the permitting system.

However, there does need to be additional formalized policies and procedures adopted for Development Services financial portion. As stated in the previous section, it is recommended that Development Services create and adopt a formal cost recovery policy for its fee-related activities. In addition to that policy, there should be a Deferred Revenue policy adopted for Building services. This policy would identify that for large building projects, where fees are paid in one fiscal year, but work is performed in subsequent fiscal years, a portion of that revenue is set aside to those future fiscal years to fund those activities. This is considered a best practice to ensure that there is sufficient funding in future years to meet prior years' commitments of plan reviews and inspections.

Beyond the cost recovery and deferred revenue policy, a procedure should be developed for semi-annual review of permitting fees. This would require the Department Director in conjunction with the Planning Manager and / or Building Official to pull a handful of Planning Applications and Building permits and review them to make sure all appropriate fees and charges were assessed to those permits. While there is currently no concern that any fees are being misapplied, setting up a formalized process will ensure that there are appropriate cross-checks. This will be critical for future planning, as the City continues to grow and if there is staff turnover, it will ensure that fees are being applied, charged, and collected appropriately.

Recommendation #51: **The City should revise its % of Expired Permits to be Used for Reinstatement to eliminate the flat fee of $86 if one inspection remains. It should replace it with verbiage "or the current inspection rate per the most recently adopted fee schedule if only one inspection is needed".**

Recommendation #52: **The City should either expand its refund policy from Building Plan Reviews and Permits to include Planning Applications, and other development-related activities or develop separate refund policies for those fees.**

Recommendation #53: **The City should review all policies and procedures every three years to incorporate any operational changes, and a last reviewed date should be added to the policy documentation to document the last time the policy was reviewed and updated.**

Recommendation #54: **The City should develop a Deferred Building Revenue policy to account for large projects that start in one year but finish in future fiscal years. Monies should be set aside to cover the costs of inspection in subsequent fiscal years.**

Recommendation #55: **The Development Services Department should set up a procedure to conduct semi-annual (twice a year) audits of its Planning and Building Fees. A handful of applications and permits should be reviewed to ensure all appropriate fees were charged and assessed.**

Appendix A: Current State Assessment

1 INTRODUCTION

This current state assessment outlines the organization, structure, and staffing of the permitting, and inspection processes in the City of Richland, Washington and covers the following departments: Development Services (Planning and Building), Public Works, Energy Services, and Fire. The information contained in the current state assessment has been developed through a series of interviews conducted at all levels of the organization, including managers, supervisors, and line-level staff, from the various development review departments.

The primary objective of the current state assessment is to document the current approaches utilized by the various development related entities in providing services. There is no analysis or findings contained in this document. Instead, this interim deliverable focuses on documenting the following items:

- The organizational structure of the various operations within the project scope.
- The roles, responsibilities and service delivery approaches for each functional review discipline.
- The organizational composition and allocation of staff assigned to the development review, permitting, and inspection processes.
- Workload associated with the various development functions.

This document will serve as a summary of the current state of staffing allocations and duties and processes utilized.

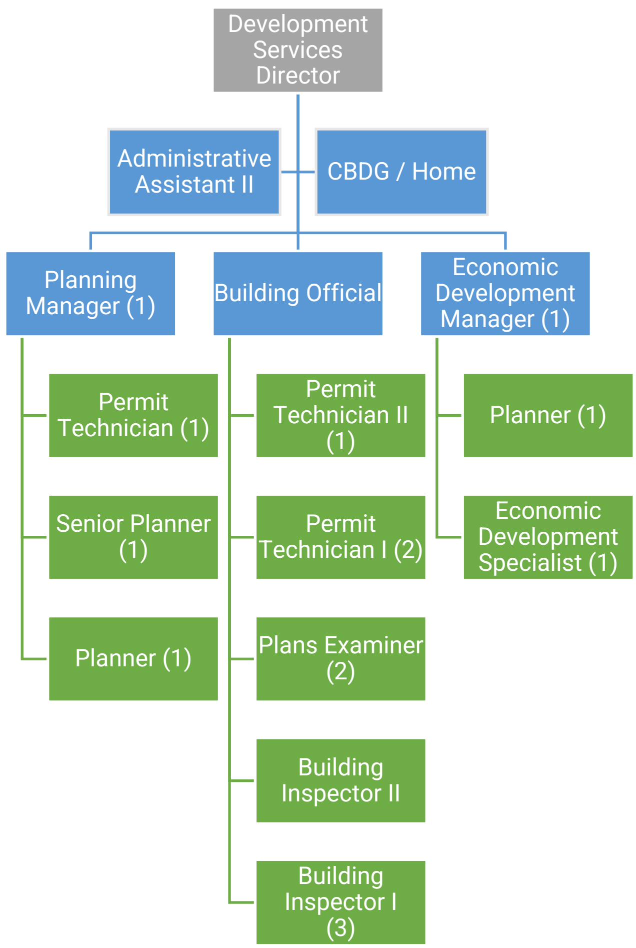
2 DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The Development Services Department is the primary conduit of development activities in the City of Richland. The Department primarily facilitates the centralized permitting center in City Hall. The Department aims to guide the physical development of the community in order to meet the present and future needs of its citizens. The Department reviews, permits, and inspects new construction and development within the City.

1. DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE

The following chart outlines the organizational structure of the Development Services Department:

Development Services Department Organizational Structure



2. STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following table details the number of staff, by position title, for the Development Services Department and summarizes the major duties of each position. The duties listed are representative of the primary role of the position and are not intended to encompass all duties performed at the level of detail of a job description.

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities
Director	1	• Oversees all activities across planning, building review and inspection, and economic development. Oversees CBDG/Home grant programs.
Administrative Assistant	1	• Provides general administrative support to the director and the department.
Planning	Planning is responsible for intake, review, and analysis of planning applications, including routing these applications to other departments as needed, consolidating comments, preparing for public hearings, and developing conditions of approval. Conduct SEPA review where required.	
Planning Manager	1	• Designated zoning administrator for the city. Floodplain administrator. SEPA administrator. Conducts SEPA reviews. Conducts site plan reviews for commercial projects. Conducts review of more complex zoning applications (subdivisions, special use permits, variances, etc.)
Senior Planner	1	• Conducts site plan review for commercial projects, assists with review for subdivisions, special use permits, variances, and other more complex applications.
Planner	1	• Conducts site plan review for single family projects. Checks business license applications for zoning compliance, Reviews and issues sidewalk use licenses.
Permit Technician	1	• Responds to questions from the public regarding zoning and permitting requirements, reviews business license applications, takes in and routes applications.
Building	Building is responsible for intake and review of building permit applications, including routing these to other agencies as needed.	
Building Official	1	• Oversees the operations of the Building division. Provides guidance on complex code issues. Supervises plan review staff and plans examiners. Supervises building inspectors and permit techs.
Permit Tech II	1	• Oversees permit intake, routing, issuance, and fee collection. Serves as point of contact for other review agencies/

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities
		departments. Responds to questions from the public. Tracks Certificate of Occupancy Process.
Permit Tech I	2	• Responds to questions from the public regarding permit requirements and processes. Take in permit applications and route them as needed. Calculate and collect fees. Compile comments and provide to applicants.
Plans Examiners	2 (1 vacant)	• Conducts review of building permit applications for compliance with building code. Responds to questions from the public regarding code issues.
Building Inspector II	1	• Schedules inspections. Conducts inspections associated with building permits – mechanical, plumbing, structural. Issues correction notices and conducts re-inspections where necessary.
Building Inspector I	3	• Conducts inspections associated with building permits. Issues correction notices and conducts re-inspection where necessary.

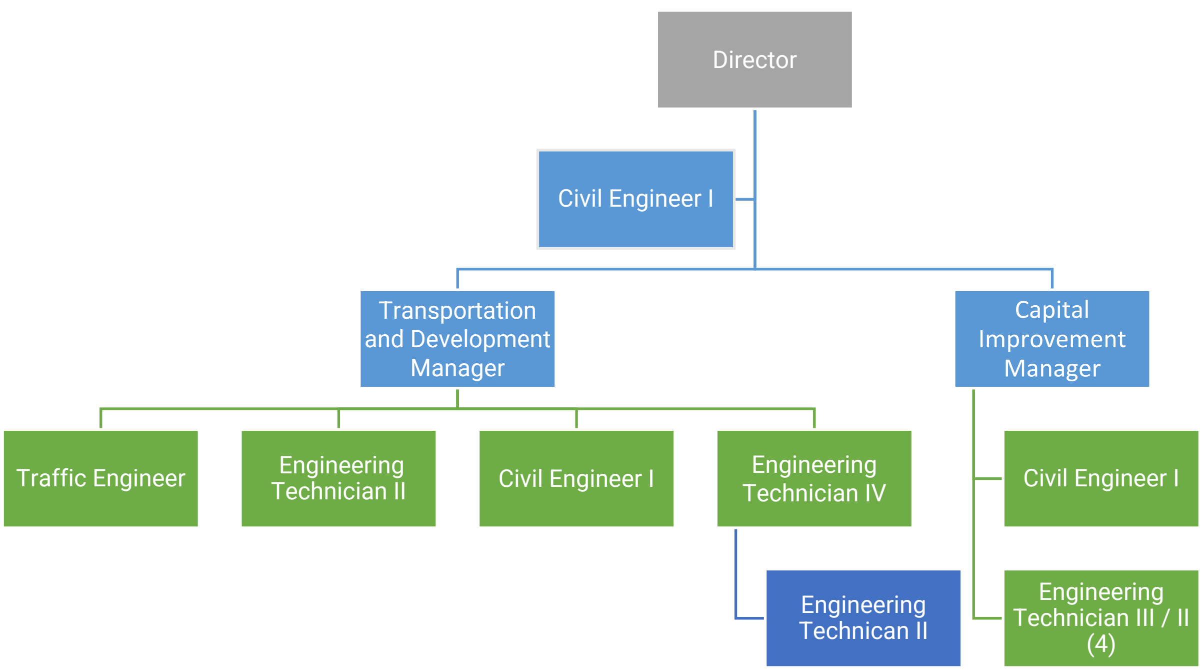
3 PUBLIC WORKS

The Public Works Department includes the following services areas: administration and engineering, water, sewer, stormwater, solid waste and recycling and streets. Their primary role in the development review process is to review applications for infrastructure, traffic, and transportation related elements. The majority of development related services falls under the Transportation and Development group, with the exception of stormwater review and construction inspections, which are under the Capital Improvements group.

1. PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE

The following chart outlines the organizational structure of the Transportation and Development Division. The staff represented within the org chart are those dedicated to the development process:

Public Works – Development Related Organizational Structure
(development review functions only)



2. STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following table details the number of staff, by position title, for Public Works Department staff involved in the development process and summarizes the major duties of each position. The duties listed are representative of staff's role in the development process and are not intended to encompass all duties performed at the level of detail of a job description.

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities
Transportation and Development Group	Transportation and Development is responsible for reviewing development applications for infrastructure, transportation, and traffic related elements. There are three staff members who are embedded with the Permitting Center.	
Manager	1	• Serves as the Division Manager is responsible for oversight of the transportation infrastructure in the City and staff who conduct transportation, infrastructure, and engineering review for the City.
Traffic Engineer	1	• Reviews development applications for compliance with access management, intersection design features, traffic calming, and traffic related standards. Reviews traffic impact analyses and provides input as to transportation concurrency compliance under the State Growth Management Act for developments.
Civil Engineer I (Permit Center)	1	• Conducts traffic and transportation reviews, commercial applications, plan and plat reviews, and traffic control plans. Covers multiple engineering aspects of the development review process.
Engineer Technician IV (Permit Center)	1	• Serves as the lead for the permit center engineering team because of his extensive experience, focuses on subdivision and infrastructure review, commercial applications, land use review, and handles maintenance warranty issues, and processing developer agreements.
Engineer Technician II (Permit Center)	1	• Processes all application types and focuses on frontage improvement permit reviews, single family, utility system permits, over the counter permits, and facilitates engineering reviews with other departments.
Engineer Technician II	1	• Processes as-built submittals, review applications for ADA and utility compliance, traffic control plans, long and short plats, fiber review, and maintain material lists for development.
Capital Improvement Division Group	Responsible for oversight of the capital improvement program for the City. Staff support the development review process for stormwater review and infrastructure inspections.	
Civil Engineer I	1	

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities
Engineering Tech III	3	• Position supports development review by conducting stormwater plan review and ensures compliance with the City's NPDES Phase II permits.
Engineering Tech II	1	• Responsible for conducting construction inspections for both City capital projects and private development infrastructure construction.

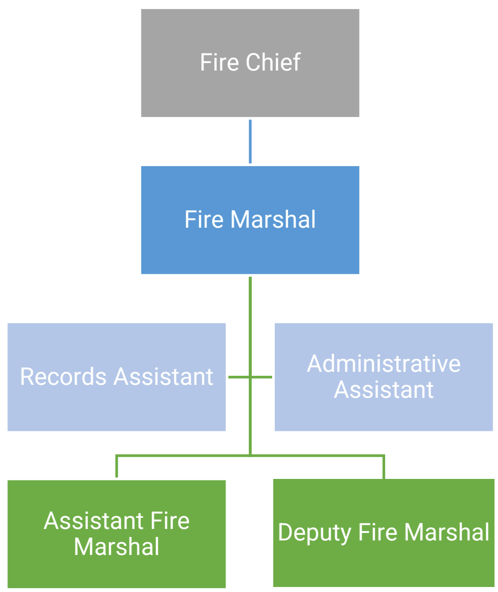
4 FIRE

The Fire Prevention Division of the Fire Department is tasked with conducting life safety and fire plan reviews and inspection for development related activities. Fire Prevention reviews, permits, and inspects new construction and development, tenant improvements and enforces the adopted Fire and Life Safety Codes within the City.

1. FIRE PREVENTION ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The following chart outlines the organizational structure of the Fire Prevention Division:

Fire Prevention Organizational Structure
(development review functions only)



2. STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following table details the number of staff, by position title, for the Fire Prevention Division and summarizes the major duties of each position. The duties listed are representative of the primary role of the position and are not intended to encompass all duties performed at the level of detail of a job description.

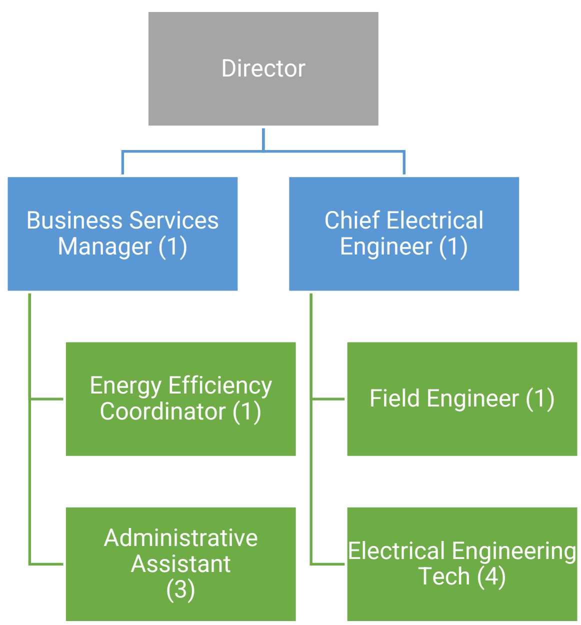
Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities
External Risk Reduction Battalion Chief	1	• Serves as Fire Marshal for the Fire Department. Oversees the Fire Prevention and EMS Divisions.
Assistant Fire Marshal	1	• Participates in pre-application meetings. Conducts site plan review, commercial plan review, subdivision plan review, and residential plot review related to the fire code and City adopted standards. Conducts inspections.
Deputy Fire Marshal	1	• Conducts business inspections, fire permit inspections, and reviews business license applications. Assists with plan reviews as needed.

5 ENERGY SERVICES

Energy Services is primarily responsible for the delivery of electricity to the residents of Richland as well as its commercial and industrial customers. It is involved in permitting for the following:

- Site plan reviews that may involve alterations or addictions to the City's electrical infrastructure,
- Issuing permits for solar arrays (additions or alterations) and
- Calculating and issuing refunds for projects that meet the standards of the state energy efficiency program.

Energy Services Organizational Structure
(development review functions only)



Permitting and inspections are a relatively minor element of these positions; therefore, a staffing table is not provided.

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities (permitting related)
Business Services Manager	1	• Coordinates work involving plan review, solar array applications, and energy efficiency rebate program.
Energy Efficiency Coordinator	1	• Coordinates intake and routing of plans for solar arrays • Coordinates energy efficiency rebate program.

Position Title	Authorized Positions	Key Roles and Responsibilities (permitting related)
Administrative Assistant	3	• Assist with intake and management of applications for solar. • Assist with management of energy efficiency rebate requests.
Chief Electrical Engineer	1	• Oversees electrical distribution and field engineers • Assists with review of commercial site plans.
Field Engineer	1	• Reviews commercial site plans for issues potentially affecting the electrical grid / utility. Conducts inspections.
Electrical Engineering Tech	4	• Review applications for solar arrays • Review residential site plans for issues potentially affecting the electrical grid / utility

6 TECHNOLOGY

The following list summarizes the technology and software solutions used in the development review, permitting, and inspection processes.

Software	Use	Replaced by EnerGov	Notes
BluePrince	Permit and inspections tracking	Yes	Used to manage intake and routing of permit applications, scheduling of inspections, and posting inspection results. Will be replaced by EnerGov. Used by Development Services, Public Works, Fire, and Energy Services.
iWorq	Code enforcement	Yes	Used to track code enforcement cases.
BlueBeam	Plan markup	No	Used for collaborative review and markup of plans. Currently only a single version is licensed but will be rolled out broadly to all departments doing plan review.
iG Workforce	Code enforcement	Energov product	Will replace iWorq to track code enforcement cases.
Executive Insights	Reporting and data analysis	Energov product	Will be used to analyze permitting data in EnerGov system.
Outlook	Calendar and task tracking	partially	Used to track due dates and schedule BluePrince related deadlines. Also used to notify users of tasks. EnerGov will replace these functions
Word	Word processing	partially	Used to create notices and letters that can be generated automatically in EnerGov.
Excel	Data analysis	partially	Used to capture and manipulate data manually (not integrated with applications).
EnerGov	Permit tracking	n/a	Will be used for permit intake, routing, tracking, and issuance.
EnerGov CSS	Citizen self service	Energov product	Is part of the Energov family of systems Citizen self-service portal for submitting applications, making payments, looking up comments and inspection results.
Futura GIS	Energy Services	No	Used by Energy Services for GIS, including for planning and permit review.
ESRI/ ArcGIS	Geographic information	No	Geographic information system used by all departments to verify and track geographical information related to planning and permitting
Seamless forms (GovOS)	On-line forms	Yes	These are used to gather data for solar applications and is planned to be replaced by EnerGov.
Paymentus	Payments	Yes	Payment processor for Fees

7 WORKLOAD AND PROCESSES

The following section provides information on workload associated with the planning and building permitting process. This is based on information provided to date by the City of Richland. It is anticipated that more data will be forthcoming.

1. Planning Division Workload and Decision Matrix.

The Planning Division takes the lead on all planning applications. This includes organizing pre-application meetings, conducting intake of applications, routing these applications out to applicable departments and divisions, and then consolidating comments to the applicant so that they can prepare a consolidated re-submission.

The following table summarized workload during the first six months of this year.

Application Type	Total Applications (first 6 months of 2022)
New Preliminary Plats (192 SF lots)	3
Final Plats (130 SF lots)	4
Planned Unit Development	1
Short Plats/Binding Site Plans	5
Boundary Line Adjustments	7
Exempt Segregations	15
Annexation	1
Rezones	4
Variances (1 minor, 3 major)	4
Sidewalk Use Licenses	5
Comp Plan Amendments	4
Code Amendments	0
SEPA Reviews	22
Shoreline Management Plan Update	1
Shoreline Substantial Development	1
Shoreline Exemptions	8
Solar – Commercial	2
Solar – New Residential	8
Solar – Existing Residential	168

Timelines associated with planning applications vary depending on the type of application.

The table on the next page provides a breakdown of different types of planning application and which individual or group is responsible for preparing recommendations or making final decisions on a project.

