



COUNTY OF SONOMA

PERMIT AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2829
(707) 565-1900 FAX (707) 565-1103

Director's Advisory Group

Monday, September 26, 4:00 pm

PRMD Front Conference Room

Notes

Attendance: Renee deMonchy, Steve Borchardt, Simon Fairweather, Jerry Eddinger, Jim Olmsted, Neil Peoples, Beth Bruno, Howard Brunner, Bob Ost, Mike Hogan.

Staff: Jennifer Barrett, Pete Parkinson, Patrick Mullin, Carrie Muller.

Item #1 Customer Service Working Group Updates

Patrick

Handout: 2011 PRMD Customer Service Working Group Action Plan

Patrick explained the makeup of the Customer Service Working Group. The working group consisted of staff and "regular" customers who met 12-15 times discussing areas to improve within PRMD and solutions to improve. From the areas identified, we had to pair it down to those we have control of. The areas identified were accurate fee estimates, accurate timelines for building/grading approvals, availability of same day plan check, availability of on-line permits, improve website searches, and balances/refunds.

Discussion:

The three main topics:

- 1) Culture change @ PRMD – key to implementing customer service @ PRMD is a collaborative approach to projects that come in.
- 2) Website – a lot of information on our website and the County's site, but access is difficult. ISD's search engine does not search pdf files making finding information very difficult. Brett and Patrick are working on modifying the front screen of the PRMD website to make it more user friendly.
- 3) General Guidelines – Patrick informed the group that he does not like the word "customer" because "customers" generally have options about where they can take their business. However, PRMD customers do not have any other options as to where to go for permits.

Pete asked Patrick to expand on “culture change”. The cube staff in a sense report to Patrick when working the front office. How does he increase teamwork and how does he keep track of people on time, etc?

Patrick’s response was that the recent changes “kicked our butts”. It has been rough up front. Morale has gone downhill rapidly. When the office was opening at 10:00am, he held a morning huddle each morning which seemed to help morale. In these morning huddles, staff was able to share issues and strategize on how to handle the busy day. It also created a sense of teamwork because everyone realized that the entire department was in the same boat and not alone.

As a result of the morning huddles, we were able to realize that the new hours were not working. The issue was brought up to Pete who then made a change almost immediately.

Another result of the morning huddles was the realization that sections need more cross talk. The change in hours (back to opening at 8:00am) eliminated the huddles but Patrick said he is working on re-establishing the practice.

Neil questioned who works at the cubicles? He mentioned that it needs work.

Patrick responded that it is too much for one person to work the cubicle all day, especially during the busy season. It is too demanding. A two person rotation is ideal, but it also leads to customers shopping for the person they want to deal with. This in turn clogs up the system and becomes subjective.

Beth told the group that she does not think it is a negative to want to deal with one person. People feel more comfortable dealing with one person and see more consistency when the same person works on their project(s).

Patrick also informed the group that he wants staff working the front cubicles that are comfortable with the assignment and like working with the public.

Neil expressed concern that the people working at the cube’s know the processes and aren’t “rookies”. Pete and Pat agreed.

Jim asked if there were incentives to working the cubes.

Pete suggested offering fewer files if someone works more cube time. Also, working the cube is a professional discipline in itself. One needs to be technical and good at people interaction. The key would be to find those people and find a way to advance their career path.

Beth asked if we would continue to require people going to Self Help to get a ticket/number from the receptionist. She expressed concern regarding the long wait she experienced one day because the person at the desk was answering technical questions for customers causing a long back up.

Beth’s second issue was in regards to microfiche – is it going away? The process to view a file at PRMD is cumbersome, some files are on microfiche, some are

scanned, some are in a box to be scanned making it hard to find documents for one file. Beth asked about the possibility of emailing documents to herself rather than making copies. Others in the group agreed with this idea.

Neil said their clients don't always agree that we should get along (Patrick's "collaborative idea"). Sometimes clients want their consultants & designers to "kick some County butt."

