

# **Evaluation of Development Permitting Process Follow Up Study**

**Pierce County, Washington**

## **STAFF FOR THIS STUDY**

Paul Zucker, President  
Laurie Price, Planning Manager  
Mark Persico, Senior Associate



**ZUCKER SYSTEMS**  
1545 Hotel Circle South, Suite 300  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619-260-2680

**[www.zuckersystems.com](http://www.zuckersystems.com)**  
**[paul@zuckersystems.com](mailto:paul@zuckersystems.com)**

**October 2006**



# Table of Contents

<b>I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. EXCELLENCE PROGRESS.....	1
B. ISSUES ON THE HORIZON.....	1
C. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	3
<b>II. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE.....	4
B. METHODOLOGY.....	4
<b>III. ENGINEERING ISSUES.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. STAFFING LEVELS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
A. STAFFING HISTORY AND PROJECTED STAFFING .....	8
B. ACTIVITY LEVEL .....	8
C. BUILDING DIVISION STAFFING.....	9
Productive Hours .....	9
Staffing Calculations.....	10
Blue Line Calculations.....	12
D. CURRENT PLANNING STAFFING .....	12
E. DEVELOPMENT CENTER STAFFING .....	14
F. DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING STAFFING .....	17
G. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STAFFING.....	18
<b>V. MONTHLY REPORTS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>VI. PALS PLUS.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>VII. COUNTER WAIT TIMES .....</b>	<b>26</b>
A. OVERVIEW.....	26
B. PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS.....	29
Reception Function .....	29
Computer Screen.....	29
Triage Technicians.....	29
Use of Two Permit Technicians.....	30
Appointments.....	31

Amount of Review Time .....	32
Cashier .....	33
Fast Track.....	33
Over The Counter Permits .....	33
Telephone Calls .....	34
<b>VIII. STATUS OF ORIGINAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
A. ALL FUNCTIONS .....	35
B. BUILDING DIVISION.....	39
SUMMARY .....	39
C. CURRENT PLANNING .....	39
SUMMARY .....	39
D. DEVELOPMENT CENTER.....	46
SUMMARY .....	46
E. DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING.....	49
SUMMARY .....	49
F. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT .....	52
SUMMARY .....	52
G. FIRE DEPARTMENT .....	54
H. HEALTH DEPARTMENT.....	54
I. PUBLIC WORKS – SEWER .....	55
J. PUBLIC WORKS – TRANSPORTATION .....	56

## List of Tables

Table 1 Staffing Table.....	8
Table 2 Annual PALS Permit Application Activity Level 2002 – 2006.....	9
Table 3 Building Safety Division Productive Hours .....	10
Table 4 Building Inspector and Plans Examiner Needs .....	11
Table 5 Comparison of Staffing Hour for Case Processing in 2004 and 2006.....	12
Table 6 Non-fee Administrative Workload .....	13
Table 7 Permit Technician Functions .....	15
Table 8 Development Center – Productive Hours .....	16
Table 9 Total Hours Needed for Lobby Service and Hours Available.....	16
Table 10 Development Engineering – Productive Hours .....	17
Table 11 Development Engineering Required Engineering and Inspector Hours .....	18
Table 12 Resource Management Caseload .....	19
Table 13 Non Resource Management Reviews .....	19
Table 14 Labor Hours expended on Fee Related Applications .....	20

Table 15 Staffing Hours for Non Fee Assignments..... 20  
Table 16 Total Hours Needed Per Year..... 21  
Table 17 Counter Statistics ..... 28  
Table 18 Suggested Transaction Times In Minutes..... 33  
Table 19 Telephone Activity and Percent of Calls Answered January 2006 – August  
2006..... 34

# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. EXCELLENT PROGRESS

PALS has made excellent progress since the 2004 Audit was released. Specifics include:

- The major effort that was launched to remove the backlog was largely successful.
- Perhaps more importantly, we see a new positive attitude by managers and supervisors in PALS as well as in Public Works, Fire and Health. Managers are increasingly thinking the way managers should think as they monitor the workload and staffing.
- The Building Official has done an excellent job in coordinating monthly reports
- The space remodeling is nearing completion
- PALS on PALS has indicated some improvement in staff moral
- The first phase of PALS+ is nearing completion
- Attention has started to be given to the counter wait times
- The County adopted the impact fees
- The Directions Package was implemented
- New staff and consultants have been integrated into the department
- PALS indicates that they are committed to completing all items in the Audit by the end of 2007.

## B. ISSUES ON THE HORIZON

In many respects the easy part of implementing the Audit is over. The remaining tasks may be more difficult. They address efficiency and qualitative aspect of the work. There is also a need to look at how to better integrate processes across all functions. Finally, it will also be necessary to sustain the gains made over the last two years. Specific issues we see include:

- **Implementation Coordination**

The Building Official has done an excellent job of coordinating the monthly reports and progress reports. However, he has not been charged with the task of implementing and integrating recommendation across the various functions and departments. It is doubtful that this position can take on this added role in

addition to the responsibilities of the building official. We believe someone needs to be designated for this role.

- **Workload and Finances**

It appears that work load is leveling off and could even have a reduction next year. This has the potential to impact the General Fund. The reserve account that the Audit suggested has not been created. As strange as it may sound, in our experience it is easier to manage an increase in activity than it is to manage a decrease.

- **PALS+**

While PALS+ is making progress, it has been slower than we would wish. The current process is to finish conversion for sewers which is the last function that needs conversion. After this the priority is to be the new Impact Fees. While we agree that these are the highest priorities, PALS is not yet able to use the system the way it was intended. For example, all the reports on backlog are still being done manually. Developing these reports in PALS+ should receive as much priority as possible. Additionally, there is a long list of enhancements that are not underway. The 2007 budget includes a total of three positions to continue to work on PALS+ and these positions are absolutely essential. However, one of the staff has just resigned and will be moving to a different function. This person will need to be replaced or additional consultants hired.

- **Staffing**

The County has done an excellent job of staffing the functions. The proposed 2007 budget indicates 172.32 positions for PALS. We estimate that 103 of these positions relate to the parts of PALS we have been reviewing. We excluded long range planning, code enforcement and some of the support functions from our staff measurements. The 2004 budget included 75 positions related to our study. We estimated the need for 99.5 positions and recommended that initially 93.7 be authorized. Our current estimate of need is for 104.7 positions which is almost the same as the 2007 budget proposal of 103 positions. However, position allocations are only the tip of the iceberg. Other issues include:

- ✓ **Engineers**

Neither PALS nor Public Works have been able to fill and retain engineering positions. Development Engineering in PALS has six vacancies and Public Works has three. A different approach is needed for engineering. In Chapter III we suggest six possible alternatives. One of these alternatives would be to create a non-profit engineering office to serve both PALS and Public Works

- ✓ **Turnover**

PALS turnover in 2006 was roughly 13%. We understand that Public Works has had a similar problem with engineers. All organizations today are

experiencing higher rates of turnover. We have seen 15 to 20% in some organizations. High turnover reduces productivity and increases the need for good policies and procedures and training. The target should be to keep turnover to 10% or less.

▪ **Counter Wait Times**

We have been concerned about counter wait times even before starting the Audit. The Coordinating Committee has now given this some priority and we are pleased to see that changes are underway. We have included an extensive discussion of these changes in Chapter VII and believe that numerous additional changes will still be necessary.

## **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report includes 22 specific recommendations for action by PALS and other departments. Additionally, there are comments and suggestions for all the Audit recommendations that have not yet been addressed. Most of the recommendations are internal to the various functions and do not require the County Executive or the County Council to take action. We do suggest that both the Executive and the Council consider the following:

1. **Consultants vs. Staffing**

Should vacant positions continue to be filled or should consultants be used instead? Since the volume of permit activity may be decreasing, consultants may be a good alternative to hiring more staff.

2. **Engineers**

Should the County change its approach to engineers using a more creative and aggressive approach as outlined in Chapter III of this report? This could include creating a non-profit independent engineering office serving both PALS and Public Works.

3. **Fees**

In setting future fees, should the County begin to create a reserve account to assist in staffing during permit downturns?

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

This study was initiated through a contract amendment Number Two executed in July 2006. The contract included the following items:

1. Up-date appropriate staffing levels by function.
2. Confirmation or changes to “Blue Line” numbers
3. Recommendations on monthly report format
4. Recommendations on PALS+
5. Review of counter wait times
6. Review of project manager system
7. Review of audit recommendations not yet implemented or where we had questions about the implementation

### **B. METHODOLOGY**

Three Zucker staff members reviewed material sent to the consultants in advance and then spent October 9, 10 and 11 at PALS observing and conducting a variety of interviews.

### III. ENGINEERING ISSUES

Engineering positions have gradually been increased in both PALS and Public Works and are now budgeted near the right levels. However, the problem has been the difficulty in filling vacant positions and turnover. High turnover creates efficiency problems and also increases the need for additional training. PALS currently has six staff vacancies in the Development Engineering division. Public Works has three vacant CE1 positions and has had no applicants over the past three months.

There are a number of reasons for the engineering hiring and turnover problems.

- Colleges are turning out fewer engineers
- Many engineers prefer to work on capital projects rather than review other engineers projects
- County salaries are below the private sector as well as some public sectors
- The County continues to use normal recruiting and hiring procedures which are less effective in a tight labor market

We can think of six alternatives to address this problem. The solution may be a combination of the six.

#### 1. Turnover

The first item to address in turnover is salaries. We would suggest substantial increases in salaries. The Human Resources Department should also conduct a detailed analysis of the turnover issue. Finally, engineers should be given the opportunity to periodically rotate between capital projects and development review. This would require cooperation between Public Works and PALS.

#### 2. Hiring

A few years ago, one of our clients had 30 vacant planner positions which they said they could not fill. We suggested that they needed to totally change their standard HR rules, regulations and procedures. The County Administrator agreed and demanded a different HR approach. We personally returned from a national conference with 25 applications from candidates, many of who were hired. Over a short period of time all 30 positions were filled.

All of our clients are having trouble hiring engineers as well as planners, however we believe hiring engineers is the most difficult. We can't guarantee that the County's changing its HR approach will be successful. But, it is obvious that the current system must be improved.

The County should also make it easier to hire part time employees. More and more people are looking for life style jobs where they can work 20 or 30 hours per

week. Zucker Systems has built its entire hiring and employment system around this principle.

**3. Changing Job Specifications**

It could be useful to examine the County's engineering work in some detail to see if non-licensed engineers, or people with other types of backgrounds could be trained to do some of the engineering tasks. In a sense this could be considered "home growing" some of the County's staff.

**4. Consultants**

We are strong advocates of using consultants to supplement staff. However, even in using consultants more creativity is needed. First of all, some of the consultants themselves also have problems hiring engineers. Staff complain about the poor quality of many consultants' work. The simple answer to this is not to hire these consultants again. The other complaint is that consultants don't understand the County policies and systems. This can be overcome by developing good policies and procedures, training the consultants and developing long term relations. The other value in consultants is that their use can be expanded or reduced depending on work load. This could be extremely important if development activity continues to drop.

Another approach for consulting is to look to retired engineers who would like to continue some part time work.

**5. Self Certification**

Self certification of engineers is used in different parts of the country. Some communities simply accept the private engineers stamp on a project. We do not favor this system as it lacks third party review and we know that a relatively high percent of private engineering does not meet an acceptable standard. This has been proven many times over in Pierce County. The other approach is one being used in King County as well as other places. Under this approach the applicant selects a private engineer to complete all the engineering and engineering review. The completed review is then given to the County for a final check. Some communities only allow pre-certified engineers to perform this function. While this form of self certification is better than the first, we see no reason why these same engineers shouldn't be hired directly by the County rather than hired directly by the private party.

**6. Create An Independent Engineering Office**

This may seem like a radical idea but it has been used by some communities for functions like information technology. Under this approach an independent non-profit corporation is formed that would have one client, Pierce County. This function would provide engineers and engineering services for both PALS and Public Works. Salaries would likely need to exceed those of the private sector.

Salaries as well as standard human resource issues would have much more flexibility.

