KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

Follow-up on Department of Permitting and Environmental Review: Accountability Could Improve Efficiency

The Permitting Division of the Department of Local Services (formerly the Department of Permitting and Environmental Review) has implemented all six of our recommendations, helping to make the review process more efficient and accountable. Since our prior follow-up, the division has updated its website with all of the performance metrics required by state law and continued incorporating and monitoring standards for how long review process tasks should take. The division has also completed performance evaluations for all of its staff in both 2019 and 2020.

Compliance with mandatory timelines has continued to decrease since 2013. As documented in our audit report, in 2013 the division issued at least 57 percent of custom home permits within the time limits established by King County Code. The percentage was likely higher than 57 percent, but the division lacked the data to track compliance. Since then, the division has implemented our recommendation to start tracking data on how frequently it meets the time limits in King County Code to process applications. The division states that the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down application processing in 2020, and all of the division's single-family review engineers left their positions due to retirements, promotions, or extended leave. Data is incomplete prior to the pandemic, but we estimate that in 2019 the division completed between 10 and 25 percent of custom home applications within the time limits established by King County Code. Therefore, while the division has fully implemented the recommendations from our 2017 audit, it still has considerable work ahead to move closer to compliance with county code. If the division's performance in this area does not improve, we will consider scheduling an audit of permit processing timeliness in our next biennial work program.

Of the six audit recommendations:

✓ **6 DONE**	⋯ **0 PROGRESS**	! **0 OPEN**
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.	**Partially implemented** Auditor will continue to monitor.	**Remain unresolved** Auditor will continue to monitor.

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

Recommendation 1   On August 2, 2019   DONE ✓

Recommendation 2   DONE ✓

The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review should collect and monitor data that documents when the "clock" stops and starts for the reasons listed in King County Code 20.20.100(C) to ensure that it is complying with the King County Code.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division began tracking the periods of time spent waiting for applicants to respond to requests for additional information. With this information, the division is able to determine how often application reviews meet the time limits in code. The division plans to incorporate these metrics into an internal dashboard that will allow all staff to view division performance and monitor compliance with time limits.

IMPACT: The Permitting Division is now able to determine which applications are at risk of exceeding time limits when prioritizing workloads. In 2020, around 13 percent of custom single-family home applications were completed within the 90-day limit in code. The division states that this was due to the transition to remote work during the pandemic and the loss of all five single-family review engineers due to retirements, promotions, or leaves of absence.

Recommendation 3   DONE ✓

The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review should comply with RCW 36.70B.080(2)(b) by posting required performance reports on its website that detail the timeliness of its permitting process.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division website now has annual performance reports that include all elements required by state law. These mandatory forms may be found at the bottom of the "Info Sheets & Forms" page.

IMPACT: The Permitting Division is now in compliance with a state law that intends for certain performance measures to be made transparent to the public.

Recommendation 4   On August 2, 2019   DONE ✓

Recommendation 5   DONE ✓

The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (DPER) should develop and document internal standards on the time expected for common review processes, such as ordinance, ecological, and drainage reviews. DPER should also conduct training on and monitor implementation of these standards.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division had developed internal standards for expected task durations at our prior follow-up. The division has continued to train its staff on these standards and monitors staff productivity against these standards weekly using a Power BI dashboard.

IMPACT: The division now has better tools available to determine whether review processes are taking too long, increasing staff accountability for the timely review of permit applications. Implementing this recommendation is especially important given the amount of turnover and other disruption the division has experienced since 2020.

Recommendation 6   DONE ✓

The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review should consistently conduct reviews of and track employee performance as required by King County's Personnel Guidelines.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division completed annual performance reviews for all staff in both 2019 and 2020.

IMPACT: Annual performance reviews increase accountability for permitting staff and help the division improve services to the public.

Peter Heineccius conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.