PROJECT PERMIT APPLICATION TYPE AND PROCEDURE

Application Type	Preapplication Meeting?	Concurrency Review (Evaluation of Transportation Impacts)	Recommendation Made by	Decision Made by:	Hearing Process
Type 1 Includes: minor revisions, ADUs, final approvals, administrative sign permits, etc.)	Optional	No	n/a	Planning Manager	None
Type 2 Includes: site plans, design review, special use permits, etc.)	Required	Yes	n/a	Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission, or Hearing Examiner (depends on permit type)	Yes, (body depends on type of permit)
Type 3 Includes preliminary plats, revisions to preliminary plats, plat alterations or vacations.	Required	Yes	n/a	Hearing Examiner	Yes, before hearing examiner.
Type 3a Includes re-zones and PUD preliminary approvals.	Required	Yes	Hearing Examiner	City Council	Conducted by hearing examiner.
Type 4 Includes zoning text and district amendments, development regulations and amendments, area-wide rezones, comprehensive plan and any plan amendments, annexations.	Required	NA	Planning Commission	City Council	Before Planning Commission and City Council

2. Building Division Performance Targets and Workload.

The Building division follows a similar approach, taking in building permit applications and then routing them to other divisions based on the type of application. Permit techs in the division receive comments from all reviewers and consolidate them into a single letter that is provided to the applicant. Target timelines for plan review are as follows:

Type of Review	Initial Review
New commercial plan review	17
Second commercial plan review	10
Changes after issue / plan review	7
Major commercial remodel	12
Second commercial remodel review	7
Changes after issue / plan review –	7
Minor commercial remodel	7
Second commercial remodel review	7
Changes after issue / plan review	7
New SFD or duplex	9
Second SFD or duplex review	7
Changes after issue / plan review	7
Residential remodel or addition	7
Second residential DRA review	7
Changes after issue / plan review	7
Master plan/same as	7
Pole signs	7
Footing/Foundation permits	7

The following table summarizes construction activity workload over the last 2.5 years.

Data Element	2020	2021	2022 (first 6 months)
Total Building Permits (number)	2,275	2,241	1,059
Total Building Permits (valuation MM)	$269.1	$246.2	$152.37
Inspections	14,168	15,084	7,440
Plan Review	1,320	1,803	998

Appendix B: Stakeholder Feedback Analysis

Stakeholder Survey Analysis

The Matrix Consulting Group conducted a stakeholder survey as part of the development review study with the City of Richland, Washington. The intent of this survey was to gauge customer perception of the development process in Richland. The survey was sent to 1,447 prior City customers and received a total of 187 responses. This represents an overall participation rate of 12.9%. The survey was open from October 18 to November 2, 2022.

1. Key Findings

The following list summarizes several key findings from the customer survey:

- **Positive Responses:** Most divisions received largely positive input from customers. In very few cases did a statement receive more than 20% disagreement. For most statements, respondents either indicated strongly agree, agree or neutral. One exception is Public Works where some ratings showed higher levels of disagreement than other divisions.

- **Customer Service and Staff Quality:** The knowledge, accommodating nature, and overall friendliness of staff (across all divisions) was highlighted in both the multiple-choice and open-response sections. Staff working the public counter received particularly strong positive feedback in both the multiple-choice and open-response sections.

- **Inspections:** The timeliness of inspections for both Building and Fire were very well-rated. Respondents regularly indicated receiving their inspection at the agreed upon date and time.

- **City Web Presence and Availability of Information:** Questions relating to the availability and quality of information on the City's website received some of the most mixed responses across all sections. Customers of all experience levels would like for the development process' online presence to be more user-friendly and provide more/better information. This was further highlighted in the open-response section.

- **Differences by Respondent Type:** While feedback was positive overall, a trend that became evident throughout the analysis of the multiple-choice sections is that the same customer groups were consistently providing the lowest levels of agreement, regardless of division. These customer groups were Builders, Business Owners, Contractors, and Developers. As noted in later sections, these groups may interact with the development process more frequently and at a higher level of complexity than others.

These findings, along with others, will be further detailed later in this summary.

2. Respondent Demographics

While the survey was anonymous, the survey asked a series of demographic-related questions aimed to aid later analysis. Responses to these questions are summarized in the tables below:

What is your role in interacting with the development process?	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Architect	9	4.8%
Attorney	0	0.0%
Builder	28	15.0%
Business Owner	45	24.1%
Contractor	36	19.3%
Developer	29	15.5%
Engineer	15	8.0%
Homeowner/Landowner/Tenant	72	38.5%
Landscape Architect	0	0.0%
Real Estate Professional	6	3.2%
Planner	5	2.7%
Other (please specify)	22	11.8%

Those that selected 'Other' identified the following roles:

- Land Surveyor (5)
- Asst. HOA Manager/Ownership Group Employee (2)
- Chair/Officer of a Non-Profit (2)
- Commercial Property Owner (2)
- House/Plan Designer (2)

- School District (2)
- Administrator
- CEO
- Community Volunteer Rep.
- Homeowner
- Landlord
- Sales
- Water Management

Homeowners/Landowners/Tenants represented the largest respondent group for this survey, accounting for 38.5% of respondents. The second highest respondent category was Business Owner at 24.1%. These two categories combined for 62.6% of the total respondents.

Which of these functions do you commonly interact with? Check all that apply.	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Building Plan Review and Permits	141	75.4%
Building Inspections	97	51.9%
Energy Services	59	31.6%
Engineering / Civil / Site Design	63	33.7%
Fire Plan Review, Permits, and Inspections	46	24.6%
Planning and Zoning	73	39.0%

Building Plan Review and Permits (75.4%) was the most frequently interacted with function, while Fire Plan Review, Permits, and Inspections was the least. 51.9% of respondents noted interacting with Building Inspections.

How frequently do you interact with the development review process?	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Several times per month	35	18.7%
Several times per year	56	30.0%
Once or twice per year	28	15.0%
Less than once or twice a year	68	36.4%

When was your most recent interaction with the City?	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Within the last 12 months.	149	79.7%

More than 12 months ago.	38	20.3%

The majority of survey respondents had interacted with the development process within the last 12 months. Furthermore, respondents were more likely to interact with the process either infrequently (once or twice a year) or with moderate frequency (several times per year). Just over half of the respondents indicated they interact with the development process once or twice a year or less.

3. Multiple-Choice Responses – Planning

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements that pertained to the Planning Division. This section received input from 111 respondents.

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the planning process.	71.1%	14.9%	14.1%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	69.2%	15.8%	15.0%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	71.7%	13.3%	15.0%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review process for my project.	60.0%	15.0%	25.0%
5	I clearly understood who had the decision-making authority (Staff, Planning Commission, Hearing Examiner, City Council) for my application.	59.7%	22.7%	17.7%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	67.0%	18.6%	14.4%
7	Staff was helpful in explaining what I needed to do and how to accomplish it.	57.6%	18.6%	23.7%
8	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	43.7%	36.1%	20.2%
9	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	55.8%	22.5%	21.7%
10	The first review of my application was complete and comprehensive.	58.1%	18.8%	23.1%

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
11	After receiving comments on my application, I clearly understood what I needed to revise on my application to achieve compliance with adopted codes and ordinances.	56.8%	23.7%	19.5%
12	Comments and corrections received on my application were based on the City's development code or other legal standards and were fully explained to me.	46.6%	33.6%	19.8%
13	Comments received from different review disciplines were consistent with one another.	46.6%	29.7%	23.7%
14	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	54.7%	23.1%	22.2%
15	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	49.6%	16.0%	34.5%
16	The City's development code/ordinance is easy to understand.	42.0%	29.4%	28.6%
17	If my application went to the Planning Commission or Hearing Examiner, the process to get my application to the public hearing was efficient.	25.7%	56.4%	17.8%
18	If my application went to City Council, the process to get my application to Council was efficient.	20.6%	68.0%	11.3%

3.1 Analysis of Overall Responses

Overall, sentiment towards the Planning division was mostly positive. On average, respondents selected ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ 53.1% of the time. Statements within this section received an average neutral response rate of 26.5%, and an average disagreement rate of 20.4%.

Statements that related to customer service and the availability of information pertaining to the process (#1 - #8) received some of the highest levels of agreement in this section.

One outlier in this group is statement #8, which specifically focused on the City's website. This statement received lower agreement at 43.7% and one of the highest neutral response rates of 36.1%.

The remaining statements (#9 - #18) focused on the actual process of approving a customer's application. These statements received lower agreement levels compared to statements #1 through #8. Average agreement for each group of questions was 62.5% (#1 - #8) and 45.7% (#9 - #18).

The only statement to receive more than 30% disagreement was #15. Responses to this statement indicate that many applicants found the time it took to process their application to be longer than they had expected.

Statements #17 and #18 received only 25.7% and 20.6% levels of agreement indicating concerns about the efficiency of the process to get applications submitted to the Planning Commission and City Council for review.

One key takeaway from the overall survey responses is that (in general) applicants appear to have a good understanding of the process ahead of their application. Staff are also perceived as helpful and provide good customer service.

Conversely, the process itself was less well-received by survey participants. As noted above, statements #9 - #18 had lower agreement rates compared to other statements in this section. Responses to statement #15 highlight that the amount of time it takes to process an application may take longer than expected.

3.2 Differences by Respondent Group

This subsection focuses on analyzing differences in responses based on how each survey participant identified (Attorney, Builder, Contractor, etc.).

Taking an average of all responses shows that Architects, Contractors, Engineers, and Homeowners had a more positive response rate compared to other groups, with average agreement exceeding 50%. Engineers had the highest average agreement level (61.4%).

Business Owners and Developers had the lowest average level of agreement (and highest levels of disagreement) across all statements, with 35.1% and 33% average agreement respectively. Builders had the third lowest average level of agreement at 42%.

This section received no input from Attorneys and Landscape Architects, four responses from Planners, and two responses from Real Estate Professionals. Planners had an average agreement rate of 44.4%, while Real Estate Professionals had an average disagreement rate of 72.2%. These numbers may be skewed due to the very low response rates from each group.

A breakdown of some key differences among response groups is presented later in this section. Based on information found therein, as well as the average response rates mentioned earlier in this section, some general inferences can be made.

For one, it appears as though the division is catering well to Homeowners. These individuals are generally less experienced with the process and require more guidance from City staff, which, based upon responses to statements #1 and #7, they are receiving.

Similarly, some of the more technically savvy customers provided high levels of agreement. Architects, Contractors, and Engineers all indicated higher levels agreement towards the availability of information and the planning process itself (with some exceptions, noted later in this section).

Conversely, Builders, Developers, and Business Owners generally provided the lowest levels of agreement (and highest levels of disagreement) among all respondent types. These groups generally took issue with the amount of information available to them prior to their application, the act of submitting their application, and the overall timeliness of the process. From these results in can be inferred that the division may not provide ample information related to the more complex applications/projects that these groups may undertake. The complexity of these projects – especially those owned by Developers – may also lend to the extended timeframes experienced by these groups.

(1) Customer Service and Availability of Information

The following bullets highlight instances where responses from specific respondent groups differed from the overall response rates for statements #1 through #8:

- As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Developers frequently provided lower agreement to statements #1 through #8 compared to other respondent groups. Developers were much less likely to understand what approvals/permits were required (#2, 33.3% agreement), their project timeline (#4, 30.4% agreement), and who had decision making authority (#5, 39.1%). Developers also had low agreement rates for statements mentioned later in this list. It is worth noting that statements #4 and #5 received higher disagreement than agreement from Developers.