- 1. *Recommendation:* The County should become much more creative in solving the engineering problems. The first step should be to explore options 1 to 5 above. Lacking success, option 6 should be pursued.**

## IV. STAFFING LEVELS

### A. STAFFING HISTORY AND PROJECTED STAFFING

The history of staffing, the current and proposed budget and our calculation of need is shown in Table 1. We calculate the need for 104.7 positions for the functions we analyzed while the 2007 proposed budget includes 103 positions. Analysis for each function is included in the more detailed sections in this chapter.

**Table 1**  
**Staffing Table**

Function	2004 Budget	Calculated In 2004 Audit	Recommended In 2004 Audit	Calculated In Current Study	Current Status 2006 Budget	Proposed Budget
Building Plans Examiners	9	6.9	7.9	7.3	11 +1 in 05 +1 in 06	11
Building Inspectors	12	18.6	16	18	15 +3 in 05	15
CE III for Building Plan Check	0	1	1	1	1 +1 in 05	1
Current Planners	12	17	15	12.3	13	13
Development Center	11	14	14	15	15 +1 in 05 +3 in 06	15
Dev. Eng. CE II Supervisor	0	1	1	1	1 +1 in 05	1
Engineers & Technicians	24	32	30	34.1	30 +3 in 05 +3 in 06	33
Resource Mgt.	6	7	7	14	12 +7 in 05 -1 in 06	13
Asst. Direct.	1	2	2	2	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>104.7</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>103</b>

\* Based on estimation using actual staff time recording

### B. ACTIVITY LEVEL

Table 2 below indicates PALS annual permit application activity level for calendar year 2002 through 2006.

**Table 2**  
**Annual PALS Permit Application Activity Level**  
**2002 – 2006**

Calendar Year	Permit Applications	Annual % Change
2002	20,557	n/a
2003	21,766	5.90%
2004	23,260	6.90%
2005	25,901	11.40%
2006	23,163 (est.)	-10.6% (est.) *
<b>% change 2002 - 2006</b>		<b>12.7%</b>

\* We had actual data for the first three quarters of 2006. We estimated the fourth quarter by a ratio of the 2005 fourth quarter to the entire 2005 data.

Application activity levels increased approximately 12.7% between 2002 and 2006, but activity may be trending down as evidenced by the 10.6% decrease between 2005 and 2006. An overall 12% increase is not significant and can usually be absorbed through increased technology and increased efficiency. But it should be noted that while the activity level has increased slightly over the last five years, the complexity of the County requirements and codes has increased in response to new environmental regulations and other factors. Quantifying an increase or decrease in permit applications is easy; quantifying changes in the complexity of codes is difficult.

It should be noted that data across all function is not consistent. There continue to be some problems in PALS+ in the way some activities are counted. Additionally, as noted in the section on PALS+, some activities divisions perform for other divisions are not counted in PALS+.

## **C. BUILDING DIVISION STAFFING**

### **Productive Hours**

The productive hours for the Building Division have been modified slightly since the 2004 Audit as shown in Table 3. Inspector hours per year have been reduced from 1,517 to 1,376. Plans Examiners hours per year have been reduced from 1,597.5 to 1,498.5. These reductions primarily relate to increased time for training which we feel is necessary and reasonable.

**Table 3  
Building Safety Division Productive Hours**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Inspectors Hour per Year</b>	<b>Plans Examiners Hours per Year</b>
Total Hours	2,080	2,080
Vacation	-100	-100
Sick Time	-73	-73
Holidays	-96	-96
Subtotal	1,811	1,811
Office Time (including breaks)	-245	-122.5
Training In-House	-100	-100
Outside Training	-40	-40
Other Meetings	-50	-50
<b>Total Billable Hours</b>	<b>1,376</b>	<b>1,498.5</b>

**Staffing Calculations**

The Building staff has examined the needed hours we calculated in 04 and have made a few suggestions for inspection as shown in Table 4. We generally feel these changes are reasonable. When combined with the change in Productive Hours, the net result is reducing the Inspectors needed from 18.6 to 18.0 and changing the Plans Examiner needed from 6.9 to 6.7. It should be noted that calculating staffing is not a precise science. Detailed data for product type was not available to revise Table 4.

The Building Division had 9 Plans Examiners in 04. We calculated the need for 6.9 but recommended 7.9. One was added in 05 and one in 06 bringing the total to 11. No new positions are recommended for 07. The Division has been able to keep the backlog close to zero using supplemental consultants as necessary to meet peak loads. The Division did have an increase in activity in 2005 but it appears to be leveling off in 2006. We suggest the current staff level of 11 be retained at the present time. Should there be any major down turn in activity, workload should be re-examined with the possibility of freezing any vacant positions.

The Building Division had 12 Inspectors in 04. We calculated the need for 18.6 and recommended 14. (Note the text recommended 14 which is correct while a summary table recommended 16 which was in error.) Three Inspectors were added in 05 bringing the total to 15. Using the new data, we calculate a need of 18. The inspectors have generally been able to meet the next day inspection schedules and we believe the current staffing levels are appropriate. The 07 budget does not recommend any additional increases at this time. One of the issues in calculating Inspector time is

calculating driving time. The Division is in the process of doing additional analysis on this issue which can help in future staffing analysis.

**Table 4  
Building Inspector and Plans Examiner Needs**

Permit Category	Volume	Inspection Ave Hours	Inspector Hours Needed	Plan Check Ave Hours	Plans Examiner Hours Needed
<b>New Buildings Commercial</b>					
Apartment Buildings	14	20	280	11.00	154.00
Agricultural Buildings	2	10	20	1.65	3.30
Bulkhead/Retaining Wall	10	3	30	1.00	10.00
Church	7	30	210	16.50	115.50
Deck/Dock/Shed	3	1	3	1.00	3.00
Service Station Repair Garage	6	20	120	11.00	66.00
Medical Office	4	20	80	16.50	66.00
Office	26	20	520	16.50	429.00
Other Structure	20	2	40	2.00	40.00
Store Retail	17	12	204	6.60	112.20
Restaurant	9	25	225	13.75	123.75
School K-12	4	130	520	16.50	66.00
Warehouse / Barn	7	15	105	8.25	57.75
Fire Station	1	30	30	6.00	6.00
Store – Grocery	2	24	48	7.00	14.00
Canopy	1	3	3	1.00	1.00
Public Parking Building	1	25	25	13.75	13.75
School Higher Education	3	50	150	19.25	57.75
<b>Residential Construction</b>					
Single Family Custom	950	5	4,750	3.00	2,850.00
Single Family Base Models	1,950	5	9,750	0.25	487.50
Duplex	106	8	795	4.12	436.72
Residential Additions	243	3	729	1.65	400.95
Residential Remodels	149	3	447	1.65	245.85
Manufactured Homes	649	2	1,298	1.50	973.50
Decks/docks/sheds	225	2	450	1.50	337.50
Residential Garages	766	3	2,298	1.65	1,263.90
Separate Plumbing Permits	676	1	676	1.00	676.00
Separate Mechanical Permits	956	1	956	1.00	956.00
			<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>24,762</b>	
			<b>Inspectors</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>Examiners</b>
					<b>6.7</b>

## Blue Line Calculations

The Building Division used a summary approach to calculate its Blue Line numbers. They monitored applications and backlog per month and determined that at roughly 650 applications per month they could meet performance targets. This is a reasonable approach given the current inability to produce a more refined analysis using PALS+. Once the more refined data is available, additional analysis of the Blue Line should be undertaken. The more detailed data would allow the Division to see how staffing needs may change if application types shift.

## D. CURRENT PLANNING STAFFING

In order to determine the necessary level of staffing we started by re-looking at how much time it takes in 2006 to process various types of applications. Table 5 indicates the type and number of applications and the average number of planner-hours required in 2004 to process each application type. Table 5 then compares this information with the projected number of applications and the hours required for 2006.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of Staffing Hour for Case Processing in 2004 and 2006**

Type	2004	Labor Hours/ Application	Total Hours	2006	Labor Hours/ Application	Total Hours	Percent of increase or decrease
<b>Administrative Applications</b>							
Short Plats/Large Lots, application. & modifications *	81	4.80	388.80	56	outsourced		N/A
Boundary Line Adj./Lot Comb. *	177	1.30	230.10	104	part is outsourced	38.50	N/A
Administrative Use Permit	8	3.00	24.00	13	3.00	39.00	62.50 increase
Design Review	98	2.00	196.00	185	3.00	555.00	183.50 increase
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>364</b>		<b>838.90</b>	<b>358</b>		<b>632.50</b>	<b>187.50 increase</b>
<b>Hearing Examiner</b>							
Conditional Use Permits & amendments	20	17.20	344.00	28	15.00	420.00	22.10 increase
Non conforming Use Permits & amendments	2	9.60	19.20	1	15.00	15.00	21.90 decrease
Preliminary Plats	44	26.30	1,157.20	46	20.00	920.00	20.50 decrease
Final Plats	44	7.23	318.12	56	7.20	403.20	26.70 increase
Planned Development	10	20.70	207.00	4	20.00	80.00	61.10 decrease
Variance	20	18.00	360.00	24	10.00	240.00	33.30 decrease
Shoreline	84	25.40	2,133.60	113	25.40	2,870.20	34.50 increase
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>224</b>		<b>4,539.12</b>	<b>272</b>		<b>4,948.40</b>	<b>9.00 increase</b>
<b>Other</b>							
SEPA Checklist Applications	391	10.50	4,105.50	297	10.00	2,970.00	27.70 decrease
Forest Practice *	92	4.30	395.60	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other land use actions/appeals (large)				92	10.00	920.00	
Other land use actions/appeals (small)	545	3.00	1,635.00	276	2	552.00	10.00 decrease
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,028</b>		<b>6,136.10</b>	<b>665</b>		<b>4,442.00</b>	<b>21.10 decrease</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,616</b>		<b>11,514.12</b>	<b>1,295</b>		<b>10,022.90</b>	<b>6.40 decrease</b>

\* Excluded in calculation for % of increase or decrease

For 2004, the average number of hours required to process each application was obtained from the 2002 database. However, for some types of applications this information was not available and an estimate of time was used. For 2006 the numbers were provided by staff from the PALS+ data base.

By totaling these numbers and dividing them by the hours worked per year we can estimate the number of case planners required to process the applications. Using the numbers provided by the department in 2004, on average, the typical case planner worked 1,577 hours per year. By dividing the total number of hours needed to process cases by the number of hours a typical case planners worked per year we were able to estimate the staffing needs.

Using the same methodology for projecting the number of applications in 2006, it was determined that approximately 6.3 case planners would be needed to process the on-going caseload. This assumes Current Planning continues to outsource the processing of Short Plats/ Large Lots and Boundary Line Adjustments. The successful use of outsourcing has eliminating the need for approximately 400 additional staff hours.

The 6.3 number assumes that the case planners spend 100% of their time on processing applications. However, this is not the case, since we know additional case planners are needed to provide the necessary non fee and administrative services required by the County. We used the data provided by Current Planning and indicated on the Non-fee Administrative Workload Table 6 to determine what additional staffing must be provide for non-fee activities.

In 2004 the case planners in Current Planning spent approximately 51% of their time on processing planning applications. The remainder of their time was spent on a variety of related work activity as indicated in Table 6.

**Table 6  
Non-fee Administrative Workload**

Administrative Activity	Average hours/years Case Planner		% of increase or decrease
	2004	2006	
Phone / email	317.0	220.6	30.5% decrease
Correspondence	114.0	145.8	27.6% increase
Meetings with public	129.0	145.8	13.0% increase
Staff meetings	99.0	114.3	15.0% increase
Planner of the Day	96.0	78.8	17.9% decrease
Enforcement	83.5	110.3	32.1% increase
Council inquiry	31.7	55.2	74.1% increase
County Attorney	40.1	33.5	17.0% decrease
<b>Total</b>	<b>910.3</b>	<b>904.3</b>	<b>0.7% decrease</b>

Table 6 indicates that there has been a minor decrease in the hours spent on non fee related items. Therefore we are assuming that case planners are still spending no more than 55 % of their time processing applications.