Rene made a suggestion to modify the counter at the Self Help station to allow staff easier access to the computers in the customer area. Currently, staff has to walk around the wall into Survey and then out of the half door. Pete said we'll look into this, but we don't have a construction budget at this time.

Simon told the group that over the last six to nine months, the change has been palpable and positive. Projects are moving faster, people at PRMD are helpful, and he is hearing good stories from the industry. Collaborative is happening.

Jerry told the group he has three jobs currently and it couldn't be going better – better than ever. Scott Burkett is his inspector and is never upset. Things are rolling better; he only misses Bev!

Patrick expressed his goal at PRMD is to make this a "friendlier place". He was a contractor for 30 years so knows what it is like on the other side of the desk.

Pete said he gets tired of hearing complaints so Simon's comment makes him very happy. We're never going to please everyone because of being a regulatory entity. He thinks Patrick is doing a good job and improving customer service. He also informed the group that he has worked the Reception desk and will continue to do so a couple hours a month. He said Amber does a fabulous job, but sometimes the line backs up while she is helping customers. With experience, she'll learn that sometimes one needs to set a person aside temporarily, give numbers out, and then go back to helping the customer.

Patrick informed the group that Self Help may start issuing their own numbers. They need to be included in the numbering system for tracking purposes.

Rene suggested "delinking" the file room from the numbering system; it is the biggest slow up to the link. He's experienced his number getting called while at the file counter, and then has to wait for it to come up again.

Patrick noted the problem and assured that he will talk to Records staff regarding the Qflow process. He explained that your place in line relates to what time you received a ticket. If we disconnected the File Room with the rest of the numbering, ones place in line would be based on the new ticket number causing longer wait times. He also mentioned that the feedback he has received regarding Qflow has been 90% positive.

Neil likes the numbering system.

Rene asked if people can ask to be routed the way they want. Will that mess up the

system? Patrick answered yes, you can ask to be routed a certain way and no, it will not mess anything up.

Mike asked if one could go straight to Records and then get routed through the cubes. Patrick answered yes.

Mike asked when Survey will join in the numbering. Patrick said Laurel is working toward that.

Item #2 “The System” – accommodating professionals/permit processing

Discussion:

Pete told the group there has been talk amongst staff about how to accomplish this and asked the group what their idea is to accommodate professionals.

Rene gave examples of two basic flows: 1) Joe Blow and 2) professionals (but this can't be seen to discriminate). How logistically challenging would two flows be? How to assign? Having a professional license but that probably won't work.

Pete suggested setting aside a specific time, like 8:00 – 10:00 for contractors/licensed professionals only. Would that work? Mike answered yes.

Patrick asked if we should require a contractor's license be shown. Steve suggested contractors sign up for this service and then be on a registered list.

Howard suggested morning and afternoon slots. He also suggested we don't accept applications without a check list submitted with drawings to show that the package contains all required items.

Pete summarized by saying we would need to identify hours for professionals. He will work with Patrick. He also cautioned not denying public access during the special hours but suggested contractors and/or licensed professionals would have priority during those times.

Jerry commented that the system Healdsburg has in place works well. If a complete application packet is submitted, issuance of the permit is in 10 days. If the packet is not complete, revisions/resubmittals are made and once complete issuance is in 10 days.

Rene asked why Plancheck was not calling for back up until stacked up. Pete and Patrick will look into the problem and follow up.

Item #3 Inspector Availability**Neil**

Neil started by saying the problem of inspector availability has probably been solved a little by PRMD opening at 8:00 am again. The problem when we opened at 10:00 am was there was not an opportunity to get a hold of inspectors before 10:00 am. Neil shared one instance that took nine days for a response from an inspector. The email response he received also rubbed him the wrong way. Inspectors need to be more available.

Pete talked to Shems in regards to response times. Shems told Pete that email is the best way to contact inspectors (though obviously not in this case). Shems also wanted Pete to let everyone know that if they don't get a response from the inspector to email him directly so he knows staff is not being responsive.