- 37.9% of Business Owners and 45.8% of Developers felt as though they received quality customer service during the process (#1). Developers were more neutral towards this statement, with 41.4% picking that response.

- 30.4% of Builders felt as though they understood who had the decision-making authority over their application (#5). This statement received 34.8% disagreement from this group.

- Statement #7 also dealt with customer service, this time relating to the helpfulness of staff during the process. While this statement received 57.6% agreement overall, looking at the different respondent types shows mixed sentiment. Homeowners were much more likely to find staff helpful, with 74.4% agreeing with this statement. Conversely, Builders, Business Owners, Contractors, and Developers all had agreement levels of 40% or less.

- Another example of mixed sentiment was shown in how each respondent group reacted to statement #8 – the quality of the information on the City's website. While overall agreement towards this statement was 43.7%, Engineers reacted much more positively with 72.7% agreement.

(2) Planning Process

This list focuses on disparities between respondent groups for statements #9 through #18:

- Business Owners had some of the highest disagreement levels for this group of statements. 41.4% found submitting their application to be inefficient (#9), 39.3% took issue with initial review quality (#10), and 50% felt as though it took longer than expected for their application to be reviewed (#15).

- Developers also provided lower agreement/higher disagreement when compared to overall responses. 39.1% found the submittal process to be inefficient (#9), and 40.9% took issue with initial review quality (#10). Developers were also less likely to indicate agreement on statements related to the quality, consistency, and validity of comments received during review (#11 - #14). These statements all received disagreement levels exceeding 30%.

- Architects and Homeowners were more likely to find the time it took to process their application to be appropriate (#15). These two groups provided 66.7% and

60.5% agreement respectively. Other respondent groups had higher levels of disagreement for this statement, with Builders, Business Owners, Contracts, developers, and Engineers each providing 40% disagreement or more.

- Architects and Engineers were the only respondent groups to provide more than 50% agreement to statement #16 (understanding of the development code). Builders, Business Owners, and Developers had the lowest levels of agreement for this statement. Homeowners were more split in their response to this statement, with 44.2% agreeing and 34.9% disagreeing.

4. Multiple Choice Responses – Building

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements that pertained to the Building Division. This section received input from 125 respondents. This section had two separate question banks: one for the permit intake and review process, and another for inspections.

4.1 Building Permit Intake and Review

The following statements pertain to the permit intake and review process:

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the building application review and permitting process.	69.4%	16.7%	13.9%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	70.4%	17.6%	12.0%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	67.6%	17.6%	14.8%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	60.8%	20.6%	18.7%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	63.9%	15.7%	20.4%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	66.7%	18.5%	14.8%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	52.8%	35.2%	12.0%

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	68.2%	14.0%	17.8%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clearly based on the city's building code or other clear legal standards and were fully explained to me.	51.9%	28.3%	19.8%
10	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	55.8%	26.0%	18.3%
11	The time it took to process my building permit application was appropriate and as expected.	57.4%	18.5%	24.1%

4.2 Analysis of Overall Responses – Permit Intake and Review

Overall, all statements received 50% agreement or more, indicating a mostly positive response. For the most part, applicants appear to be satisfied with the level of customer service they received and have a decent understanding of the process beforehand. Only two statements received disagreement exceeding 20% or more – statements #5 (understanding the review steps) and #11 (time to process building permit application).

Average agreement for this section was 62.3%, while disagreement was 17%. On average, 20.8% of respondents selected neutral.

The statement relating to the usefulness of the City's website (#7) received a higher neutral response rate of 35.2%. Similar sentiment was noted in the Planning section.

Statements related to the quality and consistency of comments (#9 and #10) received slightly lower agreement and higher levels of neutral responses compared to others. The statement that focused on the timeliness of the process (#11) received the highest level of disagreement at 24.1%

The responses to this section appear similar to those found in the section dedicated to Planning. As noted earlier, applicants have a more positive outlook towards the helpfulness of staff and the availability of information (barring the website). Responses more focused on the review process were slightly less well-received.

4.3 Differences by Respondent Group – Building Permit Intake and Review

Responses from each customer type were similar to the overall responses noted in the prior section. Engineers, Homeowners, and Contractors all had the highest average agreement levels of 70.5%, 62.6%, and 62.1% respectively. Architects, Business Owners, and Developers had lower average agreement. These groups each provided 47.6%, 42.5%, and 45.5% average agreement.

The following list highlights some key instances where certain respondent group (or groups) deviated from the overall response rate for each statement:

- Business Owners were 33.3% neutral on their understanding of required approvals/permits (#2). They were also 37% neutral on their understanding of required documentation (#3). 38.5% indicated that submitting their application was inefficient (#8), the highest level of disagreement among all respondent groups.

- Builders were less likely than others to understand the fees required for their project (#6). 36.4% disagreed with this statement.

- Developers were more neutral towards statement #9, which dealt with the validity of comments and how well they were explained. 44.4% of Developers selected this 'neutral'.

- 33.3% of Architects, 31.8% of Builders, and 30.8% of Business Owners disagreed with statement #9 (review comments were clear and cited the code).

- 40% of Architects, 36.4% of Builders, and 38.9% of Developers noted receiving new issues/comments upon resubmittal of their application (#10).

- 66.7% of Architects, 36.4% of Builders, and 44.4% of Developers indicated that their application took longer than expected (#11).

Overall sentiment by respondent type was similar to that found in the prior section. Builders, Business Owners, and Developers generally indicated lower levels of agreement when compared to other respondent groups. A key difference here is that Architects had much lower overall agreement when compared to their responses to statements concerning the Planning Division.

A key takeaway here is that the review process may be inconsistent, especially when it comes to larger projects/applications submitted by the likes of Builders or Developers. These groups were more likely than others to either take issue/not understand initial comments made upon first review (#10). They were also more likely to have experienced receiving new comments after revising and resubmitting their application (#11).

4.5 Building Inspections

The following statements pertain to the building inspection process:

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	The City did a good job of communicating what inspections would be required for my project from the date of permit issuance.	77.5%	8.8%	13.7%
2	My inspection was completed on the date that they were scheduled.	77.2%	13.9%	8.9%
3	It was easy to request and schedule an inspection.	74.5%	17.7%	7.8%
4	Inspectors dealt with me using a positive approach of "here's how to get your work approved".	67.6%	23.5%	8.8%
5	If deficiencies were identified during an inspection, inspectors indicated the applicable code section.	56.0%	33.0%	11.0%
6	The inspector showed up when expected.	72.6%	19.6%	7.8%
7	Inspectors were fair and consistent in applying the codes and regulations to my project.	69.3%	23.8%	6.9%
8	The process to obtain the certificate of occupancy for my permit was efficient.	56.1%	33.7%	10.2%
9	If my project was inspected by different inspectors (plumbing, building, fire, zoning, landscaping, engineering) the process was well coordinated and comments from inspectors did not contradict each other.	62.5%	30.2%	7.3%

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
10	Staff provided me with good customer service throughout the inspection process.	68.7%	27.3%	4.0%

4.6 Analysis of Overall Responses – Building Inspections

All but two statements received more than 60% agreement overall, with statements #1, #2, #3, and #6 receiving more than 70% agreement. Based on the overall results for this section, applicants indicated having little to no issue knowing what inspections to schedule, scheduling said inspections, and having their inspection done on time.

Average agreement for this section was 68.2%, while disagreement was 8.7%. On average, 23.1% of respondents selected neutral.

4.7 Differences by Respondent Group – Building Inspections

For the most part, each respondent group had similar responses when compared to those received overall. No single respondent group had an average disagreement level exceeding 20% for this section. Builders, Engineers, and Homeowners all had average agreement levels of 70% or higher.

Developers had the lowest overall agreement at 36.5%, followed by Business Owners at 51.6%. These two groups had higher neutral response rates of 46.9% (Developers) and 36.9% (Business Owners).

The following bullets summarize instances where different respondent groups deviated from the overall responses as shown in the prior subsection:

- Builders had high agreement rates for multiple statements. 81% approved of communication from the City (#1), 90.5% indicated that their inspection was completed on the expected date (#2), and 85.7% found it easy to schedule an inspection (#3).

- 84.8% of Homeowners understood what inspections were required for their application. Furthermore, 89.1% noted that inspections were completed on the expected date (#2) and 80.6% indicated that their inspector showed up on time (#6).

- As noted in the introduction, Developers generally had high rates of neutrality across statements in this section. Several received neutral response rates of 50% or more. These statements were #4, #5, #7, and #10. These statements related to the customer service they received (#4, #5, and #10), and inspector consistency (#7).

As mentioned in the introduction, this section received mostly positive responses across all statements, save for the relatively high neutrality displayed by Developers. Building inspections appear to be performed in a timely manner, as per the positive responses to statements #6.

Builders and Homeowners were two of the largest respondent groups (21 Builders and 46 Homeowners) and also provided some of the highest levels of agreement for this section. These groups indicated that they understood the required inspections well and received timely service.

The questions that received the highest levels of neutrality from Developers mainly focused on their interactions with inspectors (such as how well they explained deficiencies) and the process of obtaining a CO.

A key finding from this section is that the division is generally meeting a high level of service in terms of communicating and performing inspections in a timely manner. Issues that may need to be addressed include the process of obtaining a COO and training inspectors to explain deficiencies to customers in a more thorough manner.

5. Multiple Choice Responses – Energy Services

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements that pertained to Energy Services. This section received input from 41 respondents.

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	83.3%	11.9%	4.8%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%

4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	66.7%	21.4%	11.9%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	69.1%	19.1%	11.9%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	66.7%	23.8%	9.5%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	36.6%	51.2%	12.2%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	66.7%	26.2%	7.1%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	68.3%	22.0%	9.8%
10	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	63.4%	31.7%	4.9%
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	66.7%	23.8%	9.5%

5.1 Analysis of Overall Responses

All but one statement received more than 60% agreement overall. On average, 67% of respondents selected agree or strongly agree, 23.6% selected neutral, and 8.7% selected disagree or strongly disagree.

One highlight here is the quality of customer service: 83.3% agreed that staff were helpful during the application process (#1). Respondents were also likely to indicate that they understood what permits/approvals were required for their project (#2) as well as what documentation to submit (#3).

Statement #7, which dealt with the information available online, received 51.2% neutral responses from participants. This is the lowest-scoring statement in this section, with 36.6% respondents agreeing with this statement.

5.2 Differences by Respondent Group

Architects, Builders, Engineers, and Homeowners all had high average levels of agreement. These respondent groups had average agreement levels exceeding 70%.