It appears that in order to stay on top of the backlog and provide the required non fee related services there is a need for 12.3 case planners. The 2006 budget provided for 13 case planners but three case planner positions are vacant. Two of the three positions are recent vacancies and one is a new position. There are 10 case planners on staff, and when the two vacancies are filled, there will be 12. We are recommending filling the two existing vacant positions, but wait to fill the third position for further evaluation of the on going trend regarding applications submittals. If it is determined that the downward trend is continuing the last position should not be filled. If any short term future backlog occurs, additional outsourcing should be utilized.

- 2. *Recommendation: Current Planning should continue to attempt to fill two vacant positions but keep the third position vacant to see how the number of development applications changes in 2007.***

## **E. DEVELOPMENT CENTER STAFFING**

A direct comparison of current staffing to the 2004 Audit is difficult since the counter process has been organized differently from the Audit recommendations and staff are allocated also in a different way. There were 11 Permit Technicians in 2004. We calculated the need for 14 and recommended 14. One was added in 05 and three more in 06 bringing the current total to 15.

Table 7 below shows how the current staff are allocated.

**Table 7  
Permit Technician Functions**

<b>Function</b>	<b>Description/Services Provided</b>	<b>Current Staffing Level</b>
Triage Techs	Meets with customers for residential projects to review their submittal package for completeness. These staff members have received specialized training so they have fewer calls for technical support.	5
Processing Techs	After an application has been accepted by the Triage team the Processing team enters the data into Permits Plus and routs the plans for review by other departments. These staff also accept plans that are being dropped off if the applicant does not need to see a triage tech.	5
LSA	These individuals are responsible for processing quick permits such as fire, development engineering and applicants picking up permits.	2
Information	General planning and zoning information, including submittal standards.	1
Telephones	Works in the phone room answering questions.	1
Commercial Appointment	Accepts applications for commercial projects, and meets with customers to review re-submittal standards.	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>

When looking at overall staffing levels we tried to determine the number of staff hours available and the number of staff hours needed. For this analysis we only looked at five of the lobby service categories: Application Appointment, Information, LSA/Quick Processing, Make Application and Staff Appointment. We did not include telephones in this analysis because there was not enough data available for telephones. As a side note we recommended two staff be assigned to the phone room in our 2004 report and we continue to believe this should be done and will provide adequate staffing.

There are 15 staff in the Development Center, less two to answer phones, which leaves 13 Permit Technicians available to handle the lobby service requests. Based upon the 2004 report each technician is available to work 1,555 hours annually, or 129.6 hours monthly. However, we now believe an additional 100 hours per year should be deducted as miscellaneous time bringing the total available hours per Permit Technician to 1,455 and shown in Table 8 or 121.3 hours per month per Permit Technician.

**Table 8  
Development Center – Productive Hours**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Development Center</b>
Total Hours (40/week)	2,080
Holidays (12days/yr.)	-96
Sick Leave	-98
Vacation*	-133
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,753</b>
Break Time (30 min./day)	-110
Training (2 Hrs./week)	-88
Misc. Time	-100
<b>Total Billable Hours</b>	<b>1,455</b>

\*Based on actual averages for 2003

For the 13 technicians dedicated to lobby service there is 121.3 hours per month available or 1,576.9 hours. We compared the hours available against the total hours needed for the five lobby service categories. This rough analysis as shown in Table 9 below indicates that there should be adequate staffing in the Development Center. The average hours needed over the six month of data is 7,878 hours divided by six months or 1,313 hours per month. This means that the 13 Permit Technicians are on the average spending only 101 productive hours per month on the counter or 83% of the calculated available hours.

**Table 9  
Total Hours Needed for Lobby Service and Hours Available**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Monthly Hours Available</b>	<b>Hours Needed for Lobby Service (Table 17), Chapter VII</b>
April 2006	1,575.9	1,152.0
May 2006	1,575.9	1,333.0
June 2006	1,575.9	1,530.0
July 2006	1,575.9	1,289.0
August 2006	1,575.9	1,426.0
September 2006	1,575.9	1,148.0
	<b>9,455.40</b>	<b>7,878.0</b>

While the staff allocations work neatly on paper the actual functioning and the numbers of bodies performing those tasks was hard to assess. On our three day visit

we never saw the five triage technicians or five processing technicians working at one time. Further in our conversations with customers in the lobby during our visit they reported that many times it appeared that only 2-3 technicians were actually performing the triage functions. We recommend that the counter changes we suggest elsewhere in the report be implemented and a few additional months be given to working with the new system. If permit times do not begin to meet the standard, either additional staffing will be necessary or additional changes to the system will be in order.

- 3. Recommendation: Changes to the counter operation should be made and systems should be in place for a few months before a detailed analysis is possible. If counter wait times do not begin to meet the standard, either additional staffing or additional changes to the system will be in order.**

## F. DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING STAFFING

Unlike the other PALS divisions, Development Engineering, for a period of time, had staff keeping detailed records of the time various activities required. The number of permit activities was based on an estimation of 2006 activity. This analysis also required calculating productive hours which are shown in Table 10. The productive hours were slightly less than those used in the 2004 Audit to better reflect training, meetings and administration needs.

**Table 10  
Development Engineering – Productive Hours**

Category	Engineering	Inspectors
Total Hours (40/week)	2,080	2,080
Holidays (12days/yr.)	-96	-96
Sick Leave	-77	-77
Vacation*	-117	-117
Break Time (30 min./day)	-112	-112
Training	-100	-100
Meetings & Administration	-250	-150
<b>Total Billable Hours</b>	<b>1,328</b>	<b>1,428</b>

\*Based on actual averages for 2003

The number of required hours is divided by productive hours to arrive and required staffing as shown in Table 11. This results in a staffing need of 34.1 positions vs. the 33.0 proposed in the budget. We feel the 33 is a reasonable number if funds are

available for consultant. We should note that for the 2007 budget the Department had originally requested 12 positions rather than the three that are in the draft budget. The County may want to consider hiring more consultants rather than staff. This provides more flexibility in case there is a downturn in activity levels.

**Table 11**  
**Development Engineering Required Engineering and Inspector Hours**

Category	Engineering	Inspectors
Required Hours	24,706	22,159
Productive Hours	1,328	1,428
Staff Needed	18.6	15.5

- 4. Recommendation:** Staffing levels for Development Engineering should be set at the 33 proposed in the budget or, as an option, staffing could remain at the current level of 30 with the hiring of additional consultants.

## **G. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STAFFING**

Since the original report was prepared in 2004, the County adopted the Directions Package, which significantly adds to the workload of Resource Management. The new applications are identified as Fish and Wildlife applications.

Table 12 compares Resource Management’s 2004 caseload and the projected 2006 caseload. The 2006 caseload data is projected from January 1 to September 30. Not indicated in Table 12 is the non-fee work effort required for mitigation monitoring, violation resolution, or Biologist of the Day (BOD) and other administrative responsibilities.

The caseload for Resource Management for 2004 was 522 applications. The projected number of cases for the year 2006 is 950 cases, approximately 82% higher than 2004. Much of this increase is due to the new Fish and Wildlife applications. Without the Fish and Wildlife applications, the caseload increased by 27%.

**Table 12  
Resource Management Caseload**

<b>Applications</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>Projected 2006</b>	<b>% increase/decrease</b>
Wetland	231	369	60%increase
Fish & Wildlife	0	287	New application
Wetland/Fish & Wildlife Variances	6	21	350% increase
Forest Practices*	85	69	19% decrease
Single Family Certification	200	204	2% increase
<b>Total</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>82% increase</b>

\*In 2004 processed by Current Planning and reviewed by Resource Management. In 2006 applications processed and reviewed by Resource Management.

In addition to Resource Management cases, staff also review and comment on some Current Planning and Engineering Development applications and prepares the final documentation for SEPA review. These functions are shown in Table 13. Both these functions are fee related, but not included in Resource Management's caseload.

**Table 13  
Non Resource Management Reviews**

<b>Type</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2006 (projected)</b>	<b>% of change</b>
Review and Comment on Divisions' Applications	660 hours*	1668 Hours*	253% increase
SEPA	348	284	19% decrease

\*Number of applications unknown, Hours from data base system

The projected workload for other application review is up 253% since 2004. The projected workload for SEPA is down 19% since 2004.

In 2004, to determine if there is adequate staffing, we looked at how much time it took to process various types of applications. For 2006 we are making a comparison of the number of applications and the time expended to determine what changes have occur between the two years. Table 14 indicates the type and number of applications for the years 2004 and 2006, the average number of hours required to process each application, and a projection of the total hours required for each type of application.

**Table 14**  
**Labor Hours expended on Fee Related Applications**

Type	2004 cases	Labor hr/ case	Yearly hours expended 2004	2006 cases	Labor hr/ case	Yearly hours expended 2006	Change in hours expended
Wetland applications	231	14.5	3,350	369	14.7	5,424	+2,074
Fish and wildlife applications	0		0	287	12.4	3,559	+3,559
Wetland/Fish and Wildlife Variances	6	19.2	115	21	24.0	504	+389
Forest Practices	85	0.6	51	69	15.1	1,380	+1,329
Single Family Certifications	200	4.5	900	204	2.0	408	-492
Applications from outside of Division	*		660	*		1668	+1008
SEPA	348	0.3	104	284	0.75	213	+109
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>5,180</b>			<b>13,156</b>	<b>+7,976</b>

\*Number of application unknown. Hours of labor from data base systems.

In addition to the fee-based applications, the biologists have a number of other responsibilities including pursuing wetland violations, mitigation monitoring, BOD/public assistance responsibilities and other administrative duties. The additional hours for these non-fee based activities are identified on Table 15 below.

**Table 15**  
**Staffing Hours for Non Fee Assignments**

Type	Hours/year (2003)	Projected hours/year (2006)	% of Change
Violations	1,211	1,979*	63% increase
Mitigation Monitoring	655	Outside consultant	100% decrease
BOD/Public Assistance	2,000	2,189	9% increase
Other Administrative duties	440	4,280	972% increase
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,306</b>	<b>8,448</b>	<b>96% increase</b>

\*Numbers may be low due to limited time available to staff.

\*\*Numbers from PALS Plus

**Table 16**  
**Total Hours Needed Per Year**

Type	Hours Per Year (2006)
Fee Related cases	13,156
Non Fee Responsibilities	8,448
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,604</b>

The average number of hours worked by Resource Management staff is 1,691 hours per year (per Division Director). This number was used to determine how many biologists/planners are necessary to handle the existing workload and to avoid developing a new backlog. The hours expended on both casework and non-fee related assignments as shown in Table 16, totaling 21,604 hours per year. Based on this number we were able to determine that a total of 13 biologists/planners are necessary (21,604 divided by 1,691 = 12.8) to meet the staffing requirements of this Division. There are currently 12 filled biologist/planner positions in Resource Management. Additionally, there are 2 vacant positions in the 2006 budget and one additional position in the 2007 proposed budget.

Unlike most of PALS, the workload for Resource Management is not decreasing. This is due to the significant number of additional responsibilities created by Council with the adoption of the Direction Package. The division has doubled in size since 2004 and filling vacant positions may be needed to keep up with the projected workload assuming that the mitigation monitoring function continues to be outsourced.

We recommended in the 2004 report that Code Enforcement should handle much of the enforcement responsibilities for wetland violations. If this were to occur, approximately 1.5 staff positions in Resource Management should be allocated to Code Enforcement.

- 5. *Recommendation:* Since the workloads are dropping in other divisions of PALS, we recommend that the workload in the Resource Management Division be carefully monitored for any sign of dropping and that all vacant positions be reevaluated prior to filling.**

## V. MONTHLY REPORTS

PALS has been making good progress on gradually refining the monthly reports. The County Council should indicate if the reports are providing the appropriate information and format desired.

We particularly call your attention to the draft Fast Forward report for November 13, 2006 which we feel is excellent. Good features include:

- The first page shows “On-Time Performance” for all of PALS functions except for the counter. This in a glance shows if the performance is meeting the standard.
- The charts showing the backlog by section over time are also useful in order to give perspective to the data.
- The data for the counter has been expanded from prior reports and the data has been segmented. Averages, which tend to be meaningless, are no longer used.
- The Blue Line data is interesting but is likely more useful for internal management than it is for elected officials.

