

**PRMD Director's Advisory Group
Accomplishments and Outstanding Issues
June 2009**

Since its inception in 2004, the PRMD Director's Advisory Group (DAG) has focused on several consensus principles that are common to all aspects of PRMD's services:

- *Predictability.* There is often considerable uncertainty about the outcome and requirements to obtain a permit. Permit applicants want a process that is clearly defined with all requirements known as early in the process as possible. A predictable process is far less costly to applicants.
- *Permit Processing Time.* Time is money for permit applicants and delays add considerably to the cost of projects.
- *Service Orientation.* Our customers want PRMD staff to be solution-oriented and results-driven, and want improved and more responsive communication with staff.
- *Complexity.* Development regulations and permit processes have become complex. PRMD's customers would like to reduce that complexity whenever possible, especially for minor development and building projects.

With these principles in mind, the DAG has used its meetings to identify specific problem areas and brainstorm possible solutions. What follows is a list of improvements implemented by PRMD that either originated with the DAG or were significantly influenced by DAG discussions. This list also includes some "outstanding issues" that may be discussed by the DAG in the future.

Well & Septic

- Staff worked with stakeholders to implement a major revision to "Remodel Policy" that provides a more coherent process for determining when septic upgrade is needed for a residential remodel and avoiding septic review altogether for many smaller projects
- New minimum site plan standards implemented to ensure that essential information is conveyed on applications to help speed processing
- Well & Septic division policies now available on internet
- Back up coverage now provided at Well & Septic cubicle
- Division manager developed priorities to help guide staff decision making, especially for new staff; ongoing staff training on risk-based decisions and effective use of professional judgment
- Greater reliance on determinations by other REHS staff, including former staff, so as not to reinvent the wheel for every case or when staff changes
- Internal permit status tracking board to monitor backlog and turnaround times—processing times have decreased overall

- Encouraged use of appointments to meet with staff during Wednesday morning 10 to 11 a.m. hour
- To improve consistency and service, one staff person now assigned full time to the Well & Septic cubicle
- New “project coordinator” letter used to advise applicants of staff assignment and application processing
- A new “customer service pledge” developed by Well & Septic Division staff
- New process developed to integrate the temporary power pole and wintertime utility release into standard permit process, rather than separate application and fee

Building Division (Inspection and Plancheck)

- DAG identified reduction of plancheck time as a high priority
- Formal policy & procedure implemented for over-the-counter plancheck
 - Policy later revised to expand list of eligible projects to include resolution of code violations, certain commercial projects and larger structures
 - More projects get same-day approval and fewer projects in plancheck queue
- Feedback to inspection staff on need to improve consistency between inspectors on the same job; second inspector to site calling out fewer new issues
- Discussed desire for more definitive scheduling for site review inspections, but no change implemented at this time due to need to “batch” site reviews by geographic area
- Staff developed new questionnaire to determine if grading permit is required at time of building permit submittal
- Reinstated structural peer review plancheck procedure in response concerns about new third-party plancheck process
- Department added two new staff to reduce plancheck turnaround time
- DAG would like inspectors to call when they are unable to make scheduled time slot; staff instructed to do this, but not always possible due to lack of cell phone coverage and unforeseen delays
- Site review comments now available for viewing online
- New process developed to communicate final inspection requirements to builders and ensure that all clearances are properly recorded to facilitate occupancy
- Several recommendations made to improve implementation of handicap accessibility requirements, including a pre-application inspection to identify needed accessibility requirements early in design phase
- More staff trained on Title 24 accessibility requirements to improve consistency

Outstanding Issues

- Review procedure for geotechnical engineer review for conformance with recommendations; DAG would like quicker process and resolution of some instances where inspector also asks for engineer to certify building code

conformance

Drainage Review

- DAG identified drainage review as “critical path” for many development projects
- Section supervisor developed new permit tracking and assignment process with emphasis on quicker turnaround for minor projects; significant reduction in processing times for projects needing drainage review and for grading permits
- Established new drainage/stormwater cubicle in front office to answer customer questions and provide permit clearances where possible
- Division increased use of overtime and contract help during staff shortages to maintain and reduce review times
- Consistency of reviews and review times have improved
- New grading, drainage and vineyard/orchard site development ordinance reviewed and recommendations made to improve process
- All grading permits now handled by drainage review staff rather than building division staff; consistency of reviews improved
- Review time goals established for various types of drainage review applications

Outstanding Issues

- DAG would like to see information and written criteria available so applicants know at design stage if drainage review will be needed
- Develop standards for well-prepared engineered plans that do not require detailed staff review

Code Enforcement

- Division manager and director developed new policy for when PRMD staff should report code violations encountered in normal course of business; generally limited to construction in progress and imminent hazards
- Staff drafting ordinance amendment to allow new property owners to obtain permits without paying penalty fees for unpermitted work done by prior owner unless code violation on record with PRMD at time of sale
- Staff have worked with applicants to extend permit expiration dates when progress is being made toward compliance

Outstanding Issues

- PRMD may consider expansion of “no penalty” provisions in future
- DAG would like to see continued improvements in staff taking a more “problem solving” approach to code enforcement cases
- DAG would like to see handout providing more information on what might be required to resolve code violations, e.g., penalties, permit requirements, verification of concealed construction, etc.

Planning Division

- Peer review contracts in place for review of traffic reports; traffic report guidelines developed and in use
- Increased use of contract planners and overtime during busy periods to help reduce processing times on planning applications
- Developed Standard environmental review initial study responses to expedite process
- Eliminated one step in management review of staff reports for public hearing projects
- Staff developed revised rules for Williamson Act (Agricultural Preserve) contracts; review by DAG helped clarify procedures
- Increased participation by DTPW and Well & Septic staff at preapplication meetings to improve early guidance to planning project applicants

Outstanding Issues

- Processing times for planning applications remain too long
- DAG would like to see clear guidelines for groundwater reports
- DAG would like planning division to have more written policy and code interpretations, available to the public

Miscellaneous Issues

- Staff developed a new post-plancheck process that has Permit Technicians verifying remaining approvals after plancheck is approved and contacting customer with results; avoids problem of customer expecting permit issuance immediately after plancheck approval
- New process to collect fees at the time deferred submittals are turned in; allows inspections to be scheduled right away, not have to wait for additional fee payment
- Contours no longer required on site plan for ground-mounted solar panels
- PRMD's forms, applications and handouts now available in separate section on website
- DAG provided feedback on front counter operations, including option of "routing paper instead of people;" DAG strongly supported retaining current system where applicants visit each cubicle and have opportunity to provide clarification and answer staff questions about project
- DAG provided feedback to Building Division about need to verify property line setbacks; this issue is not a problem for contractors on site, no need to change process
- DAG provided feedback on new minimum site plan standards, including feedback on requirement for site contours
- Added ability to contact staff via email from PRMD website
- Added new "Boards and Commissions" area to the PRMD website

- Review and advise on PRMD's online services, including the new *Active Map* service and redesigned website, and provide recommendations to improve functionality and usefulness
- Provide feedback on PRMD's new automated attendant phone system to ensure that calls are properly routed
- Reviewed PRMD's Performance Measurement project to help identify core services to be measured and ensuring information gathered is relevant to customer experience

Outstanding Issues

- Consider separate processes for contractors/design professionals and general public
- Address various problems with user-friendliness of building permit form, including elimination of nearly unreadable copies, consider computer generation for these forms