On the other hand, Business Owners, Contractors, and Developers each had an average agreement of 60% or lower. These respondent groups had neutral response rates of 30% or more. None of the respondent groups had an average disagreement level exceeding 20%.

The following list highlights some instances where a respondent group may have deviated from the overall responses:

- 100% of Builders, 100% of Engineers, 92.3% of Developers, and 86.7% of Homeowners felt as though they received high-quality customer service (#1).

- Statements that related to the overall project timeline and the steps involved (#4 and #5) received lower agreement from Business Owners, Contractors, and Developers. Each of these groups provided 60% agreement or less, with higher levels of neutrality compared to disagreement.

- 50% of Business Owners and 50% of Developers felt as though they understood the fees required for their project (#6).

- As noted earlier, statement #7 (information on the City's website) received a very high level of neutral responses across all respondent types. Architects and Engineers each provided the highest level of agreement for this statement – both at 50%. Developers had the lowest level of agreement at 16.7%.

- 41.7% of Business Owners, 50% of Contractors, and 50% of Developers indicated that the process of submitting their application was efficient (#10).

It is clear from the results in this section that Energy Services provides high-quality customer service. Even Developers, which previously had some of the lowest average agreement levels across all sections, rated customer service at 92.3% agreement.

Based on the analysis of respondent groups, as well as the responses overall, one key issue identified here is the usefulness of the City's website as it relates to Energy Services. Statement #7 received the lowest level of agreement (and highest level of neutral responses) up to this point in this report. Other heavily-neutral responses – especially those found among Business Owners, Contractors, and Developers – tend to relate specifically to the availability of information prior to their submittal. These issues would appear to be tied together. Working towards creating a website that would be received more positively would mean creating a website containing a wealth of information for all customer types.

6. Multiple Choice Responses – Fire

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements that pertained to the Fire plan review and inspections process. This section received input from 31 respondents. As with Building, participants were provided with two question banks – one for plan review and another for inspections.

6.1 Fire Plan Review

The following statements pertain to the fire plan review process:

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	80.7%	19.4%	0.0%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	80.6%	6.5%	12.9%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	80.6%	6.5%	12.9%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	74.2%	12.9%	12.9%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	74.2%	16.1%	9.7%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	71.0%	19.4%	9.7%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	54.8%	32.3%	12.9%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	77.4%	12.9%	9.7%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	71.0%	19.4%	9.7%
10	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	73.3%	26.7%	0.0%

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	67.7%	19.4%	12.9%

6.2 Analysis of Overall Responses – Fire Plan Review

On average, statements in this section received 73.2% agreement and 9.4% disagreement. Neutral responses averaged at 17.4%. Customer service and customer understanding of required approvals and documentation were again the most well-received. All but two responses in this section received more than 70% agreement.

The statement related to quality of the City's website (#7) did not receive as much positive sentiment as other items in this section. 54.8% of respondents agreed, while neutral responses were relatively high at 32.3%. Statement #11 (timeliness) was the only other statement that was less than 70% agreement but was 67.7%.

Overall responses are indicative of a mostly positive experience in interacting with Fire Plan Review. While statements #7 and #11 were only slightly less well-received, none of the statements in this section received more than 12.9% disagreement.

6.3 Differences by Respondent Group – Fire Plan Review

This section received a small number of responses compared to other divisions included in this survey. Therefore, an average level of agreement/neutrality/disagreement for each respondent group would likely be skewed and is omitted for this division.

The list below highlights some instances where responses from individual groups may have deviated from the overall responses:

- 28.6% of Builders and 30.8% of Developers indicated that they did not understand the timeline associated with their project (#4). Furthermore, 23.1% of Developers did not understand the steps associated with the review process (#5).

- 28.6% of Builders did not fully understand what fees would be required for their project (#6).

- 44.4% of Business Owners, 33.3% of Developers, and 50% of Homeowners were neutral towards statement #10, which asked if respondents had received new issues/comments after revising and resubmitting their initial application.

- 28.6% of Builders and 30.8% of Developers felt as though the time it took to process their application took longer than expected (#11).

Again, Builders and Developers generally had some of the highest levels of disagreement for statements in this section. Statements that received 20% or more disagreement from this group focused on their understanding of project timelines, steps, fees, and the timeliness of the process. With this information in mind, along with the response to the quality of the information found on the City's website, it could be implied that bolstering the Fire Plan Review division's online presence could help alleviated some of the lower-scored items in this section.

Another key deviation was the high amounts of neutrality from certain groups towards statement #10. While it is hard to assume what a respondent may be indicating by selecting neutral, it could be worth investigating the number of new issues/comments introduced by Fire Plan Review following resubmittals.

6.4 Fire Inspections

The following statements pertain to the fire inspection process:

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	The City did a good job at communicating what inspections were required from the Fire department.	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
2	My inspection was completed on the date that it was scheduled.	73.1%	26.9%	0.0%
3	It was easy to request and schedule an inspection.	73.1%	23.1%	3.9%
4	Inspectors dealt with me using a positive approach of "here's how to get your work approved".	73.1%	26.9%	0.0%
5	If deficiencies were identified during an inspection, inspectors indicated the applicable code section.	66.7%	29.6%	3.7%
6	The inspector showed up when expected.	76.0%	24.0%	0.0%
7	Inspectors were fair and consistent in applying the codes and regulations to my project.	70.8%	25.0%	4.2%

8	Staff provided me with good customer service throughout the inspection process.	68.0%	32.0%	0.0%

6.5 Overall Analysis – Fire Inspections

Responses to this section were mostly either positive or neutral, with very low disagreement levels across all questions. Average agreement was 72%, average neutrality was 26.6%, and average disagreement was 1.5%.

The highest-scoring statements focused on the timeliness of inspectors (#1 and #6), while the lowest scoring dealt with how well inspectors communicated deficiencies (#5) and overall customer service (#8). That being said, none of the statements in this section received less than 65% agreement, indicating a positive customer experience overall.

6.6 Differences by Respondent Group – Fire Inspections

Generally speaking, the responses by each respondent group had agreement levels similar to or exceeding those found in the prior subsection. Notably, Builders, Business Owners, and Contractors all had agreement levels exceeding the overall response rate for multiple statements:

- The seven Contractors that responded to this section provided 100% agreement for all statements except for #5, which dealt with how well inspectors explained deficiencies found during their inspection. Builders also had high agreement levels across all statements, save for #5.

- Business Owners, Developers, and Engineers had slightly lower agreement levels for statement #8, which dealt with customer service. That being said, these agreement levels were only one or two percentage points lower than the overall score.

7. Multiple Choice Responses – Public Works

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements that pertained to Public Works. This section received input from 57 participants.

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	66.7%	12.3%	21.1%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	55.4%	19.6%	25.0%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	63.6%	12.7%	23.6%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	47.3%	21.8%	30.9%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	49.1%	21.8%	29.1%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	49.1%	23.6%	27.3%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	42.3%	36.5%	21.2%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	48.2%	22.2%	29.6%

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	42.3%	26.9%	30.8%
10	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	44.2%	30.8%	25.0%
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	44.4%	22.2%	33.3%

7.1 Analysis of Overall Responses

This section received the lowest average overall agreement at 50.2%. The average neutral response rate was 22.8% and average disagreement was 27.0%. It is worth noting that all statements received at least 20% disagreement in this section.

The highest rated statements related to the quality of customer service (#1) and the applicant's understanding of the permits and documentation required for their project (#2 and #3). These are the only statements to receive over 50% agreement overall.

Responses to this section indicate that, when compared to other departments/divisions in this report, Public Works may struggle to provide ample information to its customers regarding timeline (#4 and #5) and fees (#6). The process of submitting an application for review, the review itself, and the time the process takes could also warrant being looked at (#8-#11). Lastly, the amount of information available on the City's website as it pertains to Public Works may need to be bolstered, according to responses to statement #8.

7.2 Differences by Respondent Group

On average, Developers had the lowest level of agreement for this section (20%) and the highest level of disagreement (64%). The most positive groups were Contractors and Engineers, each with an average agreement rate of 50% agreement or more.

That being said most respondent groups in this section had relatively even agreement and disagreement, with a neutral response rate of over 20%.

- Multiple respondent groups had high levels of disagreement for statement #1, that staff provided good customer service throughout the process. 39.3% of Architects, 44.5% of Builders, 42.3% of Business Owners, 63.3% of Developers, and 44.5% of Homeowners noted receiving less than stellar customer service.

- Developers provided 50% or more disagreement for all statements. Three statements received more than 75% disagreement: all relating to the timeline associated with their projects (#4, #5, and #11).

- While Homeowners largely followed the same trend as other respondent groups (having an equal percentage of agreement vs. disagreement), this group were much more likely to indicate disagreement towards three statements in particular. 49.4% found the submittal process to be inefficient (#8), while 56.8% indicated that review comments were unclear (#9). Similarly, 41.4% noted receiving new issues/comments on their application following revision and resubmittal (#10).

Overall, multiple respondent groups took issue with the process of submitting their application, as well as the quality and consistency of the review process. This sentiment was shared by respondent groups of all expertise levels, from Developers to Homeowners.

Likewise, multiple groups noted that it was hard to find information related to their application – ranging from required documentation to the necessary fees. This again ties into the quality and availability of information on the City’s website, as shown by the responses to statement #7.

8. Multiple Choice Responses – Development Review Process

The final multiple-choice section asked respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with the entirety of the development review process in Richland. This section received input from 131 respondents.

#	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1	The process is predictable.	57.7%	20.0%	22.3%
2	The amount of time taken to process my application was acceptable.	48.9%	22.9%	28.2%
3	The City met its time commitments for processing my application.	54.2%	22.1%	23.7%
4	Staff answering the phones provided good customer service.	71.8%	16.8%	11.5%
5	The technology in place is user friendly and makes the permitting process more efficient.	48.9%	33.6%	17.6%
6	The City speaks with "one voice" when processing applications and permits and conducting inspections	45.0%	30.5%	24.4%

8.1 Analysis

Responses to this section were again quite mixed, with only one statement receiving more than 70% agreement overall. Average agreement was 54.4%, average disagreement was 21.3%, and the average neutral response rate was 24.3%.

One positive element revealed by the results is that respondents largely feel as though they receive quality customer service over the phone (#4).

Three of the six statements received less than 50% agreement. These dealt with the timeline associated with an application (#2), the technology used in the process (#5), and consistency amongst City staff (#6). These statements received relatively high neutral and negative responses from participants.