The following ideas could be considered to make the monthly reports even better including:

1. The on-time performance chart could include several prior months to compare the current month to prior months.
2. The backlog still must be manually calculated until PALS+ is completed. Once completed the goal should be for PALS+ to automatically produce the monthly report with little or no other staff involvement.
3. The backlog is based on the performance standards PALS has been using. In a number of cases the Audit suggest the timelines be shortened and this should be accomplished in 2007.
4. The backlog is being calculated by looking at the status of applications at one point in time at the end of the month. However, that is a misleading way of calculating backlog. The appropriate way is to tally all permits processed during the month that met the performance standard and all that did not, rather than simply the backlog at the end of the month. However, it may be necessary to use the current system until such time as PALS+ can be programmed to create the more accurate reports.
5. The Fast Forward reports should also include performance indicators for Public Works Sewer and Transportation as well as Fire and Health.
6. The more detailed backup reports on the Internet are often late. Again, this should be corrected with PALS+.

7. A better chart showing the number of permits received each month and comparing these to prior years would be useful. These would be similar to the Base Line charts shown on Page 4 for Development Engineering.
  8. The Blue Line data will need to be refined as the divisions continue to evolve the measurement of their performance. Some of the Blue Lines are lower than we feel are reasonable. Additionally, as efficiency increases, the Blue Lines can be raised.
  9. A chart should be included showing the anticipated revenue and the actual revenue as the year progresses. This can be particularly critical should there be a drop in activity or change in product type that can impact revenue.
- 6. *Recommendation:* The possible changes to the monthly reports as outlined above should be reviewed.**

## VI. PALS PLUS

At the time of the 2004 audit, PALS was in the midst of converting its permitting system from DCIS to PALS+. The conversion is well underway. All functions have been completed except for sewers which are currently under development. This has been a joint project of the County's Information Technology Department and three systems staff assigned to PALS.

Progress on the conversion has been slower than originally estimated, however this is not unusual for this type of major conversion. Issues we see include:

- **Completing Conversion**

We concur with PALS that the highest priority needs to be to complete the conversion for sewers.

- **Impact Fees**

Staff working on PALS+ will need to begin working on systems to implement the County's new impact fees. While this will delay other system enhancements, we concur in this being a priority.

- **Monitoring Reports**

Our biggest disappointment relating to PALS+ has been the inability to produce the monthly permit timeline monitoring reports. The monthly reports prepared for both the County Board and the public have had to be constructed by hand and thus are subject to some error and take staff time to prepare. Some of the data that should be in monthly reports is also not available (see Chapter V). Staff indicate that they have been trying to work on these reports as time permits but progress has been slow.

- **Enhancement Requests**

There is a list of 54 suggestions to enhance the PALS+ system. Eventually, all of these should be addressed.

- **Staffing**

Although it was initially estimated that the three staff working on the system would not be needed during the 2007 fiscal year, that is clearly not the case. The County Executive has included these staff in the proposed budget and we concur that they are essential.

- **Staff Time Keeping**

The system has been designed for staff to keep track of their time for individual projects. This data is useful for setting fees, conducting staffing analysis and for general management purposes. However, staffs use of the system has been spotty at best and has been only of partial use for this study. Additionally, many staff that have been recording their time are starting to stop, feeling that it is too labor intensive. It is difficult to develop a system that

is easy to use and staff can see the payoff from using the system. As suggested in the 2004 Audit, we believe the system needs to be simplified to make it easier to use. Additionally, management and employees will need to see the payoff from using the system. We suggest further implementation be delayed until the system can be simplified and managers and employees see the benefits. Emphasis should be on completing other aspects of PALS+ first.

- **Workload Recording**

PALS+ records workload based on the number of applications received. However, this is only a partial indicator of workload. When some of the divisions conduct reviews for other divisions, these reviews are not always counted in the workload. We have tried to identify some of these in our current study but assume we have not caught all of them. Once staff has time to look at enhancements, some attention should be given to this concern.

- 7. *Recommendation:* Priority should continue to be given to completion of PALS+ conversion for sewers and implementing the Impact Fees.**
  
- 8. *Recommendation:* Completing an automated monitoring reporting system for the monthly reports should receive a high priority.**
  
- 9. *Recommendation:* The dedicated three PALS+ staff positions should be retained at least through FY 07 and possibly longer. Work should include completing the monthly reports, the enhancement projects, staff time keeping simplification and workload recording.**

## VII. COUNTER WAIT TIMES

### A. OVERVIEW

We have been concerned about the long counter wait times even before we signed the original audit contract. However, until recently, the Development Advisory Committee did not include this issue in their priority lists. Once the backlog was eliminated the counter moved up in priority. A number of new counter processes were put in place on September 18 and thus during our review they had only been in place for three weeks. As such, it may be premature to critique this system until it has had another month or two to prove itself.

There have been several significant changes made since January 2005; not all of which we would agree with. The most noticeable change was the removal of the public counter which occurred in spring 2006. Permit technicians that used to meet with customers at the counter in the lobby now have private work stations where they may meet with the customer depending upon the type of service the customer needs.

Now when entering the Development Center lobby a customer enters the receptionist line where they are queried regarding the purpose of their visit and assigned to one or more of the six lobby service categories as follows:

- Application Appointment – Previously appointments were available for either residential or commercial projects and there were 12 appointments per day. However, effective September 18, 2006 appointments are only available for commercial projects, and the number of appointments was reduced to two per day.
- Information – General zoning and planning information on a parcel and to start a submittal standards checklist. There is no change for this.
- LSA/Quick Processing – Plumbing and mechanical permits, site development permits, driveway and curb cuts, re-submittals, fire permits and pick-up permits.
- Make Application – Submitting an application for residential construction. This category is actually further split into Make Application 1 and Make Application 2 depending upon the number of permits submitted.
- Staff Appointment – Appointments with a specific staff member.
- Technical Support – For detailed content questions where the Permit Technician does not have that level of knowledge.

Staff from Zucker Systems spent three days in the Development Center observing, meeting with staff and talking to applicants. Our overall impressions are not positive. Data for the last six months as shown in Table 17 shows the average wait times for

customers seeking general information is running over two hours with the longest wait times in excess of 6 hours. Customers seeking “quick permits” are waiting on average almost 2 hours with the longest wait running more than 5 hours. Customers seeking to make an application are waiting an average of over 2 hours, with the longest waits running in excess of 5 hours. Average wait times and transaction times have not changed to any measurable degree since our 2004 study.

We also heard from customers that they are again starting to arrive at the County building at 5 or 6 AM to assure that they can meet with staff that day. We were told four separate stories of people arriving at the Development Center before noon to submit an application and being turned away at the receptionist desk because the waits were already too long for staff to assist them that day. One customer we interviewed told us he was told to come in to pick up and pay for his permit. He had already waited for over an hour for this simple transaction. While these are anecdotes, when taken together with the data, we believe that things have not improved much since our last visit.

**Table 17  
Counter Statistics**

Lobby Service Requested	Longest Wait Time (Min.)	Average Wait Time (Min.)	Average Transaction Time (Min.)	Number of Customers	Total Per Lobby Service (Min.)	Total Per Lobby Service (Hrs.)	% Per Service Type
<b>6-Apr</b>							
Applicant Appointment	75	23	142	15	2130	35.5	1.00%
Information	481	126	50	128	6400	106.7	8.40%
LSA/Quick Processing	372	89	28	319	8932	148.9	20.90%
Make Application	492	224	116	194	22504	375.1	12.70%
Staff Appointment	97	16	117	249	29133	485.6	16.30%
Technical Support	394	22	34	620			40.70%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1525</b>	<b>69099</b>	<b>1151.7</b>	
<b>6-May</b>							
Application Appointment	96	18	140	17	2380	39.7	0.90%
Information	390	132	63	156	9828	163.8	8.50%
LSA/Quick Processing	413	79	36	408	14688	244.8	22.30%
Make Application	472	191	99	222	21978	366.3	12.10%
Staff Appointment	114	15	123	253	31119	518.7	13.80%
Technical Support	104	16	45	776			42.40%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1832</b>	<b>79993</b>	<b>1333.2</b>	
<b>6-Jun</b>							
Applicant Appointment	84	22	97	17	1649	27.5	0.90%
Information	452	132	73	209	15257	254.3	10.50%
LSA/Quick Processing	224	52	36	511	18396	306.6	25.80%
Make Application	509	146	108	204	22032	367.2	10.30%
Staff Appointment	104	12	129	267	34443	574.1	13.50%
Technical Support	170	19	39	776			39.10%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1984</b>	<b>91777</b>	<b>1529.6</b>	
<b>6-Jul</b>							
Application Appointment	31	4	126	39	4914	81.9	2.50%
Information	444	115	62	187	11594	193.2	12.00%
LSA/Quick Processing	299	65	39	408	15912	265.2	26.20%
Make Application	331	95	113	147	16611	276.9	9.40%
Staff Appointment	78	12	120	236	28320	472	15.20%
Technical Support	129	16	26	540			34.70%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1557</b>	<b>77351</b>	<b>1289.2</b>	
<b>6-Aug</b>							
Application Appointment	69	12	150	28	4200	70	1.50%
Information	447	143	63	220	13860	231	12.00%
LSA/Quick Processing	352	105	56	444	24864	414.4	24.20%
Make Application	407	144	98	125	12250	204.2	6.80%
Staff Appointment	178	11	115	264	30360	506	14.40%
Technical Support	42	13	51	755			41.10%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1836</b>	<b>85534</b>	<b>1425.6</b>	
<b>6-Sep</b>							
Application Appointment	32	8	99	14	1386	23.1	0.80%
Commercial	96	25	121	16	1936	32.3	0.90%
Information	392	142	58	203	11774	196.2	11.80%
LSA/Quick Processing	362	95	39	201	7839	130.7	11.70%
Make Application	387	93	80	295	23600	393.3	17.10%
OTC	306	89	39	144	5616	93.6	8.40%
Pick-up	163	45	38	68	2584	43.1	3.90%
Staff Appointment	87	14	119	119	14161	236	6.90%
Technical Support	141	15	53	662			38.40%
<b>Total Customers</b>				<b>1722</b>	<b>68896</b>	<b>1148.3</b>	

## B. PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS

### Reception Function

Under the current system, the customer starts by talking to a receptionist who signs in the customer and determines who they need to see. For a receptionist function to be successful, it is important that the wait time to see the receptionist is very short. We suggest three or four minutes maximum. For example, if the customer is here for an appointment, it is not reasonable to have a long wait simply to announce that they are present and ready for the appointment. Our observation time was limited and during most of our visit the receptionist function seemed to work reasonably well. However, at one point we observed waits of close to 10 minutes.

- 10. *Recommendation:* The standard for receptionist wait times should be set at no more than 3 or 4 minutes. If wait times are longer additional receptionist back up staff should be available. If problems persist, it may be appropriate to re-examine the function to see if too much is being asked of the receptionist.**

### Computer Screen

After customers have been entered into the system and assigned to one of the six service areas their name appears on a screen near the receptionist desk. This screen is much too small for customers to see their names or where they are on the list without walking over to the screen. A much larger screen with larger font type needs to be installed in a conspicuous location that is visible from across the lobby.

- 11. *Recommendation:* A larger customer tracking screen should be installed in the lobby so it is visible from across the lobby.**

### Triage Technicians

After being checked into the system the customer waits in the lobby until being called by one of the Permit Technicians. All customers, except those seeking to make an application, now meet at the technician's work station. The Development Center uses Triage Technicians to review submittal packages under the "make application" category. The Technician meets customers in the lobby and then takes the package back to their desk where it is reviewed. After being reviewed by the Triage Technician and any technical support deemed necessary, the Triage Technician takes the package back out to the customer in the lobby and updates them on the status of application completeness. The time between a Triage Technician taking a submittal package from the customer and the customer hearing back from the Technician can

easily exceed 1 ½ hours; all the while the customer sits in the lobby unsure what is happening to their case. The hour or more time will seem less burdensome if the customer is an integral part of the process.

We believe that face-to-face communication is an important means of discussing issues as they arise when applications are being reviewed, and we find that these discussions often save time. Management of the Development Center, however, believe that if the customer comes back to the Triage Technicians workstation that too much time is spent discussing and explaining issues unrelated to the applicant thereby taking time away from assisting other customers. We are not convinced that this is the case.

