



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

AUGUST 2, 2019

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) is making substantial progress toward implementing our recommendations, making the review process more efficient, timely, and accountable. For example, the Permitting Division has created a standardized checklist for initial screenings, which helps produce more consistent results while also reducing delays and duplicative work. It has developed internal standards for how long each review process should take, and it provides applicants with estimated completion dates when a review is delayed. The Permitting Division has also posted almost all of the performance metrics required by state law on its website, and it has increased the number of staff members receiving annual performance reviews.

However, the division has not begun collecting the data necessary to ensure it is in compliance with provisions of the King County Code that require permits to be issued within a certain number of days. Instead, it is piloting an alternate approach to time management, and it plans to propose legislative changes to align the King County Code with division practice.

Of the six audit recommendations:

	2 DONE		3 PROGRESS		1 OPEN
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.		Partially implemented Auditor will continue to monitor.		Remain unresolved Auditor will continue to monitor.	

Please see below for details on the implementation status of these recommendations.



Recommendation 1

DONE



The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review should comply with RCW 36.70B.080(1) either by making a decision within 120 days of receiving a completed application or by issuing written findings that a specified amount of additional time is needed when a review takes longer than 120 days.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division has modified and standardized the notification it sends to applicants when the application is delayed pending receipt of corrected or additional information from the applicant. The new notification informs applicants that a specified amount of additional time will be needed. The division also sends out this form in cases where a final decision has not been made 120 days after receiving a completed application.

IMPACT: Providing notification ensures that the Permitting Division is in compliance with state law and also gives reviews a specific due date, which improves transparency for applicants and helps ensure that reviews are completed in a timely manner.

Recommendation 2

OPEN



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 division believes that the time measurements required in KCC 20.20.100 are not helpful to customers or useful as a performance metric. Instead of collecting the data necessary to determine whether it is following the King County Code, the Permitting Division is piloting a new approach to time management in 2019. After piloting and refining this new approach, the division plans to propose changes to the standards adopted by the King County Council in code.

Recommendation 3

PROGRESS



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 has posted a report titled “RCW 36.70B.080(2) Mandated Performance Report” for calendar year 2017 on its website. This report includes several of the summary statistics required by state law, but does not include the number of permits where both parties agreed to extend the deadline.

WHAT REMAINS: The Permitting Division should collect data on instances where both parties agreed to extend the deadline so that it can include this number in its annual reporting, as required by state law.

Recommendation 4

DONE



The Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (DPER) should develop and document internal standards for initial application reviews to ensure consistency across different reviewers and reduce the need for duplicative work. DPER should also conduct training on and monitor implementation of these standards.

STATUS UPDATE: The Permitting Division has updated and standardized the checklists used by reviewers for the initial application screening. These forms include descriptions of each standard, which help guide different reviewers to reach similar decisions. The Permitting Division has trained its staff on these new procedures to improve the consistency and thoroughness of application screening for residential building permits.

IMPACT: Having a consistent process has reduced staff time as well as delays to applicants arising from incomplete or inadequate intake screening. For example, plans examiners are now consistently receiving and reviewing site plans and building plans together, eliminating duplicative reviews by engineers for previously unidentified site issues.

Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



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 developed time standards for review process tasks and shared these standards with staff in March 2019. It plans to continue conducting trainings and implementation throughout the rest of 2019.

WHAT REMAINS: The Permitting Division should complete its planned trainings and implementation of its new standards. It should monitor implementation to identify opportunities to improve accountability, performance, and productivity.

Recommendation 6

PROGRESS



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 increased the proportion of staff receiving a performance appraisal to 77 percent in 2018. It anticipates that all staff will receive a performance review in 2019.

WHAT REMAINS: The Permitting Division should continue implementing its plan to conduct performance reviews for every employee each year.

Peter Heineccius, Principal Management Auditor, 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.