Neil again said the issue basically went away once we opened at 8:00 am and as long as inspectors are available until 8:30 am there shouldn't be a problem.

Rene asked if PRMD had a rule in place for inspectors to responds to emails.

Pete reassured that they should all be responsive. Pete is not sure if PRMD has a rule for email responses but we do have a rule for answering phone message, however, it's obvious that isn't being followed either. Pete said he would speak to Shems.

Item #4 Encroachment Permit Wait Time**Neil**

Neil shared an experience he encountered regarding an Encroachment permit. He checked the status online of a permit submitted on August 24 and there was no work flow happening. When he asked Kevin Lopeman about the situation, he was informed that Kevin had a six month backlog.

Pete spoke to Nathan regarding the issue. Nathan sat with Kevin and said he does have a backlog but it's not six months. Nathan is going to have others work on Encroachment permits to help the backlog. He also informed Pete that Kevin has a bunch that is just about ready to go out.

Neil expressed concern that Encroachment permits not being issued is and will have an impact on Grading permits.

Pete encouraged the group and encourages others to call division managers or DeWayne when there are problems so they know of issues and can fix them.

Item #5 (added) Well and Septic Update**Pete**

Pete provided an update regarding the Well and Septic division. Elsa is several weeks behind. We are recruiting for two positions, District Specialist and Well Specialist. We have contacted nearby counties to help on a short term basis. Jon Tracy will be staffing the Well and Septic cube 20 hours a week. We will give more thought to contract help, but the septic projects are harder to farm-out than building

projects.

Bob suggested and asked about the possibility of outside firms reviewing each other's work, like peer review.

Mike asked if we would be bringing back retirees.

Pete responded that Bob Swift is out of the country but we will be talking to him once he's back. We are also trying to bring back Dave Donovan but he doesn't seem interested.

Item #6 (added) Regulatory Reform/Reduction

Rene

Jerry gave an example of a situation where regulatory reduction would have helped. A building project had minor changes which the engineer made in the field. The engineer had already taken responsibility for the plans but he was required to bring the revisions into the office to get re-stamped. Why should he have to come in? Why can't the revisions be approved in the field?

Pete shared that the Economic Development Board is very interested in job creation and the regulatory throttle comes up all the time.

Neil said he knows that state regulations such as green, accessibility, etc. are out of our hands but can we look at the local regulations?

Jim asked if we could find other areas where use permit hearings could be waived. He also suggested broadening the use of the Planning Director discretion to approve "similar & compatible uses".

Jennifer responded that the new code is almost out and there are more uses of the Planning Director, broader uses. The new Planning Code will be in "Crawford Style" (similar to other recently updated codes in the county) and much easier to use.

Rene questioned the Administrative Design Review process. He said planners won't give a timeline and won't provide which staff is assigned. The answer he has received is "we have no idea". Jennifer assured she would look into this issue. We should be able to provide estimated time frames.

Simon asked if there is a more modern septic technology to allow more parcels to be buildable. Is there a more modern code?

Beth gave kudos to Bob Swift for his accomplishments with pre-treatment regulations/requirements. He will be missed.

Rene offered to collaborate with Mike Treinen and maybe two staff from PRMD to find the roadblocks. They could create a list of regulations to be considered. He realizes so much is not PRMD's problem but BOS policies that have been put in place.

Beth suggested involve a civil engineer such as Steve Brown for additional knowledge. He is a great asset.

Pete agreed it is worth looking into to see what is feasible. Some regulations are only going to get tighter, like the new septic rules under AB885.

Mike reminded everyone that the public has to be comfortable with code changes.

Jerry said of all the state agencies, PRMD is a world away from what it was in the past. The system works well!

Pete said the BOS is supportive. However, they only hear complaints from constituents. They do listen to PRMD.

2011 Meeting Schedule
4:00 – 6:00 pm, PRMD Front Conference Room

November 14