Triage Technicians could be trained to use techniques that keep the conversation focused on the application, which would allow them to meet with customers face-to-face. We believe this approach serves the public by allowing customers to meet with the reviewer and keeps customers flowing through the lobby. Finally, we believe that face to face communication can assist in educating the customer, can avoid misinterpreting applications, and in general reduce errors in the process.

**12. Recommendation: Triage Technicians should work with the customers at their desk.**

All Technicians should be trained in techniques that help keep the discussion and comments focused on the project. This would allow all technicians to meet one-on-one with projects applicants. We would caution that this should not be taken to an extreme, because some side conversations are inevitable and in-fact productive and healthy.

**13. Recommendation: All customers regardless of type of service requested should meet with the permit technician at their work station.**

### **Use of Two Permit Technicians**

There has been a change in how Permit Technicians do there work. Permit Technicians originally would both review applications for completeness and enter the application into PALS+. Now these functions have been separated such that one technician accepts the application – a Triage Technician – and another technician enters the data into PALS+ a Processing Technician. We believe having two technicians involved in a transaction introduces the possibility for error and the hand-off from one technician to the next also means a second technician needs to become familiar with the project as they enter the data. As a practice, we try to minimize the number of staff involved in the process as a way of improving efficiency. Further,

bifurcation of the steps may also require an applicant to make two trips to the Development Center if fees are miscalculated or to pick-up the permit. However, management of the Development Center believe that applications can be input to the system during the slower periods of the day and that having one technician input the permit takes time away from them assisting another customer. Additionally, given the wait times, there do not appear to be slower periods of the day.

We believe that one technician should be responsible for handling both the review of an application and entering data into PALS+. If the number of staff trained to perform the triage of applications is increased, one technician could perform both the review and data entry functions. Alternatively, if data entry is taking too long and there is concern that technicians cannot assist other customers, additional clerical staff can be brought on to perform data entry tasks. However, this would not be our preferred solution.

**14. Recommendation: The same Permit Technician that reviews an application for completeness should also enter the permit into PALS+. These two separate steps should be recombined and handled by the technician while the applicant is there waiting.**

## **Appointments**

Another change is to the appointment system. Previously there were up to 12 appointments scheduled per day, and appointments were accepted for any type of project. The number of appointments has been reduced to two per day in 4-hour blocks, and they are only accepted for commercial projects. Consequently, it takes 5-6 weeks before being seen for an appointment which means 5-6 weeks before being able to discuss a commercial project with staff. This seems counter to the stated economic development objectives of the County. In most communities we see appointments running no more than five days out. Initially we believe staff should be able to handle four appointments per day. With other changes being discussed it may be possible to increase this even further to meet the five day goal.

We continue to believe that the technicians are being asked to do too much as part of the initial review and that appointments are taking too long. There should be two technicians assigned to appointments and the duration should be limited to two hours except in unique circumstances.

**15. Recommendation: Two Technicians should be assigned to appointments and appointments should be limited to 90 minutes.**

**16. Recommendation: Systems and procedures should be in place so that appointments can be scheduled no longer than five days in advance.**

**Amount of Review Time**

We believe that one of the biggest issues impacting review times and the counter is the question of how much review should be done at the counter before applications are accepted versus what should be reviewed post-submittal. Clear trade-off exists between the amount of review done at the counter and the length of time customers have to wait in the lobby. If technical support is deeply involved reviewing applications before they are submitted the quality of the application submitted will be better, but the trade-off is longer waits at the counter and longer transaction times. We observed this issue very clearly in 2004 and it still seems to be very significant. There were three recommendations in the 2004 audit to address this specific issue – Recommendation 93, 94 and 95 – none of which have been implemented.

The concept behind the use of Triage Technicians was that these staff would have additional training and not need to rely upon the technical support staff. However, when reviewing the data this does not appear to be the case. During the six month period of January – June 2004 there were 3,564 requests for technical support out of 11,096 customers or 32.1%. During the six month period of April – September 2006 there were 4,129 requests for technical support out of 10,456 customers or 39.5%. The percentage of overall requests for technical support increased. While it is not possible to determine how many requests for technical support came from internal requests versus requests directly from the public. We believe, and the data seems to indicate, that there continues to be too much review before an application is accepted. This level of review not only slows the movement of customers through the Development Center but is redundant of work that is completed when an application is formally filed.

**17. Recommendation: The amount of time taken in accepting applications should be decreased. Recommendations 93, 94 and 95 of the 2004 audit should be implemented.**

In looking at the data in Table 17 we conclude that many of the transactions are taking more time than we feel is reasonable. This may be due to staff training or the systems being used. In Table 18 we indicate the average transaction times for April to September 2006 and the times that we think would be reasonable based on our experience in many other communities. Managers and supervisors of the counter should sit with staff to actually process typical transactions to determine how to shorten the transaction times.

**Table 18  
Suggested Transaction Times In Minutes**

<b>Lobby Service Requested</b>	<b>Average Transaction Time April to September 2006 (shortest and longest time)</b>	<b>Recommended Transaction Time Goals</b>
Application Appointment	126 minutes (99 to 150)	60 to 90 minutes
Information	62 (50 to 73)	30 to 45 minutes
LSA/Quick Processing	39 (28 to 56)	15 to 20 minutes
Make Application 1	102 (80 to 116)	45 to 60 minutes
Make Application 2	102 (80 to 116)	60 to 90 minutes
Staff Appointment	121 (115 to 129)	60 to 90 minutes
Technical Support	41 (26 to 53)	30 to 60 minutes

**18. Recommendation:** The Counter should work with staff training and systems to achieve the transaction goals shown in Table 18.

### **Cashier**

During our visit there were times when the customer was waiting, due to the lack of a cashier. This is poor public service and should be avoided.

**19. Recommendation:** A cashier should be available at all times and a back up should also be available.

### **Fast Track**

There are a variety of function that might be considered for fast tracking such as various drop offs and pick ups and extremely short transactions. Although there are no longer PALS counters, consideration might be given to seeing if a portion of the Public Works counter could be used for these fast transactions.

**20. Recommendation:** PALS should explore the potential for using a portion of the Public Works counter for fast track transactions.

### **Over The Counter Permits**

PALS performs almost no over the counter permits. While County regulations and the need for some specialist review makes over the counter difficult, we believe staff should examine this possibility in more depth. Our experience elsewhere indicates

that over the counter permits are the most efficient system for both the customer and staff.

**21. Recommendation:** PALS should examine if additional permits can be issued over the counter.

### Telephone Calls

If customers can obtain the information they need either by telephone or via the Internet, there is no need to come to PALS. Table 19 below indicates current telephone statistics. As can be seen the percent of calls answered averages less than 50% and has actually been decreasing over the last few months. This data is similar to what we uncovered in the 2004 Audit. Recommendation 101 of that Audit called for assigning two Permit Technicians to the telephone. Although we were told that this has been authorized, it is not yet in place.

**Table 19  
Telephone Activity and Percent of Calls Answered  
January 2006 – August 2006**

Month	Incoming Calls	Percent Answered
Jan-06	2,064	59%
Feb-06	2,182	50%
Mar-06	2,765	51%
Apr-06	2,334	54%
May-06	2,768	38%
Jun-06	2,502	42%
Jul-06	2,180	38%
Aug-06	2,362	49%
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>19,157</b>	
<b>Avg. % Answered</b>		<b>46.50%</b>

**22. Recommendation:** Assign two Permit Technicians to answering phones ASAP.

## VIII. STATUS OF ORIGINAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the recommendations which have not been implemented or are only partially implemented. The numbering of the recommendations is keyed to the original report. Each of the recommendations has been summarized in bold and is followed by a brief discussion of what needs to be done to implement the recommendation.

### A. ALL FUNCTIONS SUMMARY

**Positives**—The functions have removed most of the backlog, have worked through office remodeling and have handled a high level of permits. Managers have been receptive to change and are monitoring activities.

**Still Outstanding**—There is a need for someone to lead the next phases of Audit implementation which cut across all functions and require a focus on policy, training, efficiency and cross function integration. The fees and budget have not yet been stabilized and much remains to be done to have PALS+ as a management tool.

**3. Adopt short term implementation plan.** Several of the eleven recommendations proposed for a short term plan were implemented. Others were not implemented. However, given what has transpired in implementing the entire report, these items are now moot. This recommendation should be listed as completed.

**6. Adopt guidelines for the development permitting system.** Many of the elements proposed are current goals in PALS ongoing development of the permit system or process. Now that PALS has the backlog under control, it is time to focus on many of these broader issues. We do have a concern that no one has been given responsibility for the Audit issues that cut across all PALS divisions.

**7. Resolve PALS Management issues.** PALS indicates that the proposed reorganization and additional positions are under review. The Oversight Committee has also looked at the issue but made no recommendation. We continue to feel that this recommendation should be implemented.

**10. Adopt guidelines for fees and budget.** It appears that there has been no progress on addressing these fee and budget items. Stabilizing budgets for PALS is a key issue that needs to be addressed. Given the possible downturn in development activity, it is imperative that a reserve account be established for these activities.

**12. Change PALS budget document.** The budget document is reviewed annually as part of the budget process. There were minor changes in the 2006 document as well as the 2007 document. We continue to feel that the budget could do a better job of documenting activity levels as well as performance. This should be a joint effort by PALS and Finance.

**14. Study Centralization of Code Enforcement.** A consultant reviewed the County ordinance for any potential problems. Staff has met once in April 2006 to begin formulating a proposal. We continue to feel that this centralization is worth being considered.

**15. Modify Chapter 18 of County Code.** PALS suggests that all applications accepted by PALS meet the completeness standard and of the County Code and say it is unclear why we thought there was a difference with planning applications. Our point was that it is not practical to meet Item 6 in the County Ordinance as part of the counter submittal. This may be one reason why counter wait times are so long. This item should be reviewed as part of working out the counter problems.

**16. Declare planning permits “complete” on acceptance of application.** PALS suggests that all applications accepted by PALS meet this standard. However, we doubt that they meet Item 6 in the County Ordinance. This should be worked out in conjunction with Number 15 above.

**17. Create integrated time system and payroll system.** This has not been done and is still a good recommendation. See the section of this report addressing PAS+.

**18. Resolve PALS data issues.** PALS+ is addressing some of the issues raised. Inconsistent data entry is also addressed in the training plan on the new permit system. The use of drop down selections rather than codes is expected to address the inconsistency issue. There are other data issues that need to get addressed as outlined in the section on PALS+.

**20. Provide annual overtime budget of \$100,000 for PALS.** The executive and County Council addressed this issue as part of the annual budget process. We understand that \$200,000 is set aside for the backlog and that other overtime is specified in parts of the budget. Once PALS is satisfied, this item should be removed as completed.

**21. Adopt overtime rules.** The Department's informal overtime policy follows the general points outlined in this recommendation. A rough draft of a policy was developed but has not been acted on. This item remains to be completed and should be addressed next year.

**22. Increase commitment to PALS on PALS.** The department indicates that they are fully committed to following through on this process. A second employee survey

(PALS on PALS) was completed in April and the results distributed on April 26, 2006. It would be useful to conduct staff surveys on an annual basis.

**23. Perform comprehensive first time reviews.** PALS says that this has always been a standard/theme for the department and this item is completed. Public Works indicates that this has also been a standard practice of the Sewer Utility. However, we believe this approach should be memorialized in policies. Additionally, each division or department should develop a monitoring program where a percent of permits are sampled to assure compliance with the policy.

**24. Develop a public awareness program.** The major parts of this recommendation have not yet been started. We particularly recommend developing a comprehensive email list to communicate with the customers.

**26. Install field computers.** PALS has been looking at a few field computer systems but has not found what they feel is a workable solution. We suggest PALS contact two or three communities that are using field computers to see if they can offer any insight.

**28. Resolve addressing issues.** PALS has ongoing coordination with the GIS department. While not all issues are resolved, the recommendation is to continue to work with the GIS department to resolve addressing issues. Currently addresses coded “XX” are indications of a questionable address. Developing an accurate address file is essential to providing good and efficient customer service.