9. Open-Ended Responses – Greatest Strengths

This section of the survey asked respondents to – in their own words – identify up to three of the Development Review Process' greatest strengths. This section received a total of 152 comments from 60 respondents. The following list summarizes some key themes from the data:

(1) Customers believe that the current staff is one of Richland's greatest assets.

A total of 53 comments made direct reference to the quality of staff in some way, whether that be their friendliness, work ethic, or knowledge of their field. A further 17 comments noted that staff are responsive to their questions via phone, email, and in person. One thing to note in particular is that many comments pointed to front-desk staff as being stellar in their customer service skills.

(2) Some processes are well-received.

Several comments received in this section remarked on some part of the process as being easy, efficient, timely, etc. 13 comments noted that the process of submitting an application is easy and efficient. A further 11 highlighted that they found the process they interacted with to be consistent and in line with the City's code.

(3) Other strengths highlighted by respondents included inspections, timeliness, and online resources.

12 comments highlighted the timeliness of the process as one of its greatest strengths. Seven comments noted that inspections are done promptly and performed by knowledgeable and personable staff. Five comments specifically stated that they enjoy the online resources available to applicants.

10. Open-Ended Responses – Improvement Opportunities

This section of the survey asked respondents to – in their own words – Identify up to three of the Development Review Process' greatest opportunities for improvement. This section received a total of 139 comments from 64 respondents. The following list summarizes some key themes from the data:

(1) Respondents indicated that they would like more information available to them.

20 comments mentioned a need for better customer resources. These ideally would help both experienced and inexperienced applicants navigate the development process. Some specific examples include common code requirements, explanations of how different review entities interact, and help on how to fill out certain forms.

Similarly, 13 more comments asked for better communication from staff related to information on their project.

(2) Customers would like to see various process improvements, as well as a timelier development review process.

21 comments suggested some form of process improvement. Common suggestions included redlining plans, allowing a more open discussion regarding planning projects, and providing text updates to applicants. 11 more comments noted a need for more consistency in the process, ranging from consistency with the City's code to better collaboration between review entities.

19 comments generally referred to a need to make the process move faster. These were not very specific beyond suggesting that efficiencies should be implemented.

(3) Participants would like to see various updates to the City's website.

14 comments noted some form of improvement to Richland's online presence as it relates to the development process. Some called for a general overhaul of the website and its content, with the intent of improving usability and improving access to information. Other more specific examples included implementing an online application system that allows for real-time tracking as well as the ability to pay fees online.

ATTACHMENT A – FOCUS GROUPS

In tandem with the customer survey, the Matrix Consulting Group conducted three meetings with stakeholder groups to obtain feedback regarding their experience with the permitting review, inspection, and approval process. The on-site meetings were held at the Richland public library on October 11 and 12, 2022

Background and Logistics

Matrix Consulting Group sent invitations to the stakeholder meetings to approximately 250 individuals and businesses who had received permits in the previous 24 months. Those invited included developers, builders, architects, engineers, and homeowners and had participated in the entitlement process, right of way process, building permit process, or a combination of these. A total of 23 individuals participated in the focus groups.

Participants were promised anonymity. To ensure this, comments were typed up without names attached and then consolidated by subject area. They are summarized in the following sections. In providing this write up, most emphasis is on issues that were identified by multiple participants in the meetings.

The comments summarized below reflect statements made by stakeholders but may not reflect the experience of all applicants. The reality is often more complex than that described by applicants. Thus, feedback summarized below should be seen as a reflection of the stakeholders' experience and opinion but not a complete understanding of the back stories behind individual applications.

Key Points

- The meetings were well attended with between four and twelve individuals and organizations represented at each. No homeowners or small business owners attended, but all other categories of invitees were represented. The groups weighed more heavily towards developers and engineers.

- Attendance was very strong for development review stakeholder groups, which often indicates that there is considerable concern about the development review process. However, several individuals said that they came because they had positive experiences and wanted to make sure that positive elements of the process are not inadvertently changed.

- The substance of the City's land use, engineering, and building requirements was not seen as a major issue by stakeholders. Most noted that their concerns related more to process, not to the technical standards that they are being asked to meet.

- The primary exception to this is the time required to get approval on a final plat. Because final plats must be approved by the City Council, there can be a several week delay in receiving this approval, which can be costly for developers. Several participants commented on this.

- Poor communication and coordination between different departments and divisions was the top concern for most stakeholders. Another frequent complaint related to the lack of predictability of the review process across all disciplines.

- Stakeholders were generally very positive about front-line customer service provided by permit techs and liked the ability to submit applications and plans electronically.

Culture / Customer Service

- Stakeholders consistently stated that the culture is heavily regulatory, and that they believed that processes would work better if staff were coached on being problem solvers and facilitators as well as in the technical aspects of their job.

- Several stakeholders spoke of concerns about culture and morale within the Development Services Department. The culture in other departments was considered less of an issue, and the Fire Department was lauded for an exceptional culture. It is unusual, and therefore notable, to have stakeholders to be aware of and note cultural issues at this level.

- Many complained that communication between departments is poor and stated that when there were conflicting comments on an application: "departments do not take it upon themselves to work out differences."

- Applicants felt that some staff "did not care" when delays or changes in comments cost them thousands or tens of thousands of dollars and generally had an attitude that "that isn't my problem."

- Stakeholders understood (for the most part) that staff cannot help them design projects but said that some staff tended to the opposite extreme, with feedback limited to saying "that is wrong" or "you can't do that" but not providing useful guidance on a path forward or noting the specific code that was involved.

- Several participants brought up the fire department as a model for showing a culture of customer service and problem solving without relaxing safety and technical standards.

- Permit techs within the department were generally praised for exceptional customer service.

- Some applicants felt that the Hearing Examiner's attitude towards applicants was condescending.

Entitlement/Land Use Process

- Many of issues identified related to complex projects that need variances, zoning changes, or where what was allowed was not clear cut – applicants would like clearer answers on what is or is not feasible so that they don't waste time and money "chasing" something that is ultimately turned down.

- No homeowners or small businesses attended the meetings, but the professionals who did attend said that they could not imagine how hard it would be for a resident or business owner who didn't have experience to navigate Richland's land use process.

- The delay to get onto the calendar for a pre-application meeting is a source of frustration - currently there is a six-week delay. Some would like the option of waiving the pre-application meeting if the timeframe for scheduling a pre-application meeting cannot be shortened.

- Stakeholders said that staff are often unprepared at the pre-application meetings; some are opening up plans for the first time while the meeting was going on.

- Several stakeholders indicated that the remote pre-application process is less helpful than in-person as they have less ability to build relationships with the appropriate individuals. They also stated that most staff don't use their cameras during remote meetings, providing a further sense of disconnect.

- Few reviewers provide written comments after the preapplication meeting – and often basic information is not provided at that point that could have prevented costly delays later in the process.

- Participants stated that often issues are brought up in review that they believe they should have been mentioned at pre-application, such as the need for a geological or archeological survey. The delay in learning about these requirements can cost applicants significant amounts of time.

- After an application is submitted, they seem to go into a "black hole" according to some applicants. Contents of staff reports and conditions of approval can be a surprise to the applicants.

- Some stakeholders indicated that comments from review disciplines can conflict with each other and that they were caught in the middle trying to negotiate different positions held by the city.

- Some stakeholders said that the staff reports are overly critical and nitpicky in their comments and that conditions of approval are excessive.

- They also stated that staff reports (prepared by planning) do not always accurately reflect comments provided by DPW on the project.

- A few stakeholders said that staff reverse themselves over the course of a project, indicating initially that something will work and then opposing it later. Stakeholders indicated that it would be helpful to have an 80% check in with staff prior to staff report to identify major issues.

Hearing examiner

- For those who have gone through the Hearing Examiner process, the consensus was that the timeline for hearing examiner decisions is problematic and frustrating. Some said they had "no idea" when they would get a decision, making planning for projects difficult.

- Some indicated that hearing examiner meetings get pushed back without clear reasons, causing costly delays.

ROW (engineering / land disturbance process) / Land Development / Final plat process

- Engineers attending the meeting said that it was common for new comments to come in with re-reviews – on items within the submittal that were not new to the project. Stakeholders say that this is especially the case with traffic comments.

- While planning and building accept electronic plans, DPW requires multiple sets of printed plans. Stakeholders said that they can spend hundreds or thousands of dollars to print out multiple copies of plans. They would like to see DPW using Bluebeam, which they believe is now an industry standard.

- Most participants praised the level of technical knowledge in DPW but said that most plans go through one reviewer and that this creates a choke point. The reviewer is often not responsive to calls / questions (due to workload or being out of the office) and if he is out sick or away stakeholders said that “nothing” moves forward.

- The department has internal deadlines for project review, with a longer timeframe for the 3rd review. The stated purpose of this is to ensure that applicants provide comprehensive responses to comments. Large developers and engineers who work with them indicated that they understood that the timeline for the third review is to penalize applicants who do not address comments upfront. However, they said that for complex projects and in situations where new comments were provided on the second review the timeline is punitive and unreasonable. One stakeholder said that he felt it was insulting to be told that a 3rd submission means that they are “not serious” when it often just means that there are many complexities involved.

- Stakeholders experienced frustration about the end of the land development process / final plat process, including the need to bond if their final punch list of items is over 10K, the many signatures required, and the need for City Council approval.

Building

- Requirements related to the new energy code are confusing. Applicants could use some training on the code and how to address City requirements.

- From a stakeholder perspective, the technology works well. Customers stated that they like the ability to submit electronically and schedule inspections electronically.

- Some expressed concerns about morale and high turnover in the building division.

- The use of NW Code Partners to conduct plan review has led to a degradation on plan review quality as well as disconnects between original plan reviews and re-reviews and disconnects with other divisions / departments, according to building permit applicants at the meetings.

- Applicants also stated that since the switch over to NW Code Partners many comments seem generic and involve reaching out to other internal departments who are also involved in the review for clarification.

- Stakeholders submitting plans for master planned communities said that the process works very smoothly for them, and they hope it continues to do so.

- Stakeholders consistently stated that permit techs are very good to work with and the intake process works well.

- Overall, most said that the inspection process works well. In some cases, an inspector will identify issues even when they are constructing according to approved plans.

Certificates of Occupancy / Final Plats

- Poor communication between Public Works and Building permit techs for project close-out.