**29. Consider requiring electronic final plat submittals.** PALS is reviewing options on this item. Some applications currently include an electronic copy. The field of electronic plan submittal is changing rapidly and PALS should continue research in this area.

**30. Install optical imaging system.** Funding for this item has not yet been addressed. However, PALS is beginning to attach more pre-existing files to PALS+ which is a good approach. This approach should be memorialized in a PALS policy and there should be staff training for this approach. There should be a county-wide effort to adopt a standard approach to optical imaging and the efforts should be funded in FY 08.

**31. Support PALS+ expenditure needs.** The County has generally been supportive of PALS+ and has included two staff positions in the Executives 07 proposed budget. These positions are extremely important as discussed in the section of this report on PALS+. This item should be reviewed again as part of the 08 budget to determine the level of staffing that is needed.

**32. Prepare data entry specifications for pals Plus.** PALS suggests that the programming for PALS+ addresses the points raised in this recommendation but there

is no formal policy. Based on our current study we believe there are still data entry problems that need to be addressed and a formal policy should be adopted. See also our discussion in this paper regarding PALS+.

**33. Incorporate PALS+ improvement needs into budget.** This issue is addressed in Number 31 above.

**34. Return phone call the same day.** PALS indicates that the department has had a policy of returning phone calls within 24 hours since the mid 1990s. They adopted a new policy on 2/1/06 requiring employees to return 85% of incoming telephone calls by close of business the next working day. The department has decided to stay with this policy and to look at ways to monitor how successful they are. They are planning to do some customer surveys to establish a baseline to measure future improvements.

Public Works Sewer Utility Division has a standard policy to return phone calls within 24 hours and estimates 80% compliance.

Based on our informal information, we feel that not timely returning phone calls continues to be an issue. We are not convinced that a next day or 24 hour policy is easy to implement and for employees to keep track of. Additionally, in the information age, we believe customers expect faster service. We continue to recommend that all calls be returned before the end of the day.

**35. Improve phone system.** PALS has made some improvements but feel the proposed changes are too costly. However, a good phone system can not only improve customer service but also can help staff efficiency. We suggest a more detailed analysis be conducted before this item is dropped.

**36. Expand E-government.** Once all DCIS permits are converted, PALS indicates that they hope to look at this issue. Plumbing and mechanical permits are currently on line but use tends to be small. If an applicant comes to the counter to apply for anything that can be done on line, there is another approach that can be used. The Permit Technician should take the applicant to a computer terminal and assist them to apply using the Internet. The goal is that the next time they need a similar permit they will do so over the Internet. E-government permits are proving to be highly useful with some communities issuing half of their permits this way. This can create efficiency for both customers and staff and help with the counter wait times. This item should receive a high priority.

## B. BUILDING DIVISION

### SUMMARY

Positives—The Building Division has done an excellent job in eliminating backlog and monitoring performance standards. A high percent of the Audit recommendations have been completed..

Still Outstanding—Now that the performance standards are being met, it is time to look at the changes to performance standards included in the Audit.

**43. Solve Building Inspector concerns.** Building has had a consultant working on this issue and some progress is being made. However, the item should remain as partially outstanding.

**44. Post job inspection card.** The current field inspection report acts as a job inspection card. It contains additional information not found on many job cards. We suggest this item be listed as completed.

**46. Establish new time goals for Building plan check.** New goals were dependent on new staff. The Audits residential goals were the same as existing goals but commercial goals are shorter. The Division indicates that once backlog is stabilized goals will be reassessed.

## C. CURRENT PLANNING

### SUMMARY

Positives--A significant effort has been made to eliminate the backlog of cases and to implement organizational changes to facilitate better customer service. The attitude of staff seems to have improved and their stress level somewhat lowered. A very serious effort has been made to implement the recommendations from the Audit.

Still Outstanding—The two most significant, not implemented recommendations, are the empowerment of the Planners and the lowering of timelines for administrative permits. Some recommended changes to the case processing have not been implemented, as well as other recommendations.

**54. PALS should establish a team approach between Current and Advance Planning for the development of major policies, ordinances and plans.** No formal process has been established for the proposed team approach. However lines of communication have been opened between the two divisions. They now have scheduled joint staff meetings and planners from Advance Planning have been assigned POD duty at the public counter. Also new ordinances are being developed

with Current Planning input. We are pleased with the new arrangement and hope that the existing communication will continue.

**55. Current Planning should prepare a well indexed policy and procedures manual.** Existing policies have been compiled into a handbook and an index is being prepared. Also there is a major push to turn existing policies into adopted regulations, thus eliminating the need for many of the policies. Although a procedure manual was started about four years ago no recent work has been done on the document. Instead a strong training program has been established for all new planners. We strongly support the efforts being applied to the policy handbook. Although a strong training program for new employee is an excellent idea, we still believe a procedure handbook is also a needed tool for staff.

**56. The Planner III currently acting as the Environmental Coordinator and most of its functions should be transferred to Current Planning.** It has been decided that this position will remain in Resource Management. The given reason for this decision is that the Resource Management director is PALS' identified SEPA expert, therefore the Planner III who is doing final review of SEPA documents should be in Resource Management. It should be noted that the Planner III function is also accountable to the Current Planning Director and attends Current Planning staff meetings. Although this staff arrangement is working, it appears to us that Recommendation 56 is still valid and should be considered.

**57. Two new Planner III positions and one new Planner II position should be added to Current Planning.** Three new staff positions were recommended in the original report. One of these positions is included in the 2006 budget. However it has not yet been filled along with two existing vacant positions. Current Planning is hoping to fill these positions before the end of the year. The two additional positions are included in the preliminary 2007 budget.

The original staffing recommendation was based upon:

1. The caseload projections when the original report was prepared. (The existing workload and related staffing is discussed in a separate section of this report); and
2. The reorganization of Current Planning into four teams. Presently the organizational chart indicates three teams with one Project Manager supervising two teams. Perhaps Current Planning's present organization is transitional, since a case planner was recently promoted to Project Manager position. A more balanced approach to staffing the teams should occur. We do not think the division as presently organized will work well over the long term.

Discussion of appropriate staffing levels for 2006-2007 can be found in the discussion of staffing

**58. A Planner III should be assigned to the Tech Support team.** There are three Planners now assigned to tech support. One of the planners is a Planner II and has been identified as working out of class. Per the new organizational chart there is a project manager as the team leader of tech support staff. We suggest that the planner who is working out of class should be the team leader.

**59. Current Planning should be organized into four teams each headed by a Planner III.** Current Planning's most recent organizational chart indicates three planning teams managed by project managers (two teams managed by the same manager) and an administrative division. Within each team are planners that are assigned to a geographical area instead of by case type. Our original report recommended that the PALS Counter and files should be transferred to a newly created administration division which would not be part of Current Planning. As of this date there has been no action on the creation of the administrative division.

Since the Environmental Coordinator is not being transferred to Current Planning. Three planning teams, one team covering cases in the west, one team for the east and one for technical support will work. However there should be three separate team leaders in order to split the management responsibility evenly. When an administration division is created, we strongly recommend the transfer of PALS Counter and files to that division. Current Planning has enough responsibilities without this additional administrative responsibility.

**60. A comprehensive project manager approach to project review should be implemented.** The Project Manager is a new job classification for PALS. The job class is one level above Planner III and is considered management. In Current Planning there are now two Project Managers. The PALS model for project managers is different than the one proposed in the Audit. The Project Manager's present responsibilities include being head of a planning team, the single point of contact for final plats and processing the most difficult of planning applications. Since implementation the single point of contact for final plats has been very successful and Current Planning is looking into applying this approach to other types of applications.

The approach PALS has taken for Project Managers is working. However, in order to accomplish PALS' goals of timely processing of applications, happy applicants and contented staff, giving a handful of staff all the responsibilities of the "project managers" as described in the original report is not realistic. When Zucker Systems recommended Project Managers, we envision **all case planners** as becoming the managers of their assigned cases i.e. changing the case planner from a regulator and collector of others' opinions to a problem solver. This can still be done. The case planners do not have to be called project managers with management responsibility, they just have to be empowered to act. We strongly recommend all planning staff be given additional responsibility for their assigned cases including:

- Conducts pre-application/pre-development meetings and review as appropriate
- Reviews application at intake and confirm application is complete for vesting
- Conducts post NOA project evaluation meeting
- Collects and integrates comments from other departments
- Challenges other department conditions when they appear inappropriate
- Resolves inter-departmental problems
- Analyzes the project
- Coordinates citizen input and comments
- Works with the applicant and citizens input to solve problems and revise the project as appropriate
- Advocates for the process, i.e., maintain timelines and see that they are met
- Coordinates with key decision-makers
- Writes and signs the staff reports
- Presents project at public meetings
- Follows-up on enforcing conditions
- Checks the building permits plans for conformance to approvals
- Field checks prior to occupancy

The two existing Project Managers in Current Planning cannot be expected to do all of these tasks for all applications. The case planner's responsibilities need to increase to allow them to be the single point of contact for their cases. The new project managers should have oversight control for any problem that may occur.

**61. The project managers review the application as part of the intake process during a scheduled submittal appointment.** If the application is accepted, it should be deemed complete for vesting proposes. Presently the Project Manager reviews all applications for completeness and quality. Then they assign it to the case planner. This system can work, however as the Project Managers become more involved with management issues, the application review can be delayed. It would be better for the case planner who is assigned the case, to review the application for completeness.

**62. Change NOA Process.** The LUACS are now sent NOA. The case planner prepares the NOA, but clerical staff still prepares the final version in order to assure quality control. About 80% of the NOA are sent out in three days. Staff should prepare the NOA with out clerical staff review for quality control. If that step in the process were eliminated than all NOA could be sent out within three days with most of them going out earlier.

**63. Current Planning should establish a new procedure for all Hearing Examiner cases and any complex administrative cases. There should be a meeting between the applicant and various representatives from PALS and/or other agencies to discuss the proposed project 20 working days after the NOA is mailed.** The Oversight Committee, assigned to review and implement Audit recommendations considered this recommendation a priority 3. Nothing yet has been done to establish this new procedure. We considered this recommendation a priority 1. Although the procedure will take additional time in the beginning, in the end there will be better communications between staff and the applicant and everyone being on the same page is assured. We recommend that a single type of application be identified and for a trail period these meeting be held. We feel that the benefits that occur will encourage staff to establish the procedure for all complex cases.

**64. Within 28 days of the NOA, a written summary of the meeting, any comments received outside the meeting and all requests for additional information should be mailed to the applicant.** This recommendation ties to recommendation 63. Nothing has been done to establish this post NOA meeting. Even if meetings are not held, a written summary of the project status should be sent to the applicant within 28 days of the NOA. As far as we were able to determine this is not occurring at this time.

**65. The Project Manager Planner should act on behalf of the applicant and monitor the timelines of other divisions, sections and agencies and if necessary, act to resolve conflicts between the applicant and other divisions and sections.** All case planners have been giving the assignment of monitoring the timelines for their cases to assure that the cases do not become backlogged per the adopted timelines. For final plats the new Project Managers are acting on behalf of the applicant and as necessary are resolving conflicts. There have been discussions on expanding the scope of the Project Managers to other types of cases.

The Project Managers are doing excellent work on the Final Plats and we encourage PALS to extend this type of service to other types of applications. We also congratulate PALS for eliminating the existing backlog of cases and processing new cases in a timely manner.

**66. Current Planning should keep the LUACS informed and encourage them to comment during all steps of the process, and not only on the draft report to the Hearing Examiner.** Current Planning has modified the notification procedures for LUACS to provide for timely and adequate information on pending cases. This recommendation has been completed.

**67. County Council should determine the level of staff support it desires for the LUCA function and staff as appropriate.** This issue has not been addressed by County Council. As the number of LUACs expand the amount of required staffing

increases. We encourage County Council to consider how much staff support they desire for the LUACs and staff Current Planning appropriately.

**68. The Project Manager Planner should review for planning issues that related to any final plats and/or building permits.** The case planner who was assigned to the preliminary plat and use permits are now reviewing the final plats and/or building permits for compliance to the original approvals. This recommendation has been completed.

**69. Pierce County should implement a traffic impact fee that would allow projects to pay a fee in lieu of preparing a TIA and negotiating appropriate mitigation.** In early October of this year, Pierce County adopted an ordinance that imposes a traffic impact fee. The County will start implementing the ordinance January 1, 2007. This recommendation has been completed.

**70. The tech support planner, not a case planner, should perform SEPA review for those projects that do not require a discretionary permit.** Case planners are still doing SEPA review on building permits that have no other related applications. The reason given for not allowing the technical support staff to perform SEPA review is that it would take too much of their time to do the necessary field check.

Although we can understand the time constraints on technical support, Zucker Systems believes that these planners should be allowed to perform the review. Since the direction package was adopted single family homes are generally exempt from review limiting the number of building permits needing review. The number of commercial and industrial construction permits that need to be reviewed is limited and generally closer to the County office. By not allowing the technical support planner to go into the field and do simple SEPA review, management is taking ownership of the plans away from technical support planners.

**72. PALS should consider requiring Pre-application/Pre-development Meetings for all applications that require a hearing or SEPA review.** Current Planning does not intend on implementing this recommendation. The reason given is that if a project goes through a Pre-application or Pre-development process the applicant would know what special studies are required and would be required to provide these studies before the application is deemed complete for submittal. Per Current Planning, the applicants are opposed to being required to providing the special studies with the application.

Pre-application or Pre-development meetings should be an important part of the review process. Giving the applicant an insight into possible problems is important information. If the issue is that the application is not complete without the identified studies, then change the definition of a completed application and not require the studies be submitted with the application. Instead allow the studies to be submitted

with the application, and if not provided, formally require the studies as part of the written comments on the application.

**73. The Pre-application/Pre-development Meeting process should be restructured.** There has been some discussion of changing the Pre-application or Pre-development process. To date no changes have been made. We still recommend the recommended changes be made to the process.

**74. The Development Center should make an effort to decrease non-fee supported administrative work for the case planners.** Current Planning has established a system of block time. In the AM the planners cannot be reached by the public. Instead the Development Center with the help of the POD handles all inquires. In the afternoon the case planners are available to the public and the applicants.

The amount of time spent on phone calls and e-mails has been reduced by 30.5%. Therefore we consider this recommendation complied with. However, the case planners' workload still needs to be periodically evaluated to determine what portion of their workload is non-fee supported administrative work. Although the amount of planner's time spent on phone calls and e-mail has significantly decreased, the number of overall non fee related hours has remained practically unchanged since the 2004 study was prepared. If the level of non fee work goes up, the situation needs to be readdressed and additional steps taken.

**76. The performance measures identified in Table 38 should be adopted by Current Planning.** Current Planning did not adopt the performance measures. Instead they are meeting the following standards some of which are identified in the Code. They are as follows:

- Return phone calls: 24 hours
- First Response to applicants: to any case requiring a public hearing 30-calender days; all items that do not requiring a public hearing 60-calender days
- Second and third responses: within 15-calender days
- All public hearing items considered by the hearing officer: within 120-calender days
- Other administrative items: within 14-calendar days
- E-mail responses: within 3-calendar days
- Staff reports with conditions: to all parties within 5 days

Although many of these timelines are greater than what we recommended, they are significantly better than the response times in 2004. Although the code allows 60-day for first response on administrative cases, we would strongly recommend that the timeline be reduced to 30-days or the same as public hearing items.

**77. Qualitative indicators should be incorporated into Current Planning’s work effort.** Part of this recommendation has been implemented. However, one of the responsibilities of the new project managers will be to review the application processes and this has not occurred. Communication has improved between Current Planning and other PALS divisions but there are still some problems with timely responses from some outside agencies. The case planners have not become project managers, instead a project manager position has been developed to manage the case planners and to assist with assuring timely results.

The new project managers have a large number of responsibilities and this recommendation probably will not receive the attention necessary. A better approach would be to establish a committee consisting of selected staff and perhaps outside industry members to review existing processes including those recommendations contained in this report but not implemented. Project Managers have been established but empowerment of the case planners has not occurred. This should be done.

**78. PALS should establish a mandatory program of planner rotation.** No program of rotation has been established. Today there is more communication between Advance Planning and Current Planning, but not as much communication between Current Planning and Advance Planning. It is good that communication has improved between the two divisions. However, we still think that a rotation of staff would be beneficial for both divisions.

**81. Current Planning should establish a training program for LUAC members.** Current Planning started to develop a policy for the LUACs and a companion training program. However this is not a priority for the Division and it has been placed on hold. We still support this work effort. If it were completed, all the LUACs would follow the same policies, allowing for consistent implementation of the regulations. However, we understand why it is not a priority at this time. This recommendation ties directly to Recommendation 67, County Council should determine level of staff support for the LUCA function.

## **D. DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

### **SUMMARY**

Positives—PALS is beginning to address the counter wait times. Some Permit Technician training has taken place and the counter area has been remodeled.

Still Outstanding—We believe that substantial additional changes will still be required to the counter process.

**83. More open communication between managers & Staff.** Human Resources is working with Development Center to improve open communication. Pals on Pals is reviewed as a part of every staff meeting.

**84. Facilitated staff retreats.** There has been some reorganization regarding Technical support staff. Additionally a process change is planned for late summer of 2006 that may address the concerns raised.

**86. Development Center Supervisor to have Admin over Tech Support.** The Department has begun a restructuring of the Technical Support function. While the recommendation has not been fully implemented, we support the direction taken and believe no further action is needed.

**87. Routine sessions to critique operations.** Division Supervisor are meeting regularly to review intake and distribution of applications. However, given the new systems there is a need for more staff discussions concerning changes to the counter processes.

**89. Consolidate permit categories.** This is part of the PALS+ conversion project.

**90. Streamline Notice Requirements.** This item has not yet been addressed and the recommendation should be implemented.

**91. Revise and streamline codes.** This is and has been an ongoing goal of PALS. There is no set schedule for a comprehensive overhaul. Further attention should be given to this item in 2007.

**93. Create clear thresholds for project review.** This issue remains a significant issue that impedes the ability of customers to move through the lobby. Because reviewing departments have not created standards or empowered the permit technicians too many people are “touching” the application. We continue to believe this issue is one of the keys to freeing up the lobby.

**94. Create standard plan details.** This issue has not been addressed and is closely related to recommendation 93 and it should be addressed quickly.

**95. Exempt certain projects from DENG Review.** This issue is tied to recommendations 93 and 94.

**96. Re-instate Lobby Service Attendant.** The original LSA was a roving staff member that sought to provide basic information for customers who were not sure if they had all the information they needed or if they were even in the right place. The LSA served to back-up or back-stop what the original receptionists said when the customer checked in. We continue to feel that this roving attendant is useful, particularly until such time as wait times are reduced. In addition to answering

questions, the person can obtain data as to customer frustrations that can help improve the system.

**100. Continue changes to permit system for end users.** Programmers are compiling a list of requests. When the basic conversion is done they will start on the requests.

**101. Assign two Permit Technicians to phone system.** An additional staff member has been hired and is being trained.

**102. Better training for Permit Technicians.** With each phase of PALS+ that is released the staff is getting training. Additional training will follow the conversion. It also appears that additional Permit Technician training is necessary as part of the new counter changes.

**103. Allow staff to attend ICC training courses.** ICC training is encouraged and we send people as the budget allows.

**104. Expand training for Office Assistants.** Diversified training is encouraged as budget allows. Sections have been working on training plans as part of the PALS on PALS implementation. This training should be documented.

**108. Three Permit Technicians dedicated to info \* quick apps.** This item will be changing based on the new counter process.

**111. Dedicate five workstations to Technical Support.** This item will be changing based on the new counter process.

**112. Accept planning applications by Current Planner.** We continue to feel that this is a good recommendation and could help reduce counter wait times. PALS indicates that this topic will be re-evaluated.

**113. Planning applications to receive priority by Permit Techs.** PALS indicates that this topic will be re-evaluated during their review of 117 "20 Minute Lobby Waits." At this time it is a good approach.

**114. First priority of Technical Support staff to be customers at counter.** This item will be changing based on the new counter processes.

**115. Implement project manager system.** PALS has begun implementing a project manager system but it is different than that recommended in the audit. This new process should be monitored to determine if any of the ideas in this recommendation still have merit.

**117. Lobby waits to be no more than 20 minutes.** The development of clear submittal and review standards and the empowerment of permit technicians may begin to reduce the wait times. The 20 minute maximum wait time should continue to

be a goal. Ideas to achieve this are discussed in Chapter VIII addressing the Development Center.

**118. Complete Information and Quick Processing in 30 minutes.** After each department revises and/or prepares their standard submittal package this goal should be reevaluated to determine if it is feasible.

**119. Complete scheduled appointments in 90 minutes.** Too much information is being dispensed during the appointments and the appointments are currently running 5 hours, which is why the Department has only two appointments per day. This system needs to be re-evaluated.

**120. 48 hour lead time for an appointment.** One of the changes implemented on September 18 was the elimination of all appointments except for commercial projects. This was not the original intent of our recommendation. Many agencies are increasing the use of customer appointments, with some agencies requiring an appointment to be assisted.

Currently it takes six weeks to be seen by appointment, which is much too long. This lead time needs to initially be reduced to five days with a longer range goal being 48 hours. It is a hardship on businesses to have to wait six weeks before having their plans accepted.

**121. Dedicate 75% of Technical Support staff time to Dev Center.** The Department has begun a restructuring of the Technical Support function. While the solution does not fully implement the recommendation we don't believe any further work is necessary.

**127. Expand training for Office Assistants.** Diversified training is encouraged as budget allows. Sections have been working on training plans as part of the PALS on PALS implementation. Additional work on this item is still needed.

**132. Revise call in system.** PALS did change the call in system so that callers would not have to come in to find out when they can be seen. Other revisions are pending, but clearly with only two appointments and with barely 40% of the calls being answered there is much to be done to improve the telephone and call in system.

## **E. DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING**

### **SUMMARY**

Positives—Development Engineering has completed detailed analysis of the amount of time it takes to process various activities and is closely monitoring the workload. They have been working hard to balance staffing and consultants given the problem

of recruiting and retaining engineers. Some additional supervision has been accomplished with the addition of Project Managers.

Still Outstanding—It has not been possible to meet all of the performance standards. Additional work is particularly needed for training, publishing a permit manual and simplifying checklists.

**136. Furnish data for monthly PALS report.** Monthly reports are currently being provided. A more robust report should be available when PALS+ is complete with Phase III.

**137. Consolidate engineering permit fee categories.** This is part of the PALS+ conversion project. Where appropriate it is being done.

**138. Add one engineer and one engineer tech/inspector for enforcement.** This item is on hold pending a more extensive review of moving enforcement to Code Enforcement as discussed in Recommendation 139. Development Engineering does have one engineer and one inspector assigned to enforcement.

**139. Study moving enforcement to Code Enforcement.** An initial study of County regulations has been done to see if there were any legal constraints. The next phase of the review has not begun. There is reluctance for an engineer to work in codes. Under our model, Code Enforcement would simply take the lead on enforcement but would still rely on Development Engineering for any technical issues.

**140. Create Surveyor job classifications.** This recommendation has not yet been addressed but we continue to feel it should be examined.

**141. In-house training program for engineers.** Although there is some training in Development Engineering this recommendation has not been fully addressed. A more formal training approach should be examined during 2007.

**142. Publish permit manual.** This item has not yet been addressed. Given continued problems at the counter, providing a clear description of what is needed with a permit application along with a checklist should be given higher priority.

**143. Shorten and simplify checklist.** This item relates to Recommendation 142 and has not yet been addressed. It should move up on the priority list.

**144. List permits exempt from engineering review.** This item relates to Recommendation 142 and has not yet been addressed. It should move up on the priority list.

**145. Study additional permits that can be exempt from review.** This item relates to Recommendation 142 and has not yet been addressed. It should move up on the priority list.

**146. Distribute applications to engineering faster.** This item has not yet been addressed. Discussions should be held with the permit counter to see if this can be implemented.

**147. Public Works to communicate directly to applicants.** This item is not complete. Public Works has adopted the stated goal, but needs to complete the contract process with some engineering consultants that they have hired, develop some of the process with the consultants and also do some training with the consultants.