ATTACHMENT B – RESPONSE TABLES

The following tables show a more detailed perspective of multiple-choice responses received by providing the specific percentages in each category – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Planning

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the planning process.	32.2%	38.8%	14.9%	9.9%	4.1%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	28.3%	40.8%	15.8%	12.5%	2.5%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	28.3%	43.3%	13.3%	14.2%	0.8%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review process for my project.	24.2%	35.8%	15.0%	15.0%	10.0%
5	I clearly understood who had the decision making authority (Staff, Planning Commission, Hearing Examiner, City Council) for my application.	21.9%	37.8%	22.7%	12.6%	5.0%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	28.0%	39.0%	18.6%	11.0%	3.4%
7	Staff was helpful in explaining what I needed to do and how to accomplish it.	32.2%	25.4%	18.6%	17.0%	6.8%
8	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	16.0%	27.7%	36.1%	13.5%	6.7%
9	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	26.7%	29.2%	22.5%	14.2%	7.5%
10	The first review of my application was complete and comprehensive.	23.9%	34.2%	18.8%	15.4%	7.7%
11	After receiving comments on my application, I clearly understood what I needed to revise on my application to achieve compliance with adopted codes and ordinances.	20.3%	36.4%	23.7%	13.6%	5.9%
12	Comments and corrections received on my application were based on the City's development code or other legal standards and were fully explained to me.	21.6%	25.0%	33.6%	14.7%	5.2%
13	Comments received from different review disciplines were consistent with one another.	17.8%	28.8%	29.7%	15.3%	8.5%

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	After I resubmitted my application the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	15.4%	39.3%	23.1%	12.8%	9.4%
15	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	24.4%	25.2%	16.0%	19.3%	15.1%
16	The City's development code/ordinance is easy to understand.	10.9%	31.1%	29.4%	21.9%	6.7%
17	If my application went to the Planning Commission or Hearing Examiner, the process to get my application to the public hearing was efficient.	8.9%	16.8%	56.4%	8.9%	8.9%
18	If my application went to City Council, the process to get my application to Council was efficient.	8.3%	12.4%	68.0%	6.2%	5.2%

Building Permit Intake and Review

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the building application review and permitting process.	36.1%	33.3%	16.7%	10.2%	3.7%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	30.6%	39.8%	17.6%	11.1%	0.9%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	27.8%	39.8%	17.6%	12.0%	2.8%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	28.0%	32.7%	20.6%	12.2%	6.5%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	27.8%	36.1%	15.7%	17.6%	2.8%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	27.8%	38.9%	18.5%	10.2%	4.6%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	20.4%	32.4%	35.2%	8.3%	3.7%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	31.8%	36.5%	14.0%	12.2%	5.6%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clearly based on the city's	22.6%	29.3%	28.3%	15.1%	4.7%

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	building code or other clear legal standards and were fully explained to me.					
10	After I resubmitted my application the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	24.0%	31.7%	26.0%	11.5%	6.7%
11	The time it took to process my building permit application was appropriate and as expected.	27.8%	29.6%	18.5%	14.8%	9.3%

Building Inspections

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The City did a good job at communicating what inspections would be required for my project from the date of permit issuance.	33.3%	44.1%	8.8%	8.8%	4.9%
2	My inspection was completed on the date that they were scheduled.	37.6%	39.6%	13.9%	4.0%	5.0%
3	It was easy to request and schedule an inspection.	37.3%	37.3%	17.7%	4.9%	2.9%
4	Inspectors dealt with me using a positive approach of "here's how to get your work approved".	36.3%	31.4%	23.5%	6.9%	2.0%
5	If deficiencies were identified during an inspection, inspectors indicated the applicable code section.	23.0%	33.0%	33.0%	9.0%	2.0%
6	The inspector showed up when expected.	31.4%	41.2%	19.6%	4.9%	2.9%
7	Inspectors were fair and consistent in applying the codes and regulations to my project.	33.7%	35.6%	23.8%	5.9%	1.0%
8	The process to obtain the certificate of occupancy for my permit was efficient.	26.5%	29.6%	33.7%	5.1%	5.1%
9	If my project was inspected by different inspectors (plumbing, building, fire, zoning, landscaping, engineering) the process was well coordinated and comments from inspectors did not contradict each other.	24.0%	38.5%	30.2%	5.2%	2.1%
10	Staff provided me with good customer service throughout the inspection process.	33.3%	35.4%	27.3%	3.0%	1.0%

Energy Services

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	35.7%	47.6%	11.9%	4.8%	0.0%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	28.6%	50.0%	14.3%	7.1%	0.0%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	31.0%	47.6%	14.3%	7.1%	0.0%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	26.2%	40.5%	21.4%	9.5%	2.4%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	26.2%	42.9%	19.1%	11.9%	0.0%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	21.4%	45.2%	23.8%	7.1%	2.4%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	17.1%	19.5%	51.2%	9.8%	2.4%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	19.1%	47.6%	26.2%	4.8%	2.4%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	22.0%	46.3%	22.0%	9.8%	0.0%
10	After I resubmitted my application, the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	22.0%	41.5%	31.7%	2.4%	2.4%
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	23.8%	42.9%	23.8%	9.5%	0.0%

Fire Permit Intake and Review

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	32.3%	48.4%	19.4%	0.0%	0.0%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	22.6%	58.1%	6.5%	9.7%	3.2%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	22.6%	58.1%	6.5%	9.7%	3.2%

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	22.6%	51.6%	12.9%	9.7%	3.2%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	22.6%	51.6%	16.1%	6.5%	3.2%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	16.1%	54.8%	19.4%	9.7%	0.0%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	16.1%	38.7%	32.3%	12.9%	0.0%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	19.4%	58.1%	12.9%	6.5%	3.2%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	25.8%	45.2%	19.4%	9.7%	0.0%
10	After I resubmitted my application the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	26.7%	46.7%	26.7%	0.0%	0.0%
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	29.0%	38.7%	19.4%	9.7%	3.2%

Fire Inspections

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The City did a good job at communicating what inspections were required from the Fire department.	17.9%	57.1%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2	My inspection was completed on the date that it was scheduled.	23.1%	50.0%	26.9%	0.0%	0.0%
3	It was easy to request and schedule an inspection.	23.1%	50.0%	23.1%	0.0%	3.9%
4	Inspectors dealt with me using a positive approach of "here's how to get your work approved".	34.6%	38.5%	26.9%	0.0%	0.0%
5	If deficiencies were identified during an inspection, inspectors indicated the applicable code section.	22.2%	44.4%	29.6%	3.7%	0.0%
6	The inspector showed up when expected.	20.0%	56.0%	24.0%	0.0%	0.0%
7	Inspectors were fair and consistent in applying the codes and regulations to my project.	20.8%	50.0%	25.0%	4.2%	0.0%

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8	Staff provided me with good customer service throughout the inspection process.	28.0%	40.0%	32.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Public Works

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Staff provided me with good customer service during the process.	15.8%	50.9%	12.3%	7.0%	14.0%
2	I clearly understood what approvals / permits would be required for my project.	14.3%	41.1%	19.6%	14.3%	10.7%
3	I clearly understood what information and documentation I needed to include in my application.	14.6%	49.1%	12.7%	12.7%	10.9%
4	I clearly understood the timeline associated with the review and approval process for my project.	14.6%	32.7%	21.8%	10.9%	20.0%
5	I clearly understood the steps of the review process for my project.	14.6%	34.6%	21.8%	12.7%	16.4%
6	I clearly understood what fees would be required for my project.	12.7%	36.4%	23.6%	14.6%	12.7%
7	The City's web site had the information I needed to prepare a complete application.	9.6%	32.7%	36.5%	7.7%	13.5%
8	Submitting my application was an efficient process.	13.0%	35.2%	22.2%	14.8%	14.8%
9	Comments and corrections received on my application were clear.	9.6%	32.7%	26.9%	11.5%	19.2%
10	After I resubmitted my application the reviewers focused primarily on ensuring that comments were addressed. New issues were not identified that should have been identified in the initial review.	11.5%	32.7%	30.8%	9.6%	15.4%
11	The time it took to process my application was appropriate and as expected.	11.1%	33.3%	22.2%	7.4%	25.9%

Development Review Overall

#	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The process is predictable.	23.1%	34.6%	20.0%	16.9%	5.4%
2	The amount of time taken to process my application was acceptable.	27.5%	21.4%	22.9%	16.0%	12.2%
3	The City met its time commitments for processing my application.	24.4%	29.8%	22.1%	12.2%	11.5%
4	Staff answering the phones provided good customer service.	32.8%	38.9%	16.8%	6.9%	4.6%
5	The technology in place is user friendly and makes the permitting process more efficient.	17.6%	31.3%	33.6%	9.9%	7.6%
6	The City speaks with "one voice" when processing applications and permits and conducting inspections	18.3%	26.7%	30.5%	11.5%	13.0%

Appendix C: Best Management Practices Assessment

1. Introduction

This best management practices assessment represents an important step to report on initial key findings and opportunities related to the development review, permitting, and inspection processes for the City of Richland. In order to make the assessments of operational strengths and improvement opportunities, the project team utilized a set of best management practices outlining effective operational practices against which to evaluate the various operations and processes of the development process in the City of Richland.

Collectively the best practices consist of:

- Statements of "best practices" or "recommended practices" or performance targets derived from national professional service organizations (such as American Planning Association, International Code Council, etc.).

- Statements of "best or prevailing practices" based on the study team's experience in evaluating high-performing development review operations.

- Identification of whether the particular unit meets these performance targets.

The diagnostic assessment is one of several tools that will be used to identify recommended reforms. Following completion of this analysis, it will be used along with information obtained from stakeholder surveys and workshops, feedback from the City, and data analysis by the project team to develop a final set of recommendations.

2. Key Strengths

Although the diagnostic assessment is designed to identify improvement opportunities, it is also an opportunity to identify existing strengths of the current processes. Some of the key strengths of the City's development review process include:

- The majority of building permit applications and plans are submitted, reviewed, and issued electronically.

- The City has established turnaround times for each review entity involved in reviewing plans, and managers track performance in meeting these timelines.

- Inspections are guaranteed for the day after they are requested.

- The City is transitioning to a new permitting software system (EnerGov) in Spring of 2023. Features of this platform should provide enhanced collaboration between different review entities and improved submittal and review processes for applicants and staff.

These are just a few examples of strengths of the current operations and where the City is currently meeting best practices.

3. Key Opportunities for Improvement

The comparison of the City's current approach to best management practices also identified some improvement opportunities. Notable issues include:

- Comments and input from different departments and divisions are not clearly reconciled before being provided to the applicant.

- Planning and DPW lack the ability to ramp up review capacity during times of high workload, and processes as currently designed create chokepoints in the review process.

- Preapplication meetings could be enhanced to provide clearer guidance to applicants prior to the development of a full submittal.

- Review comments for Planning applications are often used to develop potential conditions of approval without providing the applicant an opportunity to address these comments prior to approval. The latter approach would expand timelines somewhat but could be more efficient for both the applicant and the city.