**148. Create quality control program.** This program is not yet started. It has been difficult to focus on this item due to the shortage of staff.

**149. 95% of first reviews in 20 working days.** Development Engineering has adopted the stated goal. However, as can be seen in the monthly backlog reports, has not been able to meet the goal. There is also a need to work with the consultants on these timelines which will include additional training for the consultants.

**150. Monitor timelines.** This item is not complete. Development Engineering does have a monitoring system in place (TO-DO list) so that it is simple to tell what is behind, and are trying to ship things out to consultants to eliminate the backlog. The recommendation should be implemented when the backlog situation is eliminated and the workflow is normalized.

**151. Keep Public Works counter with PALS.** Even though the majority of Public Works has moved out of the Annex they are still maintaining the presence of two employees assigned to public assistance. However, there is still a possibility that these two staff members may be relocated when the Public Works Department builds a new office. Public Works should review this recommendation again to see if staffing can be adjusted to have a greater presence at PALS.

**154. New system for abbreviated and minor plans.** This item has not yet been addressed but should be included in the 2007 priorities.

**156. Change applicant notification system.** This item has not yet been addressed but should be included in the 2007 priorities.

**158. Meet with Public Works staff for final acceptance.** This item has not yet been addressed but should be included in the 2007 priorities.

**159. Use Public Works sign off form.** This item has not yet been addressed but should be included in the 2007 priorities.

**160. Add one engineer inspector.** This item is discussed in the staffing section. We are more inclined to suggest hiring more consultants than adding more staff.

**161. Add three Engineer I positions.** This item is discussed in the staffing section. We are more inclined to suggest hiring more consultants than adding more staff.

## **F. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### **SUMMARY**

**Positives**—The backlog of applications that existed in 2004 has been eliminated and staff continues to work at preventing the building-up of a new backlog of applications. Regional support teams have been established and implementation of the Direction package has occurred smoothly.

**Still Outstanding**—Although the backlog on fee related workload items has been eliminated, there continues to be a problem with non fee related items.

**162. Resource Management should prepare a policy handbook.** A policy handbook has been started with approximately eight policies completed and two in draft. Resource Management continues to use for reference a number of large files which contain all the old policies. Due to the lack of administrative staffing a biologist has been assigned to preparing the handbook. The old policy files should be reviewed and sorted. For historical reference policies that are outdated and are no longer being applied should be put in a separated handbook identified as previous policies. The remaining policies can either be rewritten in the new format or renumbered and put in the policy handbook as presently written. A good index of all the policies should be prepared. An effort should be made to convert policies to ordinances whenever feasible.

**163. Resource Management should develop a training program.** A training manual has been developed. All new staff member must complete the program. On going training occurs at weekly staff meetings.

**164. Make organizational changes in Resource Management.** Resource Management now has teams of professionals each headed by a level III staff member. None of the other recommended organizational changes have occurred. The Oversight Committee has evaluated the situation and has made no additional recommendations on this item at this time. Resource management stated that no Biologist would be willing to work at the Development Center full time and therefore the BOD system is being continued. We continue to recommend the previous recommended changes in order to provide for more effective use of staff. We particularly support assigning the enforcement of wetland regulations to Code Enforcement.

**165. Resource Management should try to improve the existing wetland indicators database.** An outside consultant contract was let in 2005 to map the wetlands in the community of Midland. All 1800 + property owners were contacted. Approximately

15% of the property owners gave the County permission to enter their property. Unfortunately many of these properties were already developed. However, on the remaining properties a surprising number of previously unidentified wetlands were found. When evaluating the cost effectiveness of this work effort, it would likely be considered cost ineffective. Unless a grant or some other type of funding source became available, we do not recommend additional work on this recommendation.

**168. Resource Management should adopt new performance measures.** New performance measures were based on new staffing and reassignment of responsibilities. Resource Management is meeting their existing standards as identified in the Code but not the standards indicated in the Audit. The standards indicated in the Audit should be pursued. Presently they return most phone calls within 24. Some calls are returned as late as 3 days; first review for all wetland or wildlife applications is completed within 60-calendar days, unless it is a variance then it is 30 days; second review is completed within 15 days. Even though the code allows 60-day review for non-public hearing applications, we feel it is way too long. All first responses should occur within a 30-day period.

**169. The qualitative indicators should be incorporated into Resource Management's work effort.** Two of the qualitative indicators have successfully been incorporated into the performance measures. The third indicator, any early response to the applicant when there are wetland (now also wildlife) indicators, is "not a big issue" per Resource Management. We disagree that it is not important to notify the applicant as earlier as possible (within 5 to 15 days) when there are such indicators. Information from Resource Managements alerts the applicant of possible need for revisions to the project and/or possible additional required applications.

**170. A program should be established for implementation of mitigation programs using bonds.** This is a department wide problem. Presently the bond amounts are inadequate to cover the cost of the necessary work. There are a number of reasons for this including the need for the County to require prevailing wages for all their contracts. Therefore the department is weary of calling bonds. Instead they have instituted a "bad boy's list." When the work is not done as bonded for, the applicant is put on the "bad boy's list" and is not be allowed to bond for any future projects. It seems to us that the "bad boys list" is a partial solution to the problem. It prevents future abuses of the system but does not correct the original noncompliance. If the funds provided by the bonds are inadequate then the method of calculating the bond amounts need to be reviewed.

**171. Establish a pre-design site assessment for a fee.** Resource Management is opposed to the pre-design site assessment and the related fee. They do not have adequate staff to perform this service. Instead they recommend the applicants utilize

outside consultants. This is an important service Resource Management could provide for small projects i.e., single family homes. However we are only recommending it with adequate staffing and a fee to cover the cost of the service.

**172. The County Prosecuting Attorney and Resource Management should develop standard procedures and related documents for permanent protection of easements.** Resource Management believes the creation of a permanent protection easement is not necessary. There is adequate protection in the established procedures. If the County Attorney concurs with this position than this recommendation does not need to be implemented.

**173. The County should establish a fee(s) for monitoring wetland mitigation program.** It is the position of Resource Management that the existing fee for the mitigation plan covers the cost of the monitoring and charging extra for submittals due to violations would be hurtful to the small property owners. Now that mitigation monitoring is being outsourced there will be a good record of the monitoring costs. The fee for the mitigation program should be re-evaluated at the end of one year of using consultants. When there has been a violation it is standard industry practice to double the submittal fees. This additional money supports the staff needed for enforcement. Out of concern for the small applicant perhaps the double fee could be waved for single family homes if an application was submitted in a timely manner (30 days or less). We think the double fee is a good deterrent for the developer.

## **G. FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**174. Monitor staffing needs.** In 2004 plan checks were performed by one permit coordinator and the Assistant Fire Marshal. Currently there are two coordinators and the Fire Department is recruiting for a third position, however, the Fire Department admits they cannot meet their plan check goals. During our interview the Fire Department expressed a desire to review all projects before they are accepted by the Development Center. They believe the permit technicians are too overwhelmed to properly review plans for fire department requirements. This desire is counter to our goal of reducing the multiple levels of counter review. Instead, we suggest that Fire develop specific criteria related to which plans they actually need to see.

## **H. HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

**175. Submit copy of proposed private sewage plan w/bldg permit.** To implement this requirement PALS would need to update the submittal standards. The TPCHD does, however, support this requirement but they lack authority to make it a requirement. PALS should complete this item as part of the 2007 Audit implementation.

**176. Perform initial review of private sewage disposal in 21 days.** The Health Department indicates that this recommendation continues to be considered. TPCHD has made a commitment to its stakeholders to process applications efficiently and cost effectively. To implement and maintain this level of service at this time would require a significant increase in fees and may not provide a satisfactory level of efficiency. TPCHD will be working with its stakeholders to establish customer service expectations and conduct a fee audit for the 2007 Budget Cycle. Workflows are currently under review to determine where process reduction and coordination of technical review will add to efficiency. Work on this item should remain as part of the 2007 Audit implementation.

## **I. PUBLIC WORKS – SEWER**

**178. Staff to meet 15 day review for reviews.** Public Works indicates that they were meeting the 15 day target a year ago when fully staffed. However, in 2005 they lost four plan reviewers plus a supervisor and timelines are now running 30 days or more. The problem is not one of resources since these permits are charged by time and material. The question is simply one of staffing. The Development Engineering Section has added four plan review positions and one Office Assistant position but there has been high turnover and vacant positions. This item is discussed in greater detail in the Executive Summary under engineering staffing concerns.

**179. Approve simple tenant improvements over-the-counter.** Public Works did change the process and although not over-the-counter, the new goal is to do these permits in five days. The Building Division is looking at the possibility of doing many tenant improvements over the counter and this would require some over the counter by Public Works. This item should remain as a proposal to be addressed during 2007.

**180. PW&U Accept credit cards.** Public Works will now accept credit cards for permit fees.

**181. Review and implement employees' improvement ideas.** Public Works has made excellent progress on many of the recommendations in this item but other are still to be addressed. The review of standard plans, handouts and checklists was started but has been delayed due to staffing issues. PALS also needs to take action on this item as Public Works believes that the handouts they are using are incorrect. There continues to be a delay in having information for new parcels on the computer systems. This item should be addressed by the Assessor-Treasurer.

**182. PW&U Remove notarization requirement.** Public Works indicates that its legal council has advised against changing this requirement. We did not have the opportunity to discuss this with legal so have no further comments. PALS should examine this question for its permits and share any ideas with Public Works.

**183. PW&U Revise approach to incomplete applications.** Public Works indicates that incomplete applications has been a problem over the last 20 years and continues to be a problem. They have made a commitment to the MBA to hold training sessions for the development industry, their engineers and surveyors to clarify the Sewer Utility's standard plans, details, submittal standards, and permitting procedures. This item also relates to progress on Recommendation 181.

## **J. PUBLIC WORKS – TRANSPORTATION**

**185. Adjust staff to meet timelines.** Public Works indicates that they have always tried to adjust staff to meet timelines. Their goal is 15 calendar days for first cycle review and 10 day for repeat cycles. This is a good starting point but we suggest 10 days and that third cycle and above meet a five day timeline. (See Recommendation 188 below.) We are told that many projects require 5, 6 or even 7 cycles. This would indicate that Public Works should increase their screening of applications for completeness and work hard with applicants following the first cycle review.

Public Works indicate that they have had funding concerns for this review. The Impact Fee does have an administrative fee that can be used for some of the reviews. PALS collects a review fee for traffic but Public Works gets no credit for those fees. Public Works suggested to Finance that PALS excess fees (which they have had) be used for some of this staffing, however, Finance suggests instead that it come from the road fund.

Irrespective of the funding issue, Public Works has an even more difficult problem. Although they have 3.5 to 4 positions budgeted for these reviews, they have three vacancies which they have been unable to fill. We address this issue in the Executive Summary.

We are not able to solve all of these issues as part of this study. However, we do suggest that these issues need to be addressed by the end of 2007 to complete Audit implementation.

**186. Co-locate traffic review to PALS.** Public Works believes that this recommendation is not workable. First of all the need for this will be reduced with the Impact Fees and we agree. Secondly they suggest that it is just as easy for traffic consultants to come directly to Public Works and this may be the case. Finally, they make the argument that many of the staff also work on other Public Works project making collocation not feasible. While these arguments all seem reasonable, we suggest that this recommendation be reviewed again once Impact Fees are underway. It would be useful to include the opinion of the Oversight Committee in this analysis.

**187. Establish fees for traffic review.** This item is still current. See the discussion in Number 185 above.

**188. Complete first review in 10 working days.** Public Works has established 15 working days for first review and 10 working days for subsequent reviews. However, this does not allow PALS to meet their timelines. We suggest that for 90% of the cases Public Works should meet 10 working days for first review and 5 working days for all subsequent reviews.

**189. Use standby consultants as needed to meet timelines.** Public Works believes that with Impact Fees they will be able to meet timelines without use of consultants. This item should be reviewed again once Impact Fees are implemented. Given the staffing problems consultants may still be necessary. From January to September of this year Public Works average review times have been 37.5 days with a range of 22 to 55 days. This means that none of the applications have met the timelines and there has been a 100% backlog. Public Works should furnish PALS with detailed data on performance to their timelines.