- Turnover in the Building Division has led to inconsistent reviews and poor coordination with other divisions.

The above items are not in alignment with best practices and indicate challenges that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes and operations related to development review, permitting, and inspection activities. The project team will expand on these and other issues in subsequent analysis and in the draft and final reports.

4. Diagnostic Assessment

This section provides an initial overall assessment of current operations and processes and identifies initial opportunities for organizational and operational improvements. The assessment is presented in a checklist format. The checklist identifies whether current practices do or do not meet the target.

The issues identified in this review will be analyzed further by the project team, leading to the development of the draft report. This analysis will primarily focus on the development review operations of Planning, Public Works, Building, and Fire within the City of Richland.

This diagnostic assessment of best practices is broken down into the major subsections of: Management and Administration; Customer Information and Interaction; Processes; and Technology Utilization.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Management and Administration			
The City has goals, objectives, and performance measures for permitting activities.	✓		Some targets in the planning process (e.g., timelines for review and re-review) are unclear and should be clarified.
There is a clear point of accountability (either an individual or a team) for ensuring that the process is efficient and predictable and to address issues as they arise.		✓	The City should identify and create a point of accountability for the entire development process by following a project manager model, especially for more complex projects.
Department managers and City Management routinely review performance (speed, efficiency) of the permitting process.		✓	There is no monitoring across all development review functions – it is primarily conducted on the individual manager level. The City should create a more consistent monitoring framework.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Managers and staff have access to clear and accurate reports showing current workload, timelines, and other measures of performance.		✓	Reports are inconsistent and do not cross disciplines. Planning uses a white board; DPW tracks projects in Excel; Building uses Outlook to set deadlines. The City should develop a single reporting system that spans all permit types and reviewing divisions. Ideally, standardized reports will be incorporated into the new EnerGov system.
The City has access to adequate resources to conduct complete and timely reviews covering all disciplines.		✓	Some reviews are not completed within established deadlines due to uneven staffing levels and staff turnover.
The City has backup plans in place in the event of absence or departure of key staff.		✓	Some reviews are dependent on specific individuals and may be delayed if they are not available. Develop formal backup / succession plans for key positions.
The City has additional resources that it can deploy in cases of unusually heavy workload or high-priority projects.		✓	Planning and DPW are making efforts to expand capacity but are still characterized by choke points in the process. Contracted review is available for Building but is not well coordinated with the overall building permitting process. The City should ensure it has more flexible capacity across the board to address workload peaks.
Customer satisfaction with each phase of the development process is monitored.		✓	The City should put in place a process to assess customer satisfaction with their experience in terms of predictability, timeliness, and customer service.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Customer Education			
The City provides easy-to-understand and attractive guides to the planning, building permit, and inspections process.		✓	Web site is relatively comprehensive, but more information would be helpful regarding identifying what permits are required and explaining the overall process from planning application through certificate of occupancy.
The City web site includes a virtual "one stop shop" that provides an overview of all permitting requirements and links to permitting requirements by department or division.		✓	Information is highly segregated for planning, building, DPW, and energy efficiency.
All development staff are available at a single easy to access location.	✓		Front-line staff are relatively centralized and experts with greater technical knowledge are on-call.
Questions from the public are answered in a timely manner.	✓		Responsiveness from front line staff is strong, but answers to more complex questions and questions about permits under review are not always easy to obtain. The City should move more dynamic information on-line and establish metrics for responses to questions from applicants.
Fee schedule is published and regularly updated.	✓		
The City reaches out to the business and development community through periodic communications.	✓		The Development Services Department has a regular newsletter.
The City regularly obtains input from the business and development community on issues related to development review and permitting.		✓	Additional dialogue and outreach would be beneficial to focus more on continuous improvement and less on responding to complaints.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
The City's policies/website clearly identify what applications can be approved administratively versus approval by the Hearing Examiner, Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission, or City Council.	✓		Information is clearly spelled out in the land use code. It would be beneficial to also include this on the web site so that applicants can understand what type of application requires what approvals.
The City provides clear and comprehensive checklists identifying all items required to be submitted for each application type.	✓		Information on the web site should be expanded to include more information on requirements for planning applications.
Application forms are available on-line and can be filled out electronically.	✓		
The City's long-term plans and land development code are available on-line.	✓		
The City's adopted ordinance, regulations, and design standards are available and up to date online.	✓		
The City has a dedicated webpage that identifies major on-going development projects.	✓		Information should be organized in a more user-friendly format but is comprehensive.
Informational brochures for small development projects, particularly ones that are relevant to homeowners are in multiple languages.		✓	Information explaining the end-to-end process for small projects should be added.
Processes			
Permit technicians are certified by the International Code Council (ICC).	✓		
Permit technicians review applications for completeness at time of submittal.	✓		

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Plans are routed only to departments/contractors for whom the project is relevant.	✓		
Certain basic permits are available instantly with no review requirement	✓		
Expedited process is available for simple projects, such as minor interior renovations.		✓	The City does vary processing/review timelines based on the complexity of the project but should consider an expedited process.
Staff uses a case management approach for larger projects.		✓	While there is some coordination among departments, there is no central management of more complex projects. The City should put in place a central point of accountability for larger permits to improve coordination across departments.
Applications provide sufficient evidence / documentation for staff (or the relevant approval authority) to successfully review the submittal and make a decision.		✓	In some cases, required information (especially geologic or archeological studies) are not provided as part of the submittal. Where possible the city should let people know that these elements might be required and what the timeline is for such a determination.
Preapplication meetings are held for major projects.	✓		Preapplication meetings are required but changes to the process could help ensure projects go more smoothly with fewer late surprises.
Review timelines are posted on the City's website.		✓	This information is provided by permit techs but should also be published.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Expedited building plan review services are provided.		✓	Expedited services are not provided but may not be needed if turnaround times are met.
Resubmittal review turnaround times are quicker than new applications.	✓		
Adopted review timelines are met consistently.	✓		For reviews with established timelines, these appear to be consistently met. Better tracking is needed for Planning application timelines.
A formal internal Development Review Committee is responsible for ensuring that plans address all City requirements.		✓	Currently, Planning acts as a central point of collection for city requirements for planning applications; building for building applications. However, this could be improved through a more formal process to ensure that the City speaks with one voice when reviewing projects.
All review comments are incorporated into a single comment letter, reviewed for consistency and conflicting requirements, and distributed to the applicant by project manager.		✓	Comments are consolidated, but in many cases they are not reconciled, so feedback from different departments / divisions can be contradictory.
Project review / comment letters provide reference to the review checklist and / or code reference.	✓		
Plans are reviewed concurrently to avoid delays.	✓		
For re-submitted plans, reviewers focus on ensuring that comments have been addressed, not issues that should have been brought up in initial review.	✓		This is established policy for the City, although stakeholder feedback indicates that it is not always consistently applied.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
Approval authorities for planning and zoning permits are clearly stated and simple permits are approved administratively.		✓	Improve information regarding decision authorities on applications and website.
Applicants can track their permit application on-line.	✓		Current system provides some information that can be looked up; will be expanded with EnerGov.
Staff reports are thorough and include recommendations on actions.	✓		Staff reports are very robust and provide a significant amount of information regarding the application.
Customers are given an approximate time to expect their inspector.	✓		
Applicants can request inspections up to 5 pm on the day before; next day inspections are available for 100% of requests.	✓		
An online inspection request system is utilized to receive inspections with linkage to the permit information system.	✓		
Combination reviewers/ inspectors are used to reduce the need for duplicate inspections at a single project.	✓		
Building Inspectors conduct between 15 and 18 inspections per day.	✓		
The City charges a re-inspection fee to encourage builders to make sure work is complete and ready to inspect at time of inspection.	✓		Reinspection fee is not commonly utilized but inspections being requested before projects are ready does not appear to be a major issue.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
For Certificate of Occupancy Inspection all applicable inspectors complete the inspection at the same time.		✓	The City should better coordinate final inspections between planning, DPW, and building. The Building Official or a Building Plans Reviewer should play a stronger role in this process, as it is beyond the typical scope of the permit techs who manage the paperwork and checklists.
Technology			
Applicants can apply, pay for, and receive permits, some instantly, using an on-line portal.	✓		New EnerGov software system implementation should significantly streamline this process.
The permit software system can calculate the appropriate plan check and permitting fees.		✓	
Applicants can look up status of a permit, including comments from reviewers on-line or using the software.		✓	
Permit tracking software is used to manage the permit intake, review, and issuance process as well as related inspections.		✓	
All plan review comments are entered into the system and available to other reviewers, permit techs, and applicants (via the front end).		✓	
The permitting system electronically routes applications to all reviewers, who can also electronically approve, disapprove, and provide comments.		✓	
The City is moving towards a paperless system for all stages of permitting and development review.	✓		New system implementation is in progress.

Best Practice / Operational Target	Meets Target	Does Not Meet Target	Improvement Opportunity / Notes
The permitting system generates clear, user friendly reports on permitting activity which can be posted to the internet.		✓	This should be a priority with implementation of the new system.
Development staff has access to applicable GIS layers.	✓		
The general public can look up zoning information, flood zones, and other pertinent information using Web GIS.	✓		Information includes zoning, land use, and critical areas.
Inspectors enter inspection results and correction items in the field via tablet and have it instantly available and viewable on-line.	✓		
One software system is utilized for all permitting, inspection, and code enforcement functions in the City.		✓	Energov should be deployed across the board for planning, Right of Way, and building permits and inspections.
Internal staff training is provided on new features within the permitting software system.		✓	All staff should be trained and expected to become effective users of the system and not rely on permit techs for day to day system use.

COUNCIL WORKSHOP COVERSHEET

Council Date: 3/28/2023

Department: Fire & Emergency Services

Core Focus Area 6 - Enhance Neighborhood & Community Safety

Subject:
Narcan Distribtuion Program Discussion

Summary:
The Benton Franklin Health District has approached local EMS providers about initiating a program to distribute Nalaxone (Narcan) to patients, their families, and others following an opioid-related call for service. Fire & Emergency Services staff will review the proposed program parameters, potential benefits and risks of the program, what other agencies in the region are doing with the program, and seek feedback from the Council on policy-level direction related to this program.

Attachments:

COUNCIL WORKSHOP COVERSHEET

Council Date: 3/28/2023

Department: Finance

Core Focus Area 1 - Promote Financial Stability & Operational Effectiveness

Subject:
Biennial Budget Discussion

Summary:
The purpose of this discussion is to review the biennial budget process, discuss the pros and cons of budgeting on a biennial basis and to seek council input on annual versus biennial budgets.

Attachments: