

Evaluation of Development Permitting Process

Pierce County, Washington

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I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

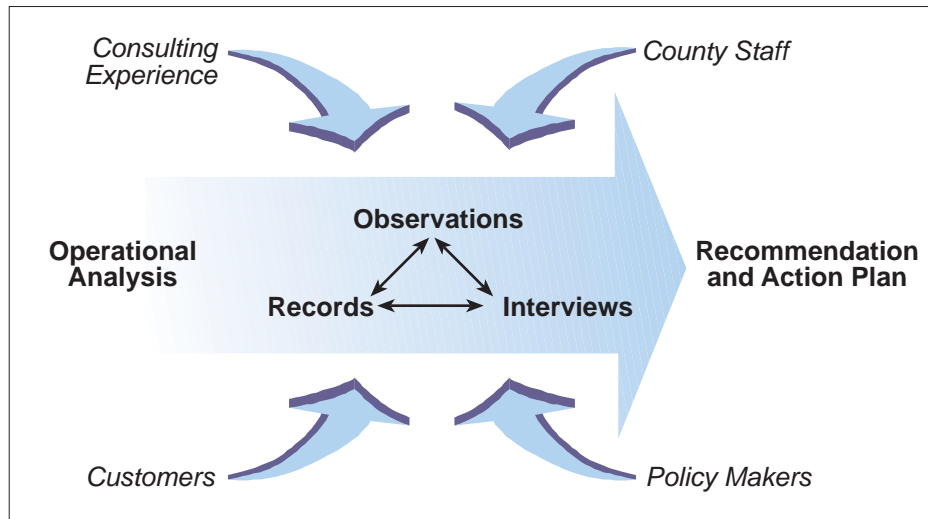
A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This study was initiated by the County’s Performance Audit Committee to evaluate the County’s development permitting process, including permits for land development and residential and commercial construction. The County received RFP responses for this work on March 18, 2004 and approved a contract with Zucker Systems on April 20, 2004.

B. METHODOLOGY

Zucker Systems used a well-tested, integrated methodology for this study, as shown in Figure 1. We brought our extensive experience to the study, worked closely with County staff, and solicited substantial input and observations from customers and policy makers. The methodology is built on inter-relating records, observations, and interviews. Each is necessary for valid studies. National research has shown that each one of these three—if relied upon exclusively—can be subject to substantial error. For example, record systems are often found to be as high as 50% in error, or the wrong things are measured. We used observations and interviews to verify records. Records and interviews were used to verify observations. Records and observations were used to verify interviews. Each group of people, shown in Figure 1, was an important part of the process.

Figure 1
Methodology Overview



Specific activities for this study included the following:

- Conducted interviews with five members of the County Council.
- Interviewed the County Executive.
- Met on several occasions with the Performance Audit Committee.
- Attended a meeting of the Hearings Examiner.
- Interviewed two members of Planning Commission, one member of Landmarks Commission and two members of a Land Use Advisory Commission.
- Conducted four focus groups representing 29 customers.
- Met with 146 employees in several staff meetings to hear some of their comments and suggestions.
- Reviewed a confidential and anonymous questionnaire completed by 146 employees.
- Reviewed an extensive questionnaire with open-ended questions completed by 63 employees.
- Interviewed 82 PALS staff members, including all that requested a confidential interview (see Appendix A).
- Interviewed 33 other County employees and six others (see Appendix A).
- Conducted various work meetings with staff to discuss issues and processes.
- Reviewed numerous forms, handouts, policies, files, and ordinances.
- Observed staff at work.
- Toured and visited all offices.
- Sent three different mail surveys to 2,184 customers of the County's permit processes with an overall response rate of 17.1%.

Four Zucker Systems staff worked on this study. Staff spent time in Pierce County in June, July and August. Staff included the following specialists:

- ✓ **Paul Zucker**, FAICP, President of Zucker Systems, led the project and was heavily involved in all aspects of the study. Mr. Zucker has a unique background. He served as Assistant County Administrative Officer and Planning and Building Official for the County of San Diego, California. He also served as Planning Director for Brookline, Massachusetts; Marin County, California; and Tucson, Arizona. He trains managers throughout the United States and Canada to run more effective and efficient building, engineering and planning organizations.

- ✓ **Bob Storchheim**, CBO, the Chief Building Official for the City of Irvine from 1976 to 1998, is considered one of the country's leading building officials and codes expert. He conducts seminars about building code functions and wrote, *The Building Department Digest*®, which specifically addresses how to run a building department. He also has managed the engineering functions.
- ✓ **Laurie Price**, AICP, Zucker Systems' Planning Manager, has extensive experience in both the public and private sector in all aspects of the development and planning process and has worked for Zucker Systems since 1987. She is currently handling some 23 development projects for Zucker Systems.
- ✓ **Mark H. Persico**, AICP, has nearly 20 years of public sector experience including, having served as community development director in West Hollywood and Calabasas, California. Over his career he has managed and directed planning, building, code enforcement and CDBG functions. He is an expert in mediation and facilitation techniques to resolve complex planning and community development issues.

C. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths and Positives

This study found some very exemplary features and strengths within the Pierce County permitting and development departments. A variety of opportunities for improvement were also found. Key positives and strengths include:

- An overall cadre of competent County employees and managers, many who have been with the County a long time.
- Generally sophisticated regulations.
- Progress is underway to implement a new permitting system.
- The inspection programs generally work well.
- Some employees volunteer to work extra hours and overtime to catch up.
- All employees from top to bottom were extremely helpful throughout the study and generous with their time and furnishing of information.
- Some plans are being received electronically using the latest computer sciences.

- Both the Building Division and the Development Center produce a monthly Scorecard newsletter.
- PALS uses a variety of performance reports.
- Data is stored and retrieved efficiently and there is a wealth of data.
- Development Engineering Inspection has the best teamwork and moral that we have seen.
- PALS continues to make improvements and it appears has implemented five of the recommendations in this report.
- Public Works Sewer Division is working on a variety of improvement efforts.

D. PROBLEM AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Problem areas and opportunities for improvement are described throughout this report. What we consider to be seven key areas, or themes, are discussed in detail under the topic Key Priority Areas which follows the Table of Recommendations.

Table 1 summarizes the 190 recommendations and opportunities for improvement made throughout this study. To assist the reader, each summarized recommendation is cross-referenced to the page on which the supporting text appears. Although all of these recommendations are important, each was given a priority number in order to help the County with implementation. There are 72 priority number one recommendations, 88 priority number two recommendations and 30 priority number three recommendations. We assume that existing and new staff along with consultants will implement the recommendations. New staff, facilities and consultants will be a substantial expenditure that should be calculated in detail as part of the implementation plan.

PALS and related departments already have many important tasks they are undertaking and may find the 190 recommendations in this report overwhelming. However, as improvements take place and staff becomes empowered to change, the County may be surprised at how fast implementation can occur.

To further help the County and departments in implementation, we have also coded all the recommendations. “Phase One Actions” are recommendations which we believe should be completed in the first six months. “Phase Two Actions” we believe should be completed within 18 months. “Ongoing Actions” should continue until resolved or permanently in place. PALS has indicated that it has already implemented five of the recommendations during the course of this study. Without doing additional analysis, we have no way to verify these results. In the Phase One Actions column, we have coded these five recommendations with a “D.”

There are 119 Phase One Action recommendations. Some of these are given priority 1, 2 or 3. However, that does not mean that only the priority 1 recommendations should be addressed.

There are 78 Phase Two Action recommendations. The departments should develop a detailed implementation plan with time targets for these actions.

There are 15 Ongoing Action recommendations.

While the above priorities and action schedules should help the County with its implementation plan, it's essential to initially focus on a few major points. We suggest seven key priority areas as discussed below, following Table 1. These priority areas should become the focus for discussion. Given the complex nature of implementing this report, we have also included eleven specific implementation recommendations as part of Key Recommendation 7.

**Table 1
Table of Recommendations**

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
1.	Distribute report for review	County Executive, relevant departments	12	1	X		
2.	Agree on an implementation plan	County Executive, relevant departments	13	1	X		
3.	Adopt short term implementation plan	County Executive, relevant departments	21	1	X		
Customer Issues							
4.	Solve customer concerns	Relevant departments	48	2	X	X	X
Overall Findings and Approach							
5.	Adopt overriding mission and goals	County Executive, County Council, relevant departments	55	1	X		
6.	Adopt guidelines for the development permitting system	County Executive, County Council, relevant departments	58	1	X		
7.	Address PALS management issues	County Executive, PALS management	64	1	X		
Issues Impacting All Functions							
8.	Calculate backlog of cases	All permitting functions	67	1	X		
9.	Allocate \$400,000 for consultants and backlog	County Council, Finance Director	67	1		X	
10.	Adopt guidelines for fees and budget	County Council	69	1	X	X	X
11.	Initially absorb PALS facility upgrades in General Fund	County Council	69	2		X	
12.	Change PALS budget document	Finance Director and PALS	70	3		X	
13.	Annually adopt Advance Planning work program	County Executive, County Council	70	3		X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
14.	Study centralization of Code Enforcement functions	PALS and other County functions	72	2		X	
15.	Modify Chapter 18 of County Code	PALS staff	76	3		X	
16.	Declare both building permits and planning permits "complete" on acceptance of application	PALS staff	76	2		X	
17.	Create integrated time system and payroll system	Finance Director and PALS	79	2		X	
18.	Resolve PALS data issues	PALS	79	1		X	
19.	Conduct PALS space study	County Executive and County Council	80	1	X	X	
20.	Provide annual overtime budget of \$100,000 for PALS	County Executive and County Council	81	3		X	X
21.	Adopt overtime rules	PALS	81	3		X	
22.	Increase commitment to PALS on PALS	PALS management	83	2	X	X	
23.	Perform comprehensive first time reviews	All development and permitting departments	86	1	X		
24.	Develop a public awareness program	PALS	87	2		X	
25.	Review sick leave data	PALS management	88	3	D	X	
26.	Install field computer system	All development and permitting departments	90	2		X	
27.	Provide training on County View	PALS management, GIS staff	91	3		X	
28.	Resolve addressing issues	PALS management, GIS staff	91	2		X	
29.	Consider requiring electronic final plat submittals	PALS management, GIS staff	91	2		X	
30.	Install optical imaging system	PALS and related functions	91	2		X	
31.	Support PALS+ expenditure needs	County Executive, County Council	93	1	X	X	X
32.	Prepare data entry specifications	PALS management	94	1	X	X	
33.	Incorporate PALS+ improvement needs into budget	County Executive, County Council	95	1		X	
34.	Return phone call the same day	All development and permitting functions	96	1	X		X
35.	Improve phone system	Information Technology	96	2		X	
36.	Expand E-government	Information Technology, PALS	97	2	X		
Building Safety Divisions							
37.	Budget to allow for small equipment	County Executive, County Council, PALS management	103	3		X	
38.	Develop Information Bulletin	PALS	104	2		X	X
39.	Add two Building Inspectors	County Executive, County Council	106	1	X		
40.	Add one Plans Examiner	County Executive, County Council	106	1	X		
41.	Develop expanded training program	Building Official	107	2		X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
42.	Expand applicant notification	Building Official	107	3		X	
43.	Solve Building Inspector concerns	Building Official	107	2	X		
44.	Post job inspection card	Chief Inspection Officer	108	2		X	
45.	Add a Civil Engineer III	County Executive and County Council	108	2	X		
46.	Establish new time goals for plan check	Plans Examiner Supervisor	109	1	X		
47.	Use consultants when plan check goals cannot be met	Plans Examiner Supervisor	109	1	X		
48.	Hire consultants to clear up the backlog	County Executive, County Council	110	1	X		
49.	Consultant plan check to be reviewed by Supervising Plans Examiner	Building Official	110	2	X		
50.	Need for geotechnical report by building plan checkers	Building Official	110	2	X		
51.	Communicate geotechnical comments directly to applicant	Development Engineering	110	3	X		
52.	Have plan check consultants hired directly by the County	Building Official	111	2	X		
53.	Review ISO evaluation for changes	Building Official	113	3		X	
Current Planning							
54.	Team approach for plan and ordinance preparation	Advance/Current Planning managers	120	2		X	X
55.	Prepare indexed policy and procedures manual	Current Planning Manager	121	2		X	
56.	Transfer Environmental Coordinator to Current Planning	PALS Director	123	2		X	
57.	Add two Planner III positions and one Planner II position	County Executive, County Council	123	1	X		
58.	Assign a Planner III to Tech Support team	Current Planning Manager	123	2	X		
59.	Create four Current Planning teams	Current Planning Manager	124	2	X		
60.	Implement project manager approach	Current Planning Manager	125	1	X		
61.	Project managers should intake projects and declare complete	Current Planning Manager	127	1	X		
62.	Change NOA process	Current Planning Manager	127	2	X		
63.	Meet with applicant 20 days after NOA is mailed	Current Planning Manager	128	1	X		
64.	Mail information to applicant within 28 days of NOA	Current Planning Manager	128	2	X		
65.	Planning Project Manager to monitor timelines	Current Planning Manager	129	1	X		
66.	Encourage LUACs early participation in process	Current Planning Manager	129	3		X	
67.	Determine level of staff support for LUACs	County Council	130	2		X	
68.	Planning Project Manager to review related final plat and building permits	Current Planning Manager	130	3		X	
69.	Implement traffic impact fee	County Council	130	2		X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
70.	Tech support planner to do SEPA review for some building permit projects	Current Planning Manager	131	2	X		
71.	LUACs and community groups to be considered parties of record	Current Planning Manager	132	3		X	
72.	Require more Pre-application meetings	Current Planning Manager	134	2		X	
73.	Re-structure pre-application and pre-development meetings	Current Planning Manager	134	2		X	
74.	Decrease non-fee administrative work for case planners	Current Planning Manager and Development Center Supervisor	137	1	X		
75.	Complete assessment of backlog	Current Planning Manager	140	1	X		
76.	Adopt new performance measures	Current Planning Manager	141	1	X		
77.	Adopt qualitative indicators	Current Planning Manager	142	2		X	
78.	Establish mandatory planner rotation	Current/Advance Planning Managers	142	2		X	X
79.	Advance Planning liaison to Development Center and Current Planning	Advance Planning Manager	143	2		X	
80.	Create private office for Current Planning Supervisor	PALS Director	143	2	X		
81.	Establish training program for LUAC members	Current Planning Manager	144	3		X	
82.	Set timeline for updating Subdivision Ordinance	Advance Planning Manager	144	2		X	
Development Center							
83.	More open communication between managers and staff	Development Center Managers	154	2	X	X	X
84.	Facilitated staff retreats	Development Center Managers	154	2	X		
85.	Eliminate Permit Coordinator Position	PALS Director	155	2	X		
86.	Development Center Supervisor to have administrative responsibility over Tech Support	Development Center Supervisor	155	1	X		
87.	Routine sessions to critique operations	Development Center Supervisor	156	1	X	X	X
88.	Use focused agendas for staff meetings	Development Center Managers	156	2	X		
89.	Consolidate permit categories	All PALS divisions	157	2		X	
90.	Simplify noticing requirements	Advance Planning Manager	157	3		X	
91.	Revise and streamline codes	Advance Planning Manager, Development Center Managers	158	2		X	
92.	Confer during code development	Advance Planning Manager, Development Center Managers	158	2		X	
93.	Create clear thresholds for project review	All PALS divisions	158	1	X		
94.	Create standard plan details	All PALS divisions	158	1	X		
95.	Exempt certain projects from Development Engineering Review	Development Engineering	158	1	X		

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
96.	Re-instate Lobby Service Attendant	Development Center Managers	159	1	X		
97.	Install wireless router in lobby	Development Center Managers	159	2	X		
98.	Make all of PALS a wireless hotspot	Information Technology	160	3		X	
99.	Install LCD computer monitors in lobby workstations	Information Technology	160	3		X	
100.	Continue changes to permit system for end users	PALS IT staff	160	2	X	X	X
101.	Assign two Permit Technicians to phone system	Development Center Managers	160	1	X		
102.	Better training for Permit Technicians	Development Center Managers	161	1	X	X	X
103.	Allow staff to attend ICC training courses	Development Center Managers	162	3		X	
104.	Expand training for Office Assistants	Development Center Managers	162	2	X		
105.	Adopt list of over-the-counter permits	Development Center Managers	165	2	X		
106.	Dedicate one Permit Technician to Application and Block Appointments	Development Center Managers	167	1	X		
107.	Schedule Application and Block Appointments within 48 hours	Development Center Managers	168	1	X		
108.	Three Permit Technicians dedicated to Information Only and LSA/Quick Permits	Development Center Managers	168	1	X		
109.	Three Permit Technicians dedicated to Make Applications	Development Center Managers	169	1	X		
110.	Schedule appointments within 48 hours for Making Applications	Development Center Managers	169	1	X		
111.	Dedicate five workstations to Technical Support Group	Development Center Managers	169	1			
112.	Accept planning applications by Current Planner	Current Planning Manager	170	1	X		
113.	Planning applications to receive priority by Permit Technicians	Development Center Managers	170	1	X		
114.	First priority of Technical Support staff to be customers of the Development Center	Development Center Managers	171	1	X		
115.	Implement project manager system	All PALS Divisions	171	1	X		
116.	Have complete codes in Development Center	Advance Planning and Current Planning	172	1	X		
117.	Lobby waits to be no more than 20 minutes	Development Center Managers	173	2	X		
118.	Complete Information and Quick Processing in 30 minutes	Development Center Managers	173	2	X		
119.	Complete scheduled appointments in 90 minutes	Development Center Managers	173	2	X		
120.	Make appointments within 48 hours of request	Development Center Managers	173	2	X		
121.	Dedicate 75 % of Technical Support staff time to Development Center	Development Center Managers	173	1	X		
122.	Relocate receptionist	Development Center Managers	174	2	X		

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
123.	Redesign counter area	PALS Director	175	2	X		
124.	Relocate Development Center Supervisors office	PALS Director	175	2	X		
125.	Assist some customers at staff desks	All PALS divisions	175	2	X		
126.	Merge cashier station and reception station	Development Center Managers	176	2	X		
127.	Expand training for Cashier and receptionist	Development Center Managers	176	1	X		
128.	Hire an additional office assistant	County Executive and County Council	176	1	X		
129.	Hire two new Permit Technicians	County Executive and County Council	176	1	X		
130.	Remove cardboard Stop sign	Development Center Managers	176	2	D		
131.	Revise handout materials	Development Center Managers	177	2	X	X	
132.	Revise call in system	Development Center Managers	177	1	X		
Development Engineering							
133.	Conduct staffing impact analysis on new regulations	County Executive and County Council	183	3	D		
134.	Add a Civil Engineer III position	County Executive and County Council	183	1	X		
135.	Assign lead for final plats to Development Engineering	PALS Director	184	2	X		
136.	Furnish data for monthly PALS report	Development Engineer Supervisor	185	3		X	
137.	Consolidate engineering permit fee categories	Development Engineer Supervisor	185	3		X	
138.	Add one engineer and one engineer technician/inspector for enforcement	County Executive and County Council	186	2	X		
139.	Study moving enforcement to Code Enforcement	PALS Director	186	3		X	
140.	Create Surveyor job classifications	Human Resources Department	186	3		X	
141.	In-house training program for engineers	Development Engineer Supervisor	187	2		X	
142.	Publish permit manual	Development Engineer Supervisor	187	2		X	
143.	Shorten and simplify checklist	Development Engineer Supervisor	187	3		X	
144.	List permits exempt from engineering review	Development Engineer Supervisor	189	2	X		
145.	Study additional permits that can be exempt from review	Development Engineer Supervisor	189	2		X	
146.	Distribute applications to engineering faster	Development Engineer Supervisor	189	2	X		
147.	Traffic Engineering comments sent directly to applicants and project managers	Public Works	190	2	X		
148.	Create quality control program	Development Engineer Supervisor	190	2		X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
149.	95% of first review in 20 working days	Development Engineer Supervisor	190	1	X		
150.	Monitor timelines	CE III	191	1	X		
151.	Keep Public Works counter with PALS	PALS Director and Public Works Director	191	1	X		
152.	Send all but 50 plans to consultants for review	Development Engineer Supervisor	192	1	X		
153.	Send plans that cannot meet performance standards to consultants	Development Engineer Supervisor	192	1	X		
154.	New system for abbreviated and minor plans	Development Engineer Supervisor	193	1	X		
155.	Small plan corrections to be field verified	Development Engineer Supervisor	193	2	X		
156.	Change applicant notification system	Development Engineer Supervisor	193	3		X	
157.	County Engineer to delegate signature authority	County Engineer	194	2	X		
158.	Meet with Public Works staff for final acceptance	Development Engineer Supervisor and Public Works Director	194	3	X		
159.	Use Public Works sign off form	Development Engineer Supervisor	194	3	X		
160.	Add one engineer inspector	County Executive and County Council	195	1	X		
161.	Add three Engineer I positions.	County Executive and County Council	196	1	X		
Resource Management							
162.	Prepare and maintain a policy handbook	Resource Management Supervisor	203	2		X	
163.	Develop a training program	Resource Management Supervisor	203	2		X	
164.	Make organizational changes in Resource Management	Resource Management Supervisor	205	2		X	
165.	Improve wetland mapping	Resource Management Supervisor	207	2		X	X
166.	Hire consultants for backlog	Resource Management Supervisor	208	1	X		
167.	Add one biologist in addition to any needed for Directions Package	County Executive and County Council	210	1	X		
168.	Adopt new performance standards	Resource Management Supervisor	211	1	X		
169.	Incorporate qualitative indicators in performance standards	Resource Management Supervisor	211	1	X		
170.	Expand implementation of mitigation programs	Resource Management Supervisor	212	2		X	
171.	Establish pre-design site assessment for a fee	Resource Management Supervisor	212	2		X	
172.	Establish conservation easement documents	Resource Management Supervisor AND county Attorney	212	2		X	
173.	Establish fee for wetland mitigation monitoring	Resource Management Supervisor	213	2		X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions	Ongoing Actions
Fire							
174.	Monitor staffing needs	Fire Marshal	215	2			X
Health							
175.	Submit copy of proposed private sewage disposal system design as part of building plan check	Development Center Managers	216	2	X		
176.	Perform initial review of private sewage disposal systems within 21 days	Health Department	216	1	X		
177.	Develop policy on private sewage disposal system expansion	Health Department	216	2	X		
Public Works - Sewer							
178.	Staff to meet 15 day review for reviews	Public Works	218	1	X		X
179.	Approve simple tenant improvements over-the-counter	Public Works	218	1	X		
180.	Accept credit cards	Public Works	218	2	X		
181.	Review and implement employees improvement ideas	Public Works	219	2	X		
182.	Remove notarization requirement	Public Works	219	2	X		
183.	Revise approach to incomplete applications	Public Works	219	3	X		
Public Works - Transportation							
184.	Send review comments directly to applicant	Public Works	224	2	X		
185.	Adjust staff to meet timelines	Public Works	225	1	X		
186.	Co-locate traffic review to PALS	Public Works	225	2		X	
187.	Fees for traffic review to Public Works	Public Works	225	3		X	
188.	Complete first review in 10 working days	Public Works	226	1	X		
189.	Use standby consultants as needed to meet timelines	Public Works	226	1	X		
190.	Notify Development Engr/ Current Planning when review is completed	Public Works	226	2	X		

Before the County begins implementing this study, we suggest that it take the following actions:

- 1. Recommendation:** The report should be distributed to the focus groups and relevant staff and generally made available to the public for review and input. (Priority 1)

- 2. *Recommendation:* The Audit Committee, County Council, County Executive, and relevant department heads should review this study and agree on an implementation plan, which should include:**
- **An agreed-upon timetable and work program**
 - **Costs estimates and method of funding (*Priority 1*)**

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

1. Development Center

Findings

The Development Center is the hub of the permit and development process because this is where the public begins the process and interfaces with all the development related divisions, sections and functions. Customer service in the Development Center was the number one issue or complaint that we received in our customer surveys. Problems include very long wait times (often up to four hours), six week timelines to obtain an appointment, and inconsistent requirements and responses to inquiries. Solving Development Center issues may accentuate other issues within PALS but this report also addresses those possible impacts. The Development Center is the window into PALS and the entire development process and sets the tone and reputation for the organizations and the process. Changes here are essential.

Recommendations

This report includes some 52 recommendations that address the Development Center issues (see Recommendations 87 to 138). Key suggestions include:

- Staff seven workstations by Permit Technicians nine hours per day including lunch hours.
- Reduce lobby wait times to no more than 20 minutes.
- Reinstate the Lobby Service Attendant.
- Expand training for all Development Center staff.
- Add two Permit Technicians and one Office Assistant.
- Have separate workstations for Technical Support staff and the Permit Technicians.
- Conduct less counter review for permits that are taken in.
- Schedule appointments within 48 hours.

- Double the staff dedicated to telephone service.
- Have Current Planners review planning applications before they're taken in.

By nature there will be some trial and error in this system, and it will need to be carefully managed with adjustments made through experience. However, we firmly believe that the direction we have set can resolve the customer service issues within the Development Center.

2. Performance Standards – Timelines

Findings

Customers believe it takes too long to obtain permits in Pierce County and we concur. In the customer surveys roughly two thirds of the respondents believe the timelines are too long. These are high negative responses.

State law suggests that all permits are to be issued within 120 days and PALS data show that 84% of their permits meet this timeline. However, we believe the way PALS counts data is not the best way to measure the 120 days or overall performance. For example, PALS report mixes in data for things like mechanical or plumbing permits that are issued the same day. When the data is adjusted, we believe the performance drops to about 40%. Additionally, PALS 120-day data includes only County time so the actual calendar time it takes to receive a permit is even longer.

PALS uses many performance measures in addition to the 120 days and has done a much better job than many organizations we study in adopting and embracing the concept of performance measures. However, given the large backlog of cases, it is difficult to use the performance measures in an operational way.

Recommendations

Numerous actions will be necessary in order to reduce timelines. This includes adding staff as described in Key Priority Area 3 below and eliminating a substantial backlog of permits described in Key Priority Area 4 below. In addition to these items, it will be necessary to set additional specific performance standards and to monitor and manage the standards as covered in Key Priority Area 5 below. Suggested performance standards are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2
Performance Standards**

Item	Measure
ALL SECTIONS, DIVISIONS AND DEPARTMENTS	
Phone calls and emails	Return 100% same day received
Online permits	Increase to 600 by the end of 2005
First-time plan checks	Complete comprehensive review 98% of the time
BUILDING DIVISION	
Custom Residential plan review	95% of first review in 10 working days with second review in 5 working days
Residential base plans	95% same day as submitted
Commercial building plan review	95% of first reviews in 15 working days, second review in 10 days and third reviews in 5 days
Plan review and inspection quality control	Check a minimum of 1% of activity
Building inspection	95% next day after request
CURRENT PLANNING	
First response to applicants	95% in 20 working days
Administrative permits without SEPA	95% in 45 working days
Hearing Officer without SEPA or LUAC	95% in 90 working days
Hearing Officer with SEPA or LUAC	95% in 105 working days
Hearing Officer with SEPA and LUAC	95% in 120 working days
Other administrative assignments	100% in 15 working days
Staff report distribution	100% to interested departments within 5 working days before a hearing
DEVELOPMENT CENTER	
Lobby wait times	95% shall not exceed 20 minutes
Information and quick processing	90% to be completed within 30 minutes
Scheduled appointments	90% to be concluded within 90 minutes
Appointments	To be held within 48 hours of making the request
DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING	
First plan reviews	95% within 20 working days and corrections within 10 working days
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	
Wetland Reviews	
<i>SF verification/categorization/delineation</i>	95% within 15 working days
<i>General verification/categorization (non-residential)</i>	95% within 20 working days
<i>Analysis reports</i>	90% of first response within 20 working days and 10 days for second response
<i>Non compensatory mitigation plan</i>	90% within 60 working days
<i>Compensatory mitigation plan</i>	90% within 60 working days
Wetland/fish & wildlife variances	95% complete within 120 working days
HEALTH DEPARTMENT	
Private sewage disposal systems	95% complete first review within 20 working days and 10 days for second reviews
PUBLIC WORKS – SEWER	
Sewer line extensions and sewer plan reviews	95% first reviews within 15 working days and 7 days for second reviews
Tenant improvement reviews	95% over the counter and 5% within 5 working days
PUBLIC WORKS – TRANSPORTATION	
Standard case review	95% of first reviews within 10 working days and 5 days for second reviews
Complex cases	95% of first reviews within 15 working days and 7 days for second reviews

3. Staffing

Findings

We believe that PALS is understaffed and has been understaffed for some time. Although increased staffing alone will not solve the timeline/performance standards issues as well as other issues, lack of staff has been a major contributor to those problems.

Recommendations

Calculating staff needs is a complex undertaking. Additionally, we believe it is not wise to organize around what might be considered full staffing, rather we suggest a combination of staff coupled with standby consultants to help during peak loads and to assist in meeting performance standards. Our calculations show a need for an additional 30 positions. We recommend that 20 of these be funded. Staffing needs should then be monitored as the various recommendations of this report are implemented.

**Table 3
Staffing Proposals**

Function	As Calculated	Consultants Recommendation
Building Plans Examiners	1	1
Building Inspectors	10	4
Current Planners	5	3
Development Center	3	3
Development Engineering		
<i>CE III (Supervisor)</i>	1	1
<i>CE II & Tech III (Enforcement)</i>	2	2
<i>ET III (Inspectors)</i>	2	1
<i>CE I</i>	4	3
Resource Management	1	1
Assistant Director	1	1
Total	30	20
Professional Services & Extra Hire		\$400,000

4. Backlog

Findings

PALS is currently operating with an extremely large backlog of cases. Although we have attempted to calculate the size of the backlog, this has been difficult due to the nature of the available data. It will be impossible to begin to meet performance standards until the backlog of cases is eliminated. This will be costly and will take a major effort. The size of the backlog and potential consultant costs to work on the backlog is shown in Table 4. We estimate that there is a backlog of 1,020 cases amongst the five PALS divisions or sections. Consulting costs to clear the backlog could be as high as \$867,929.

Recommendations

In order to clear up the backlog we recommend a series of operational solutions coupled with the hiring of consultants. We suggest an initial budget allocation of \$400,000 for consultants which is half the estimated cost. Other efforts to clear the backlog are outlined in Key Priority 7 below.

**Table 4
Backlog Cost Estimates**

Type	Number	Ave Hours Each	Hours Needed	Cost Per Hour	Total Cost
Building-Residential	102	3.0	306	\$100	\$30,600
Building-Commercial	78	15.0	1,170	\$100	\$117,000
Current Planning	300	10.9	3,270	\$85	\$277,950
Development Engineering	109	10.0	1,090	\$100	\$109,000
Resource Management	431	9.1	3,922	\$85	\$333,379
Total	1,020		9,758		\$867,929

5. Management and Organization

Findings

In order to address priorities 1 through 4 above, we believe a number of PALS management and organizational issues need to be addressed. Some of these include:

- A number of PALS managers and supervisors operate from a style of management that can intimidate subordinates and lead to employees giving up on making recommendations for improvement.

- PALS does not have accurate data to monitor and support its activities.
- Both managers, supervisors and staff need additional training.
- Some supervisors are attempting to supervise too many staff members.

Recommendations

We have included numerous recommendations in the report to address the management issues. Key recommendations are summarized in Recommendation 7 and include:

- Adding a new Assistant Director who would consolidate and supervise all of the five key development functions.
- Conducting 360-degree evaluations for all managers and supervisors.
- Developing a management and supervisor training program.

6. Facilities

Findings

PALS and related development permitting functions are operating in inferior facilities. This impacts both the efficiency of staff, staff morale, and the ability to perform good customer service. Space issues are some of the most extreme we have seen in our studies. For example:

- The Development Center is too small and crowded for the amount of activity.
- Many workspaces are sub-standard in size with not enough room to open and work on a set of plans.
- One key supervisor is required to share space with other staff.
- In some cases there is poor air circulation and lack of sound control.
- There is inadequate space to add any new staff as recommended in this report.

Recommendation

Solving the facilities issues is beyond the scope of this study. We simply recommend that properly sized and standard facilities should be made available to PALS and the County should retain a qualified space expert to conduct a study and recommend options.

7. Implementation

Findings

Implementing this report will be a complex task. We have suggested that one of the first items is for the County to prepare and adopt an implementation plan. The focus should be on the six key priority area outlined above in this report as well as specific implementation items outlined below. Costs to implement the recommendations can be substantial, as summarized in Table 5. These are only rough cost estimates that will need to be confirmed. We assume some of these may already be included in the 2005 budget proposal. We have not attempted to estimate the cost to upgrade or expand the facilities.

Table 5

Item	Recommendation Number	Cost Estimate	
		Low	High
Hire consultants for backlog	9, 52	400,000	400,000
Upgrade and expand facilities	11	To be determined	To be determined
Conduct space study	19	30,000	60,000
Increase overtime budget	20	75,620	75,620
Add field computers for inspectors	26	30,000	40,000
Use optical imaging system	30	60,000	100,000
Backfill two IS User Developers for 2005	31	170,000	170,000
PALS+ improvements	33	30,000	50,000
Add features to phone system	35	5,000	10,000
Small tools for Building Inspectors	37	5,000	10,000
Wireless router in Development Center	97	2,500	3,000
Make PALS a wireless hotspot	98	8,000	10,000
Install LCD monitors in Development Center	99	5,000	8,000
Funds for International Code Council training courses.	103	3,000	5,000
Implement Development Center counter redesign	123	55,000	70,000
Create two new work stations in Development Center	124	7,000	12,000
Add 20 new positions	39, 40, 57, 134, 138, 160, 161, 167	1,300,000	1,400,000
Furniture and equipment for 20 new positions.		50,000	60,000
Total		2,236,120	2,413,620

Cost Items

Recommendations

1. Close the phones and public access to PALS every Friday for several months. Make these informal dress days and even consider the possibility of free pizza. During these Fridays all PALS staff including Advance Planning and other department staff located within PALS should focus on cleaning up backlogged permits, starting with the oldest first.
2. On an interim basis, say for three or four months, transfer four staff from Advance Planning to work on clearing up backlogged cases.
3. Allow all staff that is willing to work paid overtime (not-comp time) up to ten hours per week for two weeks in a row with one-week normal time until the backlog is gone.
4. Public Works to reallocate existing staff to:
 - Clear up any backlog of cases in Traffic and Sewer and begin to meet the recommended new performance standards.
 - Allocate several engineers on a temporary basis to work with PALS Development Engineering to clear up the backlog of cases.
5. Each division or section should give highest priority to the work that they do for another division or section. Normally each division or section, as might be expected, gives priority to the key items they are responsible for. However, under this approach the entire system can break down for the customer. Each division or section needs to see the other divisions or sections as their customers.
6. Hire the recommended Assistant Operations Director as soon as possible. Until this is completed as well as during a transition period, reassign one or two management level “can do” managers to PALS from other County functions to assist with the implementation.
7. Fill all vacant and newly authorized positions as soon as possible. The County’s Human Resources Department may need to take a different approach in this regard. An open and fast recruiting and hiring process will be essential.
8. Hire outside consultants to help clear up the backlog. Initially, and as a minimum, this should include two consultants each for Building, Development Engineering, Current Planning and Resource Management. We suggest an initial budget allocation of \$400,000.
9. Consider hiring a consultant to assist with and monitor implementation.
10. Begin a homeowners and small business night to receive and process selected small types of permits.

11. Ask Public Works, Health and Fire to assign staff as necessary to both clear up their portion of the backlog as well as staff to the new performance levels.

3. *Recommendation:* As part of the implementation plan, the County Executive, County Council, PALS and related departments should consider including the 11 implementation items outlined above. *(Priority 1)*

II. CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS

In today's environment, governmental performance is measured by customer satisfaction. In order to determine Pierce County's performance, we used three techniques consisting of policy maker interviews, focus groups, and a number of customer mail surveys.

This chapter includes customer comments for improving the County's permitting process. The intent of this customer input was to elicit views and opinions on positive and negative aspects of activities and to seek ideas for change that will improve and enhance the permit process and the permit organizations.

In considering the results, the reader must bear in mind that unlike documents and statistics, the views expressed by individuals are subjective and may reflect personal biases. Nonetheless, they are at least as important as the objective material because it is these people, with their feelings and prejudices who work with or are often affected by County activities. A second important consideration is that in analyzing the material, it may not be as important to determine whether a particular response is "correct" as it is to simply accept a response. Tom Peters, the noted management consultant, has said that in relation to customer service "Perception is everything." In other words, perception is reality to the person holding the perception.

A. POLICY MAKER INTERVIEWS

We interviewed five members of the County Council, the County Executive, selected policy makers staff, and members of the Performance Audit Committee. All meetings were conducted on a completely confidential basis to obtain as much candid feedback as possible.

In order to assure the confidentiality of the comments, comments were merged. There was a range of responses to issues discussed during the interviews and some individuals' statements were diametrically opposed to others. However, in presenting the conclusions, we are trying to impart a general sense of the majority of the responses. Comments are arranged by topic. Comments were used to help shape our research efforts. Issues covered and problems suggested from these interviews include the following.

Overall

One person said they get more complaints about PALS than any other department including Police. Another said that PALS needs help but that it has been worse.

Advance Planning

Some feel that Advance Planning is overstaffed since most of the community plans have been completed.

Community Plans

Some want to make Community Plans a “straw man” and blame them for the problems. However, it was the only way to raise the bar, area by area, and 99% of them are the same.

Consistency

Consistency was noted time and time again as perhaps one of the biggest problems. Customers are told one thing one day and another the next day. Some customers shop for staff that will give them the answer they want. Some customers are told they need to do a study. They spend money and do the study and then later are told it was not needed. There is an inconsistency in how codes are applied and a lack of communication among the divisions and sections. A property owner is told what he needs to submit or change in a submittal. He makes the changes but then is given a new list.

Economic Development

Commercial and industrial development have become important due to County concerns for economic development. The County as well as PALS needs to have an economic development strategy and approach.

Facilities

There is agreement that PALS facilities are substandard and this has a negative impact on both the staff and the public.

Hearing Examiner

The regulations call for the Hearing Examiners to follow a ten-day process but it does not always happen.

Management

Managers and supervisors in PALS tend to close their eyes and get defensive. They do not have adequate control over the bureaucrats. “The tail is wagging the dog.” There is need to have all the development people in one place with a “czar.”

Policy

A lot of policies have been adopted but staff needs to better articulate them to the community. Streamlining is desired but without taking away the regulations. Part of the problem may be that some staff are over zealous, particularly the technical leaders. While some staff feel that the Community Plans create problems, policy makers feel this is being exaggerated.

Process

There is poor communication among the groups – they don't integrate well. This is true both inside and outside of PALS. The applicants do not have a good sense of the overall process. A team approach has been used for several large projects and this has worked better. There is good support for electronic submittals.

Sewer Permits

There is a major concern about the slowness in getting sewer permits from Public Works.

Staffing

Although most feel there may be a shortage of staffing, others say the departments have generally gotten what they ask for.

Tacoma

Tacoma standards are seen as being higher than the County's but they still act faster than the County. They have tried to simplify things.

Timing

Permitting doesn't move quickly enough.

B. FOCUS GROUP OVERVIEW

One method selected to solicit customer feedback was the use of four focus groups. After consultation with Zucker Systems, the Performance Audit Committee staff in consultation with the Department of Planning and Land Services selected focus group members by using a list of people who have had contact with the County's permit process.

Three focus groups with 23 people consisted of various applicants for development projects or permits. One group of six people consisted of members of various Land

Use Advisory Committees. We were impressed with the quality and knowledge of the focus group members. Each group met for two hours on July 14. All meetings were conducted on a completely confidential basis to obtain as much candid feedback as possible. No County staff members were present, nor was a tape recorder used, nor were detailed minutes taken. The facilitator for the groups was Paul Zucker, President of Zucker Systems. He is solely responsible for the interpretation of comments.

In order to assure the confidentiality of the comments, comments from the applicant groups were merged. There was a range of responses to issues discussed during the sessions and some individuals' statements were diametrically opposed to others. However, in presenting the conclusions, we are trying to impart a general sense of the majority of the responses. Comments are arranged by topic. Comments were used to help shape our research efforts.

C. APPLICANT FOCUS GROUPS

The 23 members of the applicant focus groups consisted of attorneys, builders, contractors, developers, engineers, manufacturers, process facilitators, surveyors, and traffic engineers. The focus group comments are arranged by topic below.

Overview

Focus group members said they have participated in similar efforts in the past and nothing happened. They are skeptical that anything will happen this time either. Specific overview comments included:

- A few years ago PALS' fees were raised with the promise that things would improve, but improvements were not made.
- The County's poor development processes impede economic development.
- Staff should recognize that applicants are customers and should help them.
- The only way to be successful is to hire former County employees. There is no way that an outside consultant could do a project in Pierce County.
- PALS tries to make itself look good by mixing apples and oranges in their statistics.
- The attitude of staff seems to be, "If nothing happens – nothing bad can happen."
- Staff appears afraid to make mistakes.
- Many of the issues start on the 10th floor. New regulations are adopted without coordination with prior regulations.

Attorney

According to the focus groups, the Prosecutor's office tends to be too involved in policy issues. Staff sends too much to the attorneys. The attorneys have staff "scared to death."

Other Communities

King County used to be the worst in the area but it no longer is. Renton is making good improvements through use of an Ombudsman. Tacoma has a very good process. However, Tacoma has a low volume of activity with a large staff. Tacoma also has better tools to work with than does Pierce County.

Communication

The County tends to make changes in regulations or interpretations without communicating with the industry about the changes.

Counter Activities

The counter wait times are way too long. Issues and suggestions include:

- Engineering should not be reviewed at the counter.
- Engineers should not need to look at everything.
- A fast track is needed for base plans.
- Six weeks to get a garage permit is too long.
- There should be separate counters for people who don't know what they are doing and other counters for the professionals. This would be like a "merchants line" at the bank.
- Better technical support is needed from the planning side.
- Credit cards should be available for sewer permits.
- High marks are given to staff who stand behind the counter. The problem is with supervisors and upper level managers.
- The receptionist could help people with parcel numbers, and it would only take 30 seconds.
- The counter staff is burned out.
- The departments, divisions and sections don't work together.
- Too much time is wasted with changing opinions.

- Counter wait times are long because each function looks at the plans. Except for over-the-counter permits, other applications should be taken in for review. Front counter people should not be opening plans for review.
- Occupancies and tenant improvements should be issued over the counter.
- Front counter people should be allowed to make the minor decisions.

Creativity

There is no incentive to do the best job you can. It is easier to get a “barracks” approved than something creative. Long Range Planning is too involved in the permit process and doesn’t support good projects. They simply keep adding new ordinances and plans. PALS continually thinks about how to throw up roadblocks. While the County says it wants infill, the ordinances and interpretations work against infill. The PDD process used to work well and the applicant was required to “give something back.” Now everything is required so there is nothing left to give back. The current process is too cumbersome and the applicant is held hostage.

Development Engineering

Issues in Development Engineering include:

- There is a concern that non-engineers are checking engineers plans.
- Interpretations are made in staff meetings but these are never distributed to the customers.
- It may be useful to have more support staff to do paperwork for the engineers.
- Development Engineering has been neutered by all the other organizations.
- Too many notes are required on the plans. It is almost like putting the ordinance on the plans.
- Third party reviews don’t work because the applicant still has to deal with the staff.
- Development Engineering was not adequately involved with the writing of the Stormwater Manual and the industry was not involved. The checklist being used is way too long.
- Bond releases are “murder.”
- Development Engineering is not adequately woven into the building certificate of occupancy and this causes delays.
- Surface Water Management in Public Works is underway on a new manual but with no input from the industry.

Enforcement

Enforcement seems to be very important for the County. However, enforcement activities tend to bog down the staff handling permits.

Environmental Resources

This section needs to be improved. A biologist should head the team.

Fire Marshal

The Fire Marshal is considered understaffed.

Interpretations

The focus groups feel that there are too many County policies. They are also concerned about how staff interprets the policies and rules. The interpretations are not routinely shared with the customers. Also, some of the policies are not considered clear enough to interpret.

Management

The focus groups were extremely critical of both mid-level and top management. What is missing is a “can do attitude.” There is no top down attitude related to solving problems. Lower level staff are not listened to. Upper management tend to not want to overrule lower level staff. Appealing decisions up the ladder is generally not successful. Staff with can do attitudes tend to be reprimanded and many have left the County. Management tends not to correct problems with incompetent staff. The Council tends to be more involved with staff than in the past.

Processes

Process issues and suggestions included:

- Expedited review is the only way to get something done.
- Applicants would rather get a phone call, not a letter to solve a problem.
- If the State DOT doesn't respond, staff waits for a response. Other communities proceed.
- The departments, divisions and sections don't work together. Each unit blames problems on the other. There are too many sequential reviews.
- Outside plan review doesn't work. County staff checks it anyway.
- It would be useful to have project managers on each permit.

- Some focus group members, but not all, feel that an Ombudsman would be helpful to solve problems.
- There should be performance standards for all permits.
- There should be a comfortable method to challenge staff decisions.
- Six weeks for first review of a single family house is too long.
- It used to be that you could redline small changes like a smoke detector on the plans but now you have to resubmit.
- Consistency is what is needed.
- Planners should make a field visit during the comment period.
- 30-day timeline for comments on planning permits should be hard and fast.
- Using the current process, PALS is understaffed. If processes are changed they may or may not be understaffed.
- Like pre-development meetings, have a team meeting with the applicant every 45 days. Define who is on the team. Set hearing dates at the start of the process.

Policies

Problems start with the County policy makers. The County passes new regulations without checking on other regulations. The NIMBY's in the County are becoming very vocal. The new Directions Ordinance will be a disaster. This ordinance will make some commercial buildings non-conforming and you will no longer be able to get over the counter occupancy permits.

Public Works

Many, but not all, focus groups members feel that PALS' engineering function should return to Public Works. The reasoning is that the County Engineer is in Public Works and roads and storm water are his responsibility. The County Engineer also signs the plans. Other issues included:

- Utilities take forever on sanitary sewers in the final plat process.
- Utility staff is not available on Fridays due to the 4/10 schedules.
- The PALS' team doesn't talk to the Public Works team. The engineers are not together.

Subdivisions

The subdivision process is considered one of PALS' worst processes. Issues include:

- Some feel the preliminary part of the process is even worse than the engineering and final plat part. Others feel the final plat part is worse because the applicant is “bleeding cash” at that point.
- Staff on subdivisions have become too compartmentalized.
- Many applicants will no longer do plats due to the long and costly process. It takes 18 months to a decision when it should take only four to six months. Additionally, you must bond 300% of the costs.

Technology

The focus groups raised a number of technology issues including:

- The new system is slower than the old system. Applicants can't access the permits anymore.
- The website is not up-to-date.
- Some of the voice mail puts you in a circle. When staff goes on vacation they should change their voice mail message and provide for a back-up.
- Some staff are good at returning phone calls, others are not.
- The GIS should be available on the website.

D. CITIZEN FOCUS GROUP

The six members of the citizen focus group are or have been members of one of the Land Use Advisory Commissions (LUACS). Many had also participated in advisory groups appointed to work on the plans. Issues of concern to this group are described below.

Code Enforcement

There is not enough code enforcement staff.

Combining Land Use Advisory Commissions

The recent combining of some Land Use Advisory Commissions was not well received. The new groups combine areas that do not have common issues, i.e. combining apples and oranges.

Plan Preparation

Some of the members felt the plan preparation process went well and Advance Planning staff were very helpful. Others felt that the staff tried to force them to make decisions on the plans that were not acceptable. Some felt their group was well balanced and representative of the area, others felt that this was not the case.

Review Process

Applications come to the Land Use Advisory Commission two weeks before the Hearing Examiners hearing. This is far too late in the process to be effective. For example, the environmental decisions have already been made. The group wants to see applications much earlier. Other issues include:

- Minutes of the group are typed by staff and sent to the Hearing Examiner before the group sees them. They don't always accurately reflect the position of the group.
- Some staff do not treat the Land Use Advisory Committee well, particularly wetlands.
- Some staff are hard to get a hold of.
- The Hearing Examiner does not give them feedback if he doesn't accept their position.
- There is a lack of looking at cumulative impacts concerning traffic.
- Staff does not always accurately represent the opinion of the Land Use Advisory Commission.
- The information coming to the Land Use Advisory Commission is not always good.
- Some feel that PALS is understaffed.

Other Issues

- Some would like an Ombudsman, a technical advocate for citizens.
- Planners are given agenda's from higher ups. If they speak up they are taken off the project.
- The Development Center does not provide consistent answers.

E. CUSTOMER MAIL SURVEYS

Three customer mail surveys were used for this study. One was sent to Building permit customers, another to Development Engineering customers, and another to Planning customers. The surveys were sent to 12 different mailing lists that were

compiled by PALS. The survey responses are shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4, and each survey is discussed individually below.

Narrative Customer Comments

The surveys also asked for narrative comments and specific ideas to improve the processes. Narrative comments were provided by 301 of the survey respondents and used as part of our analysis. Most of the comments were critical of the County. We also asked respondents for suggestions for improvement which are summarized in Table 6.

Objective Survey Scores

The survey question statements were designed so that checking a “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” category is a sign of a satisfied customer. A “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” is a sign of a dissatisfied customer. The percentages shown in the figures in the margins to the right indicate the percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The “Not Applicable” category was excluded from this calculation.

Normally, when negative responses of “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” exceed 15%, the responses indicate an area of possible concern. Less than 15% normally indicates that this category of question is satisfying the customers. Percentages higher than 15% but below 30% are areas that should be examined for possible customer service concerns. Negative percentages of 30% or higher indicate areas needing early attention since roughly one third or more of the customers have concerns about service.

Some believe that only customers who have problems will return a survey of this type. While customers with problems may be more likely to return the surveys, our experience with this and hundreds of similar surveys in many communities indicates that they still produce valid information. For example, we’ve worked in other communities where the negative responses seldom exceeded 15%. Within Pierce County, as surveys are segmented by topics such as inspection, we also received responses where negative comments were less than the 15% threshold. In these cases, 85% or more of the customers feel positive about the service.

It should also be noted that a survey of this type is not a scientific, statistically controlled sample. Nevertheless, when high numbers of respondents express concerns, they are indications of problems that need to be addressed.

Table 6
Recommendations From Customer Surveys

Applications
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Builders could fill out all the paperwork for permits (BASE plans) and drop them off at the permit center. Then pick up permits 5 days later and pay for them. 2. It would be beneficial for the average property owner/applicant if most required information could be completed and checked online before a trip to the Building Department for a permit was made. 3. Make appointments for all permits and use the walk-in for questions. 4. Set a limit on how many appointments one company can have at a time. 5. Check sheet, drop plans off, if plans not complete at review, charge inspection fee to resubmit. 6. Drop-off intake system for smaller projects, garages, sheds, decks, etc. 7. The application needs to be a one-stop process and not have to go to every individual department. 8. Take applications over the Internet. 9. Have separate technicians for drop-off and pick up corrections – shouldn't have to wait more than 15 to 30 minutes. 10. Segregate professional applicants from first and one-time applicants. 11. The permitting system needs to be updated and add more help. 12. If you have the checklist, just submit to the person that will be reviewing the job. 13. Streamline the PC checklist, it is a mile long.
Counter
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hire more counter staff and counter techs. 2. Rotate lunch to keep the flow moving. 3. Staff needs customer service training. 4. Counter staff need to avoid personal conversations among themselves while customers wait. 5. Separate developers/builders from single-residential projects by being open only for single-residential projects from 3pm to 5pm. 6. Need more knowledgeable staff answering phone calls. 7. The system of losing your place in line to apply for a permit should be changed so that you keep your position as a holdover. 8. Have a list that people could call in to get on, and if the list filled up so that it wasn't until tomorrow that someone would get seen, at least that person will know he/she is on the list. 9. The appointment list needs to be maintained at a two-week or less time-frame. 10. Go back to the roving lobby clerk to assess the level of need of each customer – help them to have everything ready. 11. You have a 2-tier system that is unnecessary. You have to be reviewed once to determine whether or not the application is "complete" and then the project is reviewed again. Do not spend one to two hours determining whether or not an application is "complete." Accept it and let techs determine needs. 12. Accept applications without determination of total completeness – this could include a checklist to be submitted with the application showing that all the applicable documents are attached. 13. Set up separate "lines" for industrial, commercial/developers (including major residential development) and individual residential (mom and pop operations). 14. Cross-train counter tech staff so they can fill in when people are on break or out of the office. 15. More access to staff. At least one staff member should be accessible 40 hours per week to take calls. 16. Change permit counter operations to allow scheduled appointments. 17. Better phone service at reception area (can't reach anyone during business hours).

Table 6 continued

Information Communication
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have one counter tech available for feasibility studies, PS, etc.2. Hand out information sheet with the first thing that needs to be done and then so on and so on.3. Publish a directory online of names and direct phone numbers.4. Have a streamlined checklist for special type projects such as schools.5. Update computer system so you can look up permits by customer name, not by permit number.6. A meeting with the "community." An opportunity for you and the County personnel to hear firsthand the dilemmas the first and one-time customers as well as the repeat customers have.7. Phone calls to resolve issues prior to or instead of lengthy response letters.8. Better communications between staff and department knowing other department regulations.9. Disseminate new regulations more effectively.10. Publish all decisions on how staff is going to interpret ordinances.11. Offer fax as alternative to mail when relaying comments.12. Put your call in line on the website.13. Better communication between PC and regular consultants would really help.14. The County has information about wetlands, streams and habitats in their GIS system that is not available to the public on the Internet. This information needs to be available to the public.15. The self-help desk and maps should be able to have copies made at the copy center for a fee.16. Set (in particular, traffic and utilities) a policy to return all calls within 24/48 hours.17. No one knows when new regulations go into effect. Surveyors and engineers should be effectively notified immediately.18. Quicker response to phone calls.19. Forms required for submittals should be available and current on the website, preferably PDF format.20. Central database for clients/professionals.21. GIS information must be available on website for download, including aerial photos.
Inspectors
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Inspector handwriting should be better.2. If an inspector is not going to make the scheduled inspection date, it should be mandatory that a phone call be made.3. Inspectors should be able to be reached by your office to give estimated time of arrival.4. The Health Department should enter their inspection results in the computer.5. Inspectors are difficult to get a hold of. Cell phones should be provided and their telephone numbers listed.6. Additional inspectors and qualified inspectors.7. Need flexibility in allowing inspections and mitigation (wetland) alternatives.8. Why are many separate inspectors required? Why can't a building inspector also check for buildings in setbacks, temporary erosion and sedimentation controls, and unauthorized full and similar building site conditions?

Table 6 continued

Plan Review
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. System for outside plan review.2. Add additional staff to reduce permit process time.3. You should have one person in charge of each project.4. Do not require a truss package before you even get your permit. Permits may not be given and then the truss package is not relevant. A sketch of the truss should suffice until time of roof inspection. The package should be designed to code by manufacturer not building designer.5. A procedure to process mechanical/plumbing “replacements” permits, a 5-minute job for any clerk. Contractors should have a walk-in, immediately available, window to purchase these permits and get back to work. That is the way it’s done everywhere else.6. One person from start to finish when you apply for permits, with turnaround times.7. The staff should review the entire report or document to identify all problems the first time around instead of piece-mealing it so that 2 or 3 additional reviews is required.8. Provide written comments to applicant right after NOA comment period closes.9. Don’t accept comments after comment period ends. Require staff to visit site during comment period.10. Need to improve communication between Development Engineering and Public Works.
Other Suggestions
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Better air filtration in building and lobby.2. Model customer relations similar to those of Thurston County.3. Take better notes and keep documentation on file.4. Keep old permits and documents either in soft or hard copy form so when an issue comes up regarding an addition or modification to an existing use, we can easily determine its origin or reason.5. Fees need to be standardized and provided on checklist.6. All the County school districts, I believe, would be willing to pay a standardized fee plus any amount based on the size of the school. This needs to include the health, utilities, planning and all other departments. This would make everything proceed smoother and take less effort by all parties.7. Customer service training.8. It’s time to allocate more money to this department from the general fund.9. Hire more staff.10. Get rid of the phone system.11. More engineers and better trained engineers are needed.12. Allow lower level employees to interpret and decide policy.13. Cut long range planning budget in half.14. Development Engineering checklist could be reduced a little.15. One inconsistency is related to the single family wetland certification form. The face of this document states “one original plus one copy required.” The printout the building permit counter gives to clients states “3 copies” under wetland certification. This should be clarified across the board.16. Need more qualified wetland specialists.17. Remodel lobby area – add fish tank.

Building Mailing List Surveys

Surveys were sent to 1,254 customers from lists that were developed by the Building Division from five categories of permits. Surveys were returned by 253 people and 33 surveys were returned with poor addresses. The return rate of 20.7 % is similar to that which we normally receive. The results from this survey are shown in Figure 2.

Question 1 indicates that 28.3% of the respondents had commercial projects, 25% residential and 46.7% other. Question 2 indicates that 15.8% were one-time users and 84.4% were two or more-time users. The number of questions by category are shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Number of Questions By Category – Building Mailing List

Category	Number of Questions	Percent
Satisfied Customer, 0% - 15 % negative	5	22.7%
Areas of Customer Concern, 16% - 30% negative	8	36.3%
Areas Needing Early Attention, over 30% negative	9	40.9%

**Figure 2
Customer Survey Results – Building Mailing List**

1. Please indicate what your permit or approval was for.							
<input type="checkbox"/> 45	New commercial structure	<input type="checkbox"/> 48	Residential addition or alteration				
<input type="checkbox"/> 24	Commercial addition or alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> 27	Fire alarms or sprinklers				
<input type="checkbox"/> 15	Sign	<input type="checkbox"/> 47	Mechanical or plumbing permit				
<input type="checkbox"/> 13	Residential new construction	<input type="checkbox"/> 25	Other (list) _____				
2. Please indicate how often you have obtained a building permit from Pierce County.							
<input type="checkbox"/> 37	One time user of a Pierce County building permit						
<input type="checkbox"/> 197	Two or more time user of a Pierce County building permit						
QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
3. When making an application for a building permit, I have generally found the County staff to be responsive and helpful.	39	130	11	43	28	1	28%
4. In general, the County staff has dealt with me in a positive manner, providing options where they were available and attempting to help me through the building permit process.	36	114	20	53	27	1	32%
5. I found the handouts for building permits supplied by the County to be useful and informative in explaining the requirements I must meet for the County.	19	107	51	45	16	12	26%
6. I found the submitted requests and forms clear and easy to use for obtaining a building permit.	21	108	38	52	23	1	31%
7. Building permit plan checking was complete and accurate. Additional problems did not surface later that should have been caught in the initial review.	29	110	28	36	41	7	32%
8. Building permit plan checking turnaround time was acceptable. I did not have to wait an excessive amount of time to get plans back or find out about problems that needed to be corrected.	21	56	15	51	101	4	62%
9. The codes for building permits and conditions of approval were applied by staff in a fair and practical manner.	22	125	40	31	25	2	23%
10. County staff was courteous.	54	124	24	28	18	0	19%
11. The turnaround time for review and approval or disapproval of my building permit was not any longer with Pierce County than other counties or cities where I have filed applications.	17	36	36	46	96	19	61%
12. The amount of time it took to obtain my building permit was reasonable.	19	44	20	66	100	1	67%
13. Pierce County is just as fair and practical in its application of building permit regulations as other neighboring counties or cities where I have filed applications.	16	58	46	39	65	23	46%

As can be seen in Table 7, 77.2% of the questions exceed our 15% threshold. Of particular concern are the 40.9% exceeding 30%. Our conclusions include:

- **Good Inspection Process**

The inspection process is considered by customers to be operating well. All five questions that were 15% or less negative addressed inspector issues, i.e. Question 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20. This means that 85 to 92% of the customers were satisfied.

- **Slowness In Issuing Permits**

Question 8, 11 and 12 all addressed the amount of time it takes to obtain a building permit. These negative scores ranged from 61 to 67% negative. These negative scores match our own research indicating that the County takes far too long to issue building permits.

- **Problems In Processing Permits**

Other questions exceeding 30% addressed the process itself. Issues included:

- ✓ The County dealt in a positive manner, Question 4, 32% negative.
- ✓ Forms were easy to use, Question 6, 31% negative.
- ✓ Plan checking was complete and accurate, Question 7, 32% negative.
- ✓ The County was fair and practical in application of regulations, Question 13, 45% negative.
- ✓ County staff was easily accessible, Question 18, 57% negative
- ✓ Coordination worked well between Building and Development Engineering, Question 21, 32% negative.
- ✓ Seven other questions also dealt with the processing issues with negative scores between 15 to 30%. These were Questions 3, 5, 9, 10, 14, and 21.

Development Engineering Mailing List Surveys

Surveys were sent to 517 customers from lists that were developed by the Development Engineering Section from three categories of permits. Surveys were returned by 57 people and 24 were returned with poor addresses. The return rate of 11.6%. is smaller than we normally receive. However, 57 surveys are sufficient for some analysis. The results from this survey are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3
Customer Survey Results – Development Engineering Mailing List**

<p>1. Please check off the type of Development Engineering article you processed through the County during the past twelve months.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 27 Site development permit for a subdivision</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 20 Site development permit for commercial or industrial project</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 24 Single family abbreviated plan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 18 Single family infiltration system</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Other (list) _____</p>							
<p>2. Please indicate how often you have obtained a Development Engineering permit.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 One time user of the Pierce County Development Engineering review and approval process</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 49 Two or more time user of the Pierce County Development Engineering review and approval process</p>							
QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
3. When making an application for a Development Engineering permit, I have generally found the County staff to be responsive and helpful.	5	31	5	10	6	0	28%
4. In general, the County staff has dealt with me in a positive manner, providing options where they were available and attempting to help me through the Development Engineering permit process.	6	26	5	13	7	0	35%
5. I found the handouts for Development Engineering permits supplied by the County to be useful and informative in explaining the requirements I must meet.	5	25	12	6	7	2	24%
6. I found the Development Engineering submittal requirements and forms clear and easy to use.	3	24	14	7	8	1	27%
7. Development Engineering plan checking was complete and accurate. Additional problems did not surface later that should have been caught in the initial review.	6	17	6	14	14	1	49%
8. Development Engineering plan checking turnaround time was acceptable. I did not have to wait an excessive amount of time to get plans back or find out about problems that needed to be corrected.	3	12	6	8	24	2	60%
9. Development Engineering codes, policies and conditions of approval were applied by staff in a fair and practical manner.	4	23	5	12	11	0	42%
10. Development Engineering staff was courteous.	12	29	8	4	4	0	14%
11. The amount of time it took to obtain my Development Engineering permit was reasonable.	2	14	6	10	23	2	60%
12. Pierce County is just as fair and practical in its application of Development Engineering regulations as other neighboring counties or cities where I have filed Development Engineering type applications.	2	13	4	16	19	3	65%
13. When County staff found problems during review of my application, they were thorough and clear in explaining what I had to do to correct those problems.	2	23	3	17	11	1	50%

Figure 3 continued

QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
14. It was easy to schedule inspections for my Development Engineering permit.	6	27	8	8	4	4	23%
15. Inspectors were timely in responding to my requests for Development Engineering construction inspections.	4	33	8	4	2	5	12%
16. Inspectors were knowledgeable, thorough and clear in explaining any Development Engineering problems found and what options I had to correct the problems and get approval.	3	26	11	7	2	4	18%
17. The staff of the County was easily accessible when I needed assistance in resolving Development Engineering problems.	1	13	4	25	12	1	67%
18. Inspectors rarely found Development Engineering errors in the field during construction that should have been caught during the plan checking process.	4	23	15	6	1	6	14%
19. I am pleased Development Engineering offers the Expedited Review Process (applicant paid overtime or applicant paid per review).	10	13	12	4	14	2	34%
20. I have used The Development Engineering Expedited Review Process and am pleased with the results.	7	9	16	8	10	7	36%
21. Development Engineering is consistent in their application of codes, policies, procedures and conditions of approval.	4	11	12	17	8	0	48%
22. Internal County relationships and coordination seemed to work well as related to my Development Engineering permit(s) between:							
Development Engineering and The Building permit staff	4	0	9	15	8	3	64%
Development Engineering and the Current Planners	4	13	15	15	3	3	36%
Development Engineering and Resource Management	2	11	21	10	4	6	29%
Development Engineering and Water Programs (Stormwater Utility)	4	13	16	9	5	5	30%
Development Engineering and the Traffic Engineering Staff	1	9	20	10	10	4	40%
23. What do you believe should be the turnaround (in work days) for Development Engineering Review of a first submittal? ____ days							
24. What do you believe should be The Development Engineering turnaround time (in work days) of a resubmittal? ____ days							
25. Please add any comments or suggestions that you have that might improve the County's scores in customer service. Please give us at least one idea.							

Question 1 indicates that half the respondents had processed a site development permit. Question 2 indicates that 9.3% were one-time users and 90.7% were two or more time users. The number of questions by category are shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Number of Questions By Category – Development Engineering Mailing List

Category	Number of Questions	Percent
Satisfied Customer, 0% - 15 % negative	3	13.6%
Areas of Customer Concern, 16% - 30% negative	17	31.8%
Areas Needing Early Attention, over 30% negative	14	63.6%

As can be seen in Table 8, 86.4% of the questions exceed our 15% threshold. Of particular concern are the 63.9% of the questions that exceed 30% negative. Our conclusions include:

- **Courteous Staff**
Question 10, 86% positive.
- **Good Inspections**
Questions 15, 16, and 18.
- **Slowness In Issuing Permits**
60% of the customers felt that the permit turnaround time was not reasonable, Question 8 and 11.
- **Problems In Processing Permits**
Problem areas included:
 - ✓ Providing options, 35% negative, Question 4.
 - ✓ Complete and accurate plan checking, 49% negative, Question 7.
 - ✓ Codes applied in a fair manner, 42% negative, Question 9.
 - ✓ As fair and practical as other jurisdictions, 65% negative, Question 12.
 - ✓ County was clear in explaining corrections, 50% negative, Question 13.
 - ✓ Staff was easily accessible, 67% negative, Question 17.
 - ✓ Expedited Review Process, 34 and 36% negative, Questions 19 and 20.
 - ✓ Consistent applications of codes, 48% negative, Question 20.

- ✓ Good relations with other Divisions, 64% negative for Building, 40% negative for Traffic and 36% negative for Current Planners, Question 22.

Planning Mailing List Surveys

Surveys were sent to 413 customers that were developed by the Planning Section from four categories of permits. Surveys were returned by 63 people and 34 surveys were returned with poor addresses. The return rate of 16.3 % is slightly lower than that which we normally receive but sufficient for analysis. The results from this survey are shown in Figure 4.

Question 1 indicates that there were a wide variety of permits by the respondents. Question 2 indicates that 15.8% were one-time users and 84.4% were two or more time users. Many of the questions were segmented so that an answer was included for Current Planning, Resource Management and Development Engineering. The number of questions by category are shown in Table 9.

Table 9
Number of Questions By Category – Planning Mailing List

Category	Number of Questions	Percent
Satisfied Customer, 0% - 15 % negative	3	7.9%
Areas of Customer Concern, 16% - 30% negative	6	15.8%
Areas Needing Early Attention, over 30% negative	29	76.3%

As can be seen in Table 9, roughly three fourths of the questions exceed our 30% threshold. Only 7.9% have less than the 15% negative threshold.

The three positive questions included:

- **Hearing Examiner**
95% to 98% of responses were positive, Question 15 and 16.
- **Courteous Development Engineering staff**
86% of responses were positive, Question 10.

The remainder of all questions had negative responses exceeding 30% for Current Planning, Resource Management and Development Engineering. Many of these negative responses exceeded 50% with turnaround time being particularly negative. The scores for this survey are so negative that additional detailed analysis is not fruitful.

**Figure 4
Customer Survey Results – Planning Mailing List**

<p>1. Please check off the types of planning actions you have applied for through the County during the past 12 months.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 24 Hearing Examiner case</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 47 Wetland Review</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 29 Subdivision or plat, boundary line adjustment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 35 Administrative staff review, site plans</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 21 Conditional use</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 19 Other (list) _____</p>							
<p>2. Please indicate how often you work with the County's planning review and approval process.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6 One time user of the planning review and approval process</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 51 Frequent user of the planning review and approval process</p>							
QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
3. When making an application, I have generally found the County staff to be responsive and helpful in the functions of:							
Current Planning	6	24	5	9	10	1	35%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	8	17	6	12	11	4	43%
Development Engineering	17	25	5	12	5	3	33%
4. In general, the staff has dealt with me in a positive manner, providing options where they were available and attempting to help me through the process in the functions of:							
Current Planning	6	16	4	14	10	1	48%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	8	17	4	12	11	4	44%
Development Engineering	7	21	5	13	5	4	35%
5. Plan review was complete and accurate. Additional problems did not surface later that should have been caught in the initial review in the functions of:							
Current Planning	1	20	8	9	12	4	42%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	4	16	6	14	13	6	51%
Development Engineering	2	12	4	20	10	5	63%
6. Application review turnaround time was acceptable. I did not have to wait an excessive amount of time to get plans back or find out about problems that needed to be corrected in the functions of:							
Current Planning	3	13	6	9	19	3	56%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	4	16	1	13	19	4	60%
Development Engineering	2	9	4	14	21	4	70%
7. Codes and policies were applied by staff in a professional manner in the functions of:							
Current Planning	3	20	7	8	11	3	39%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	4	23	4	12	8	4	39%
Development Engineering	2	22	8	9	6	4	32%

Figure 4 continued

QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
8. The turnaround time for review and approval or disapproval of my application was not any longer with Pierce than other counties or cities where I have filed applications. Current Planning	1	10	4	15	15	7	67%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	5	8	4	17	16	7	66%
Development Engineering	1	11	4	14	16	6	65%
9. Pierce County is just as fair and practical in its application of regulations as other neighboring counties and cities in the functions of: Current Planning	4	11	7	14	8	5	50%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	6	12	6	17	8	6	51%
Development Engineering	3	15	6	14	9	4	49%
10. Staff was courteous in the sections of: Current Planning	11	22	3	5	9	2	28%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	11	29	3	6	5	3	20%
Development Engineering	10	30	4	5	2	3	14%
11. The conditions of approval applied to my project were reasonable and justified from the functions of: Current Planning	2	25	9	4	9	3	27%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	6	21	6	9	7	4	33%
Development Engineering	2	25	7	6	8	4	29%
12. The staff of the County were easily accessible when I needed assistance in resolving problems in the functions of: Current Planning	2	19	4	11	15	1	51%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	5	21	1	15	11	3	49%
Development Engineering	3	18	2	15	11	3	53%
13. I found the handouts supplied by the County to be useful and informative in explaining the requirements I must meet for the functions of: Current Planning	5	20	9	6	6	4	26%
Resource Management - Wetland Review	5	22	9	8	6	4	28%
Development Engineering	1	17	12	11	5	4	35%
14. The Hearing Examiner treated me fairly.	17	16	9	1	1	13	5%
15. The Hearing Examiner was courteous during the hearing.	18	12	8	1	0	13	3%
16. Was your application ultimately approved? <input type="checkbox"/> 49 Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 7 No							

A Summary of Customer Surveys

We have completed this survey for numerous communities in 23 states. Compared to other surveys we have completed, the negative scores here are quite high. Recommendations throughout this report will address the various issues raised in the surveys.

- 4.** ***Recommendation:*** **The policy maker interviews, focus group comments, and scores and survey responses should be shared with staff for the purpose of discussing the various recommendations in this report and brainstorming additional ideas to answer customer concerns. (Priority 2)**

III. EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

Two confidential questionnaires were completed by many of the County employees who work with development review and approval. A short, close-ended questionnaire, as shown in Appendix B was completed at a series of staff meetings by 146 employees and collected by the consultants. The short questionnaire asked employees to list pet peeves and give suggestions for improvements. Their comments were used as part of our analysis for this report.

A longer, 11 page questionnaire (shown in Appendix C) was completed by 63 employees and mailed to the consultants in San Diego to assure confidentiality. Information obtained from these questionnaires was essential to our analysis. The number of questionnaires returned from each function is shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Number of Employees Responding to Questionnaires

Function	Short Questionnaire	Long Questionnaire
Administration	4	2
Advance Planning	15	8
Building	27	11
Code Enforcement	6	1
Current Planning	13	8
Development Center	19	8
Development Engineering	20	7
Fire	11	2
Health	3	0
Public Works	4	0
<i>Sewer</i>	7	4
<i>Traffic</i>	5	2
<i>Water</i>	4	3
Resource Management	8	7
Total	146	63

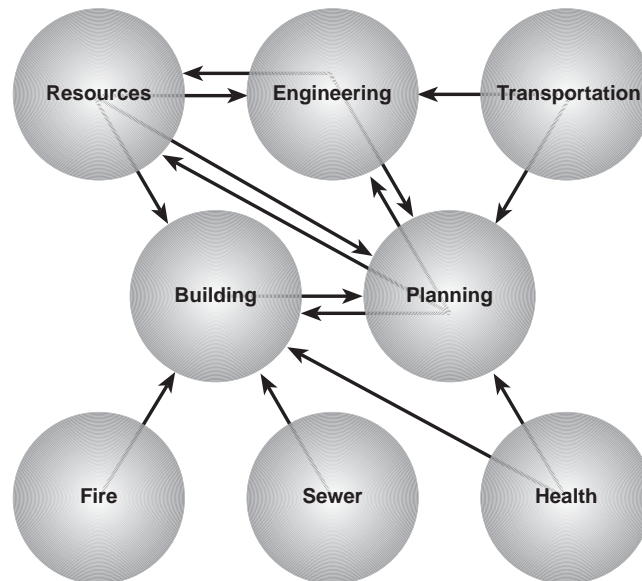
In addition to these two questionnaires, we were given the extensive results from the PALS-on-PALS survey. Material from all three surveys were used in our analysis.

IV. OVERALL FINDINGS AND APPROACH

A. OVERVIEW - GETTING A PALS PERSPECTIVE

In analyzing PALS, it is useful to view the situation in a historical context. Pierce County was known for having low development standards. Up until the 1990's the County had no zoning or Comprehensive Plan. In the 1980's an effort to do a Comprehensive Plan was turned down twice by voters. The state's Growth Management Act changed all of that. The transition to more planning and new standards has not been easy. In many ways this transition is still underway. Regulations have led to the need for increased specialization within PALS. Today eight key County functions are involved in many development and permitting activities, as illustrated in Figure 5. In addition, there are other county, state and Federal agencies that at times are also involved such as State Department of Transportation, Advance Planning, etc. The development and permitting process, at best, is a complicated one.

Figure 5
Key Development and Permitting Functions



Coupled with this policy and institutional framework, the County continues to have an increased growth rate.

During this transition period PALS has operated out of crowded and substandard facilities. Based on our current analysis, PALS has also likely been understaffed for

much on this transition period. During this time, PALS has made many improvements and has attempted to keep abreast of development. Many dedicated employees have worked overtime and made extra efforts to work on backlog.

Better facilities and increased staffing alone will not correct PALS problems. Needed will be a clear customer service philosophy outlined in Section B of this Chapter. Agreement will also be needed on customer service issues and approaches outlined in Section C and D. And finally, PALS management must make their case to policy makers and customers. They will need to establish the credibility that, given additional resources, they can meet customer expectations. An approach to management issues is outlined in Section E of this Chapter.

B. CUSTOMER SERVICE - PHILOSOPHY/THEORY

Why Is Mission Important?

We often find considerable confusion amongst both policy makers and permitting staff in regards to the development permitting process. Current organizational theory suggests that for efficiency and effectiveness, it is imperative that organizations agree on the mission of the organization. Clarity of mission is also very important for a study like this one. While we can make a variety of specific recommendations that impact current activities, good implementation will require agreement by most policy makers and staff. Additionally, organizational improvement is not a one shot event. For every recommendation we make, we would hope that staff would make many more on their own. Additionally, as staff reviews the recommendations of this report, we hope that for some of the recommendations staff would say, “yes, you have identified a problem and your recommendation can solve it. But, here is even a better idea.” Thus, for both current implementation and continuous improvement, agreement on mission is essential.

What Is The Goal?

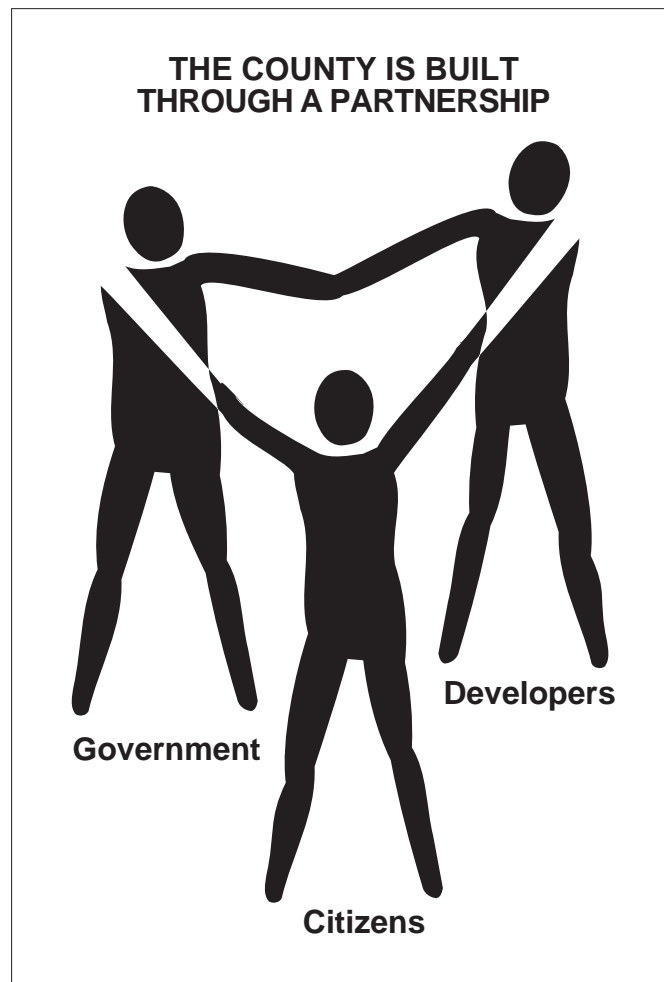
The development permitting process should be a process, not a policy. Some communities have used the following language to help clarify the development process:

- The development process should be clear and reasonably predictable; that is, both the developer or property owner and citizens should know what to expect from the process.
- The process should be policy-neutral, that is, the process itself should not be used to impact development depending upon attitudes about “growth,” “slow growth,” or “no growth.” Growth issues, if desired, should be dealt with by the policy makers and adopted as clear public policy.

The Development Partnership

It is not unusual that staff and citizens see the applicants as “the bad guys.” Applicants on the other hand see staff, citizens and the process as simply standing in the way of their doing what they want to do. We are not comfortable with either of these approaches. We see communities being built or evolving through a partnership. This is a partnership between the applicants, government and citizens. The dance of development is illustrated in Figure 6. Staff’s role is not merely that of a regulator. Rather, it should be the role of a problem solver - a problem solver with the ultimate goal of building a better Pierce County. Problem solving should not only be for the applicant but also for citizens. Citizens from one of our clients described it this way. “So, after the project is completed, the three of us (applicant, government and citizens) surround the project hand in hand singing, Kumbya.”

Figure 6
The Dance of Development



Impact of a Poor Development Permitting Process

It is not unusual that staff, citizens and even some policy makers fail to see the true impact of a poor development and permitting process. The impact varies if the applicant is a developer, a homeowner, or a business.

- **Developer**

A key issue for the developer is time. Developers will either be paying for the project with cash out of their pocket and/or often with construction loans. Either way, there is a cost when there are delays in the process. These costs can be substantial. So much so that most developers will gladly pay increased fees if they can have their projects proceed on a timely basis. This includes not only plan approval, but the inspection process as well. The penalty for poor services is indeed a high one.

It is not unusual that staff and citizens don't see timing as a problem. Delay simply means that the developer will see less profit. In some cases this may be true. However, the more likely scenario is that the increased cost is passed along to the consumer, either in the form of a more expensive product or in the form of decreased quality. We doubt that any policymaker would say that they want to increase costs to the consumers or reduce the quality of the development or the quality of the community.

- **Homeowner**

The homeowner is often also interested in a timely development permitting process. Often their projects directly impact their quality of life. They may want to upgrade the kitchen or bath, add a bedroom for a new family member or an elderly member of the family, or a host of other reasons. They may personally take time off from work to processes the permit or stay at home for inspections. All of this interrupts their life and is either a direct or indirect cost.

- **Businesses**

The development permitting process impacts both proposed new businesses and existing businesses. Like developers, there is a financial cost to pay for delay in the plan approval or inspection process. However, there are also other costs to pay that can be deadly for the business. A new business may have targeted on opening date. Related to the opening date is the hiring of staff, an advertising program or targeting a window of business opportunity.

An existing business has similar concerns. They may need to expand or change to remain competitive or cost effective. In today's fast moving times, this can be particularly critical for the manufacturing sector. As one of our clients told us, "by the time we get the permit for a tenant improvement, we have already lost the order that created the need for the tenant improvement."

- **Government**

A poor development system can also impact government in the form of delays in desirable taxes or job creating activities.

In summary, a poor development permitting process can add cost to the process resulting in higher end product costs, decreased development quality, impact on citizens quality of life, lost business for both new and existing businesses, and lost tax revenue and jobs.

Economic Development

Pierce County, is interested in economic development. There is often debate as to how economic development relates to the development permitting process. Some suggest that the development permitting process is only one factor in economic development and often a small one. There is some validity to this argument. There are many decisions that go into economic development activities. Some of the hottest economic development communities in the United States also have notoriously complicated development processes. Examples include Austin, Texas and San Diego, California.

However, it would also be an exaggeration to conclude that the development permitting process has no relation to economic development. Each circumstance may be different. If all else is equal, why would a business select a community where the permit will take six months vs. one where it will take 60 days?

Staff for some of our clients feel that an economic development project is “just another developer” and should not be granted any “special treatment.” This impression fails to recognize that an economic development project may be encouraged by the community as a means to resolve significant social/physical/economic problems.

Thus, a community’s economic development strategy may be recognized as direct public policy deserving special attention and priority.

Summary on Mission

Specific recommendations will be included throughout this report to implement the specifics of the mission. However, we also suggest that the County adopt a summary of an over-riding mission and goals as set forth below.

5. Recommendation: The County should adopt the following over-riding mission and goals and understanding to guide the improvement efforts for the development permitting process.

- **The process should be a process, not a growth policy or anti-growth policy.**

- **The process should be a partnership between the applicant, government and citizens.**
- **The process should be customer focused and easily understood by all customers, whether a homeowner, a builder, a community member or a policy maker.**
- **While staff has certain regulatory roles, the emphasis should be on problem solving for both the applicant and citizens while always focusing on building a better Pierce County.**
- **It is recognized that a poor development permitting process can result in higher-end product costs, decreased development quality, impact on citizens' quality of life, and lost business for both new and existing businesses.**
- **The County's economic development approach or directives should be recognized as public policy deserving special attention and priority in the development permitting process. (*Priority 1*)**

C. MAKING A DEVELOPMENT PERMITTING SYSTEM WORK

Complex development permitting systems require a number of key features in order to be successful. These features are based on our research in working with roughly 150 permitting systems in 23 states and talking with hundreds of customers of such systems. While each community is different and has different expectations for their system, there are a number of common ingredients. We found the same common ingredients to be present in Pierce County through our customer focus groups, mail surveys, input from staff and our own observations. The features include:

- **Performance Measures**

The system requires well developed performance measures. The performance measures need to address the primary concerns of applicants which are the time required to obtain approval and the clarity and consistency of the reviews.

- **Time To Obtain Approval**

Good systems set two types of time targets. The first is how long it will take staff to respond to an application, i.e. first review. The second is how long will it take to actually obtain the approval. The County staff is totally in control of how long the first review will take. The applicant and the County share the responsibility as to how long it will take to obtain the approval.

Timelines for first reviews will vary by the type of review. Some reviews can be completed over-the-counter. Others will require one to 20 working days. We believe that virtually any review should be able to be completed within 20 working days. The days should be set as working days, not calendar days. Instead of using averages, they should use phrases like, “95% will be completed within 20 working days and no review should exceed 30 working days.” As a general rule, second reviews should take less time than first reviews, and third reviews, if necessary, less time than second reviews.

Time targets should also be set for obtaining approval, recognizing that it will only be possible to meet this target if the applicant is responsive to staff requirements on a timely basis.

- **Clarity and Consistency of Reviews**

The applicant wants to know at the outset what is required. They want a complete first review with no surprises later. They want consistent answers from each staff member or function.

- **Making This Happen**

The following features are necessary in order to make the system work:

- ✓ **Project Managers**

All major projects should have a designated project manager. The project manager is responsible to monitor the timelines for the assigned projects, coordinating all related functions, and solving problems both for the applicant and any citizen input.

- ✓ **Permit Coordinators**

One or more overall permit coordinators are assigned to monitor all the applications and the project managers to see that projects are kept on schedule.

- ✓ **Monitor First Time Reviews**

The supervisors of project managers should monitor projects to see that first time reviews are comprehensive. One way to do this is to monitor five or 10 % of the projects.

- ✓ **Education Materials**

Good handouts, application forms, checklist and policy and procedures manuals are necessary for staff and in many cases for the applicants.

✓ **Training**

Staff must be trained and qualified for their positions. We recommend that a minimum of five percent of staff time be set aside for continuous training, i.e., an average of two hours per week.

✓ **Resources**

Adequate resources are necessary to make the system work. This includes office space, various aspects of technology and the appropriate amount of staff.

✓ **Managers**

Finally, all systems must be managed. Good managers are essential to work with staff and manage the systems.

Specific recommendations will be included throughout this report to implement the specifics of this development system. However, as a guidance for staff and managers, we also suggest that the County adopt these guiding principles for the development permitting system.

6. Recommendation: The County should adopt the following guidelines for the development permitting system.

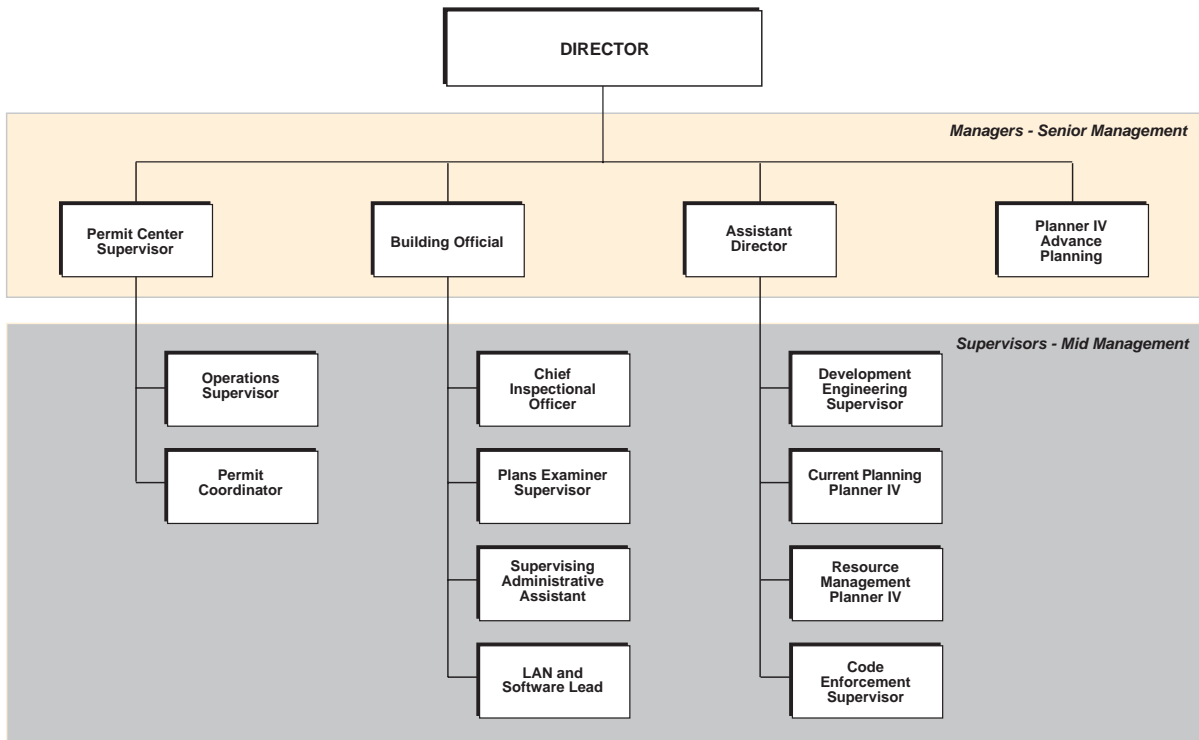
- **Performance measures with time targets should be set for all reviews and approvals.**
- **The goal should be clarity and consistency of all reviews.**
- **Project managers should be appointed for all projects that require review by more than one division or section.**
- **Permit Coordinators should monitor all timelines and the work of project managers.**
- **Comprehensive first-time reviews should be the norm and monitored by supervisors.**
- **Clear educational material should be available for the public.**
- **Extensive training should be completed by all staff.**
- **The adequate number of trained staff should be available to carry out the activities.**
- **Good managers are essential to manage the overall system. (Priority 1)**

D. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION

The current management structure and organization of PALS is shown in Figure 7. It includes five positions that are considered management or senior management. In addition to the Director, it includes a manager for the Development Center, the Building Official, the head of Advance Planning, and the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director oversees accounting and Code Enforcement as well as the three key development activities of Development Engineering, Current Planning and Resource Management. This group of five managers meets on a weekly basis.

Ten additional positions also shown in Figure 7 are considered supervisors or mid-management. They meet periodically within their functional group and meet together with Senior Management once a month.

Figure 7
PALS Current Organization



Our task for this study does not include specific personal evaluations. All of our recommendations are made with the assumption that existing managers will be in the organization, although functions for some may change. Management and supervisors within PALS needs to work on a variety of improvement areas including:

- **Communication**

A number of managers and supervisors appear to operate from a style that intimidates subordinates. Communication between management, supervisors, employees, and between functions needs substantial improvement. This has been documented in PALS on PALS (a confidential staff questionnaire), in our interviews with facilitators, our staff questionnaires and our many staff interviews. This management style means that many employees have given up on making suggestions for improvements. They are either ignored or fear retribution.

- **PALS on PALS**

The Director has not had a PALS-on-PALS evaluation because the consultant requires five complete questionnaires before tabulating results. For whatever reason, only four questionnaires were completed. Lacking these tabulations, the senior managers are meeting to work on issues. However, we believe that without the confidentiality of anonymous questionnaires, this process may not be effective.

- **Representation of Key Functions at Senior Management**

The problems and needs of the key development functions of Development Engineering, Current Planning, and Resource Management are not being adequately addressed at the Senior Management level.

- **Data**

PALS has more data than we have seen in any organization we have reviewed. Good data is essential for good management. However, as discussed elsewhere, we have found much of the data can be confusing. Problems occur in how the data is entered, the way data is tallied and in data interpretation. While we see nothing intentional in this respect, management and supervisors should be more alert to this problem.

- **Development Center**

The Development Center is the customers window into the permit process. Problems in the Development Center were the number one complaint that we heard in the customer surveys. Improvements here are essential.

- **Management Skills**

Most managers and supervisors in PALS came into management the same way that occurs in most organizations. They were good at an operational job so they were appointed as managers or supervisors. National research shows that good operators do not always make good managers or supervisors. PALS need to have in place an extensive management and supervisor training approach and philosophy.

- **Training**

There has been inadequate staff training throughout much of PALS. This has not only led to inefficiency, but according to the customers, also inconsistency in requirements and processing. Management and supervisors have a key responsibility to see that staff are trained.

- **Spans of Control**

A number of the supervisors (mid-managers) are in untenable positions, attempting to supervise far too many employees. This has been a particular problem in Development Engineering and Current Planning. Senior Management should address these problems.

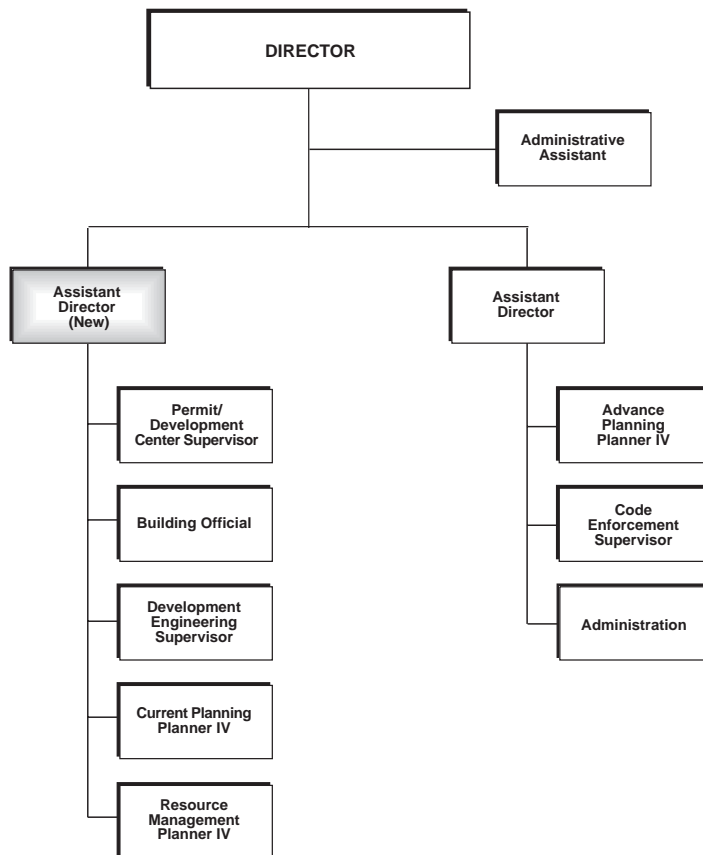
Addressing The Issues

We believe that the director of an organization like PALS needs considerable flexibility in the way he or she organizes, based on personal style and operational issues. However, given this perspective, we offer the following recommendation that we believe will begin to address the Department's management concerns.

Organization

We suggest the Department be organized as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8
PALS Proposed Organization**



Features of this organization and our rationale include:

- **Assistant Director for Operations**

An Assistant Director would consolidate and supervise all of the five key development functions. He or she would be charged with implementing this audit, integrating the functions, putting in place the proposed performance system and monitoring performance. We believe this position should have outstanding management and communication skills.

- **Assistant Director for Administration**

An Assistant Director would manage Advance Planning, Code Enforcement, and an Administrative division. This division would collect various administrative functions currently located in various parts of PALS and would entail some staff reassignments. In other parts of this report we call for moving enforcement functions from the development and permitting functions to a more centralized code enforcement unit. This can benefit from additional oversight provided by this position.

Currently administrative functions are spread throughout the Department without a clear integrated focus. For example, the Supervising Administrative Assistant handles personnel and purchasing. Moving this function would allow the Director's Administrative Assistant more time to assist the Director in communication related activities. Some file and counter responsibilities rest in Current Planning. Technology is under the Building Official. Accounting is under the Assistant Director. Centralizing these functions can be particularly critical to resolve the data issues described elsewhere in this report. A central focus will also be necessary to address the facility concerns.

The Director for this administrative function could be a new hire or promotion of an existing employee. Additional study would be necessary in relation to the classification of positions and reporting lines in this function.

- **Other Organizational Changes**

Additional organizational changes are recommended within the various functional units and are discussed in those chapters.

- **Senior Management**

Although there may be times in the new structure when the Director would meet only with the Assistant Directors, all positions shown on Figure 8 would be considered Senior Management and would need substantial ties and relations with the Director.

- **360-Degree Evaluations**

Given the management issues uncovered in PALS on PALS and in this study, all managers and supervisors would undergo a true 360-degree evaluation conducted by an outside party. A 360-degree evaluation provides confidential feedback to managers and supervisors from superiors, subordinates and peers. The manager receives feedback and plan development for specific leadership skills vital to the organization. To set the stage for this and remove managers' and supervisors' apprehension, the first evaluation would be for the Director to then be followed by the others.

- **Management Training**

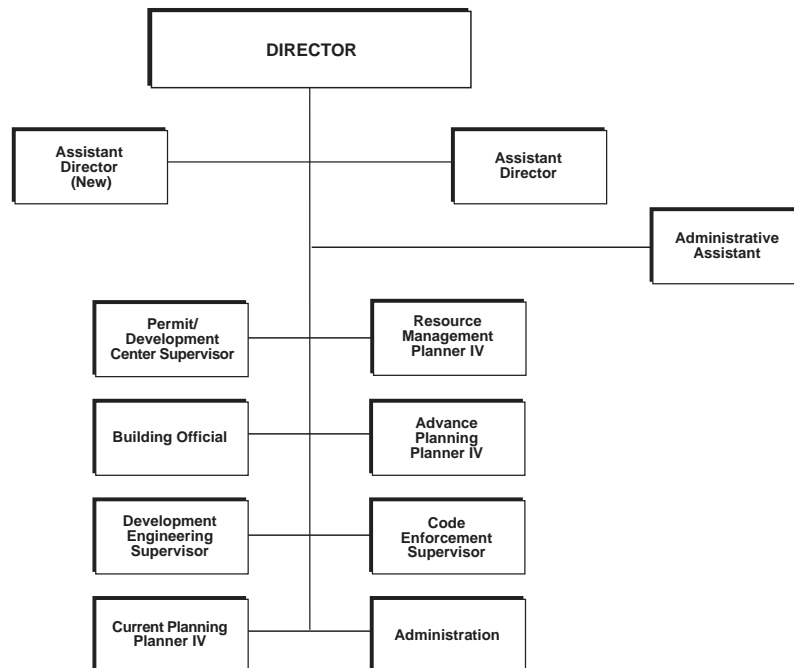
The Human Resources Department would work with the Department to propose detailed management training. Such training could begin with generic management topics but eventually be tailored for each specific manager based on needs that are shown in the 360-degree evaluations.

7. Recommendation: Management and supervision issues within PALS should be addressed by:

- **Creating a new Assistant Director position and reorganizing the Department.**
- **Broadening the definition of which positions are considered Senior Management.**
- **Conducting 360-degree evaluations for all managers and supervisors.**
- **Developing a management and supervisor training program. (Priority 1)**

An alternative to the organizational structure is shown in Figure 9. Under this alternative the eight key functional managers would report directly to the Director. Coordination would be supplied by the two Assistant Directors, one for operations and one for administration. The choice between the two organizational alternatives should be made by the Director.

Figure 9
PALS Alternative Proposed Organization



V. ISSUES IMPACTING ALL FUNCTIONS

A. BACKLOG

There is a backlog of permits throughout PALS and related departments. It will not be possible to implement the new performance standards listed in this report until the backlog of permits has been removed. Actually deciding what is a backlog requires careful calculations.

The theoretical way to calculate backlog is as follows:

1. The average intake volume per month is determined for each permit type.
2. This is multiplied by the desired process cycle in months.
3. The result of 2 is the average number of projects normally in house in order to meet desired process cycles.
4. The actual number of projects on hand is calculated for each project type.
5. The calculation in 3 is subtracted from the calculation in 4 which gives the backlog number.
6. For example, assume that the average volume for a permit per month is 35 and the process time is 1.5 months. This means that at any given time there would normally be 52.5 projects being processed ($35 \times 1.5 = 52.5$). Assume the actual number of projects on hand is 74. The backlog of projects would be 21.5 projects ($74 - 52.5 = 21.5$).

We do not have adequate data to calculate the backlog for each function in the departments using this system. In the various sections of this report, we comment on approaches to determining the backlog for that specific function. It could also be useful for the functions to complete calculations as described above in order to address their backlog issues. Specific additional information is needed as to the content of the backlog and the best way to handle it.

Several pieces of data illustrate the complexity of the backlog issue. We received a report showing the number of applications applied for in 2003 and the number of applications approved. This report is summarized in Table 11. This data would tend to show a large backlog in Building, Current Planning, Resource Management and Public Works Sewers but not in Development Engineering. We believe this data is not an accurate reflection for Sewers which does not have any substantial backlog. We have other data that indicates that Development Engineering does have a backlog.

Perhaps, this data simply shows that Development Engineering may be gradually chipping away at their backlog.

**Table 11
Applications Received and Approved 2003**

Function	Applications	Applications Approved	Net	Percent
Building	9,722	8,949	-773	-7.95%
Current Planning	1,655	1,141	-514	-31.06%
Development Engineering	7,107	7,205	98	1.38%
Resource Management	1,099	912	-187	-17.02%
Fire	343	345	2	0.58%
Health	?	9,571		
Sewer	2,880	2,409	-471	-16.35%

Another way to look at the backlog was to compare the Development Center applications received data with the DCIS report on Age of DCIS Applications at Time of Approval/Denial. This data is shown in Table 12. The data indicates that generally PALS processes the same number of applications each year that it receives. If this is true it could mean that the backlog simply carries over from year to year and has been present for many years.

**Table 12
PALS Applications Received vs. Approved**

Year	Applications Received	Applications Approved
2001	19,901	19,392
2002	20,558	20,611
2003	21,766	22,734

Looking at all the data, it becomes clear that even knowing the size of the backlog is a formidable task. Clearing out the backlogs will be quite expensive. If consultants were to be used for the entire backlog, our time and cost estimates are shown in Table 13 and total \$1,053,229. However, we have a variety of other suggestions in this report that can assist in reducing the size of the backlog. Additionally, we know that our calculations of the size of the backlog may be high or low. We suggest that the County initially authorize \$400,000 of consulting funds but also monitor progress on a monthly basis.

**Table 13
Backlog Cost Estimates**

Type	Number	Average Hours Each	Hours Needed	Cost Per Hour	Total Cost
Building-Residential	102	3.0	306	\$100	\$30,600
Building-Commercial	78	15.0	1,170	\$100	\$117,000
Current Planning	500	10.9	5,450	\$85	\$463,250
Development Engineering	109	10.0	1,090	\$100	\$109,000
Resource Management*	431	9.1	3,922	\$85	\$333,379
				Total	\$1,053,229

*Number = 185 Inactive Application, 80 Inactive Violations, 166 Inactive Monitoring

- 8. Recommendation:** The various development and permitting functions should calculate their backlog of cases. *(Priority 3)*

- 9. Recommendation:** The County should initially allocate \$400,000 for consultants to work on the backlog but monitor progress on a monthly basis. *(Priority 1)*

In Chapter I, Section D we indicate how we suggest the backlog be handled in implementation of this report.

B. BUDGET AND STAFFING

PALS' budget, revenue and workload for ten years are shown in Table 14.

The data in this chart can be useful in analyzing PALS but it also has a number of drawbacks. The budget, fees and staffing levels should be accurate. However, the numbers for the development process and NPDES activities are budget estimates rather than actual numbers and may not be 100% accurate. Of a possible more serious concern, the workload data may not be the most accurate indicator of staffing needs. As discussed elsewhere in this report, PALS workload data is subject to some errors and interpretation. With these qualifications we have used the data the best we could in our analysis.

**Table 14
PALS' Ten-Year Budget, Revenue and Workload**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
BUDGET										
Budget (000)	\$9,313	\$6,869	\$9,251	\$9,595	\$10,128	\$11,274	\$12,130	\$11,905	\$12,549	\$12,663
Actual (000)	\$9,255	\$8,760	\$9,206	\$9,411	\$9,986	\$10,934	\$12,112	\$11,908	\$12,673	-
Budget – Dev. Process & NPDES	\$7,948	\$7,449	\$7,721	\$8,047	\$8,124	\$9,504	\$9,690	\$9,686	\$10,468	\$10,782
FEES										
Fees –Budget	\$7,025	\$66,869	\$6,119	\$7,292	\$6,952	\$7,966	\$8,400	\$8,523	\$9,639	\$10,297
Fees – Actual	\$6,759	\$5,998	\$6,285	\$7,787	\$7,733	\$8,049	\$9,384	\$9,720	\$11,044	-
Fees as % of Dev. Budget	85.0%	80.5%	81.4%	96.8%	95.2%	84.7%	96.8%	100.4%	105.5%	-
STAFFING										
Staffing- Total	133.25	123.00	122.00	121.50	119.50	127.75	125.50	124.50	131.50	131.50
Staffing-Development*	112.75	101.75	101.75	101.25	99.10	106.40	104.40	104.25	112.25	112.25
% change, Dev.		-9.8%	0.0%	-0.5%	-2.1%	7.4%	-1.9%	-0.1%	7.7%	0.0%
WORKLOAD										
Res./Comm. Plan Review**	7,996	5,830	5,795	5,830	6,102	5,134	5,090	5,447	5,408	5,590
Planning Division**	3,729	3,450	4,109	6,365	6,472	10,441	9,020	9,065	8,887	9,774
Total	11,725	9,280	9,904	12,195	12,574	15,575	14,110	14,512	14,295	15,364
%change		-20.9%	6.7%	23.1%	3.1%	23.9%	-9.4%	2.8%	-1.5%	7.5%
Workload per dev. staff	104	91.2	97.3	120.4	126.9	146.4	135.2	139.2	127.3	136.9

*Includes NPDES

**Estimated in 1998, 2003 and 2004

Fees and Staffing

The County has had an informal policy that fees should cover the budget for development and permitting activities. As can be seen in the table, through the years fees have recovered in a range of 80.5% to 105.5% of the development and permitting related budget. Most importantly, for the last two years the revenues have exceeded the budget. It should be noted that these are the direct PALS cost internal to the Department. The Budget and Finance Department indicates that there is approximately an additional 8% of external County costs. Additionally, they indicate that PALS is a heavy user of the GIS system that could account for an additional \$250,000 to \$500,000 of cost. However, given the expansive and integrated nature of the County's GIS system, it would be extremely difficult to make this calculation.

As noted elsewhere in this report, we believe the development industry will accept fee increases in order to provide outstanding service. We have seen this proven in many communities. However, the history in Pierce County and in many communities, is that the industry gets the fee increase but without the improved service. We are told that this is exactly what happened in 1997. As can be seen in the table, fees increased from 81.4% of the budget in 97 to 96.8% of the budget in 98. However, Staff was actually reduced by .5 positions in 98 and was further reduced in 99 by 2.15 positions. The budget for 2001 and 2002 did increase slightly but staffing actually went down in both 2001 and 2002.

If PALS is to be successful, it is essential that a better approach to staffing and budget is essential.

10. Recommendation: PALS fees and budgets should follow the following guidelines:

- **The development and permitting activities should be 100% fee supported.**
- **Any excess fees should not go to the General Fund but should go into a reserve account for any downturn in development activity.**
- **Staffing levels and related budgets should correspond to workload. However, this will require a better way to calculate workload and staffing demands.**
- **Over time it may be appropriate to add the 8% external overhead to the fee structure. However, given the current need to improve PALS productivity and needed fee increases, any attempt to capture this 8% should be delayed until performance meets industry expectations. (Priority 2)**

Facility Upgrade Cost

As noted elsewhere in this report, there is a serious need to expand and upgrade PALS facilities. Although we have not made a calculation, the cost will likely be substantial. The County will need to decide if such facilities should be added to the fee structure or financed from the General Fund. As with overhead charges, if added to the fee structure, we suggest any new fees for facilities be delayed until service improves. At that time consideration could be given to a fee surcharge to cover facility cost, prorated over the life of a bond or similar financial approach.

11. Recommendation: Cost for PALS needed upgraded and expanded facilities should be absorbed by the General Fund until PALS service levels meet industry expectations. (Priority 1)

Budget Document

PALS part of the County's budget and the budget format is relatively unchanged through the years. We note several items that would make the budget a more meaningful document including:

- The four performance measures, while useful, are relatively limited in giving the true nature of PALS performance. The 1999 budget was actually more

extensive with eight performance objectives. We understand that the budget once contained many more measures but an effort was made to simplify to a few key measures. While all measures need not be included in the budget, consideration should be given to including some of the key performance measures included in this report.

- The document shows budget for the development process and NPDES but does not show actual expenditures for prior years. If the new approach to fees is accepted, the actual figures will be essential.
- The workload and service data should be substantially revised once PALS new data system is in place. The Development Center transaction statistic should be totally removed. It is simply a record of cash register transactions and has little to do with workload.
- For many years the budget document has included a page called “Budget Allocation Ratios” that includes five measures. These measures tend to mix different types of data (apples and oranges) and thus are not meaningful measures. They should be replaced with more meaningful measures.

12. Recommendation: The County should consider changes to the budget document as outlined above. (Priority 2)

Advance Planning

During the course of this study some policy makers, staff and customers suggested that the Advance Planning program is too large and some staff should be allocated to Current Planning. Since we were not under contract to review Advance Planning we cannot comment on this suggestion. We did in the course of our study interview the Advance Planning Director and review Advance Planning’s 2004 work program. This work program is an excellent approach and one we highly support. We understand that the program is shown to the County Executive and discussed with the Council but there is no official action or confirmation of the program.

The amount of planning a community wishes to undertake is normally a policy decision. As such, we normally recommend that an annual work program be officially adopted.

13. Recommendation: The County Executive and County Council should discuss the desirability of annually adopting an Advance Planning work program. (Priority 3)

Staffing

Staffing proposals are shown in Table 15. Staffing analysis is extremely complex. Throughout this report we have made calculations using whatever hard data was available. These kind of calculations are only one indicator of staffing needs. Judgments must be made on a variety of other issues such as:

- **Variables**
 - ✓ Competency levels of staff members
 - ✓ Automation
 - ✓ Approaches to peak seasons
 - ✓ Approach to customer service
 - ✓ Difficulty of measurement
 - ✓ Use of consultants, overtime and temporary staff.
- **Overstaffing Indicators**
 - ✓ Employees coming in late, leaving early, taking long lunch hours.
 - ✓ Employee boredom
 - ✓ Conducting reviews in excess of need.
- **Understaffing Indicators**
 - ✓ High turnover of staff
 - ✓ Burnout and stress leave
 - ✓ Employees complaining that they don't have enough time to complete their work
 - ✓ Excessive overtime
 - ✓ Poor maintenance of work areas and facilities

Using all of these factors and our own judgment we made the recommendations as summarized in Table 15. These are initial staff recommendations. Once in place, workload and performance should be monitored to adjust the staffing as necessary.

**Table 15
Staffing Proposals**

Function	As Calculated	Consultants Recommendation
Building Plans Examiners	1	1
Building Inspectors	10	4
Current Planners	5	3
Development Center	3	3
Development Engineering		
<i>CE III (Supervisor)</i>	1	1
<i>CE II and Tech III (Enforcement)</i>	2	2
<i>ET III (Inspectors)</i>	2	1
<i>CE I</i>	4	3
Resource Management	1	1
Assistant Director	1	1
Total	30	20
Professional Services and Extra Hire		\$400,000

C. CODE ENFORCEMENT

This study did not include an analysis of the County’s code enforcement program. However, in working with the development and permitting functions of PALS we noted that many of the staff are spending substantial amounts of time on code enforcement activities. Building code enforcement is now being handled by Building Safety staff while zoning enforcement is being performed by Code Enforcement. While development and permitting staff will always need to be somewhat involved in code enforcement as technical experts, there could be considerable efficiency in centralizing all the code enforcement activities in the Code Enforcement Section. We recognize that this move could have some impact on the County’s General Fund.

- 14.** ***Recommendation:*** PALS should conduct a study to determine if the code enforcement functions should all be centralized in the Code Enforcement Section. Additionally, the County should consider creating a code enforcement function that is broader than PALS. *(Priority 3)*

D. COMPLETE APPLICATIONS, VESTING AND 120-DAY RULE

There appears to be a certain amount of confusion in the County in relation to the concept of application completeness, vesting and the 120 day rule in the statutes.

Application Completeness and Vesting Statutes

The local understanding appears to be that a building permit application is considered “complete” when it is taken in but a land use application is determined to be “complete” after it is taken in and within 28 days. We have been unable to locate this distinction in the ordinances or statutes. The reason that this is important is that once an application is “complete,” it is vested under the regulations that existed at the time the application was declared “complete”. Currently there is a major bottleneck in the process at the Development Center. Part of this may be due to the staff feeling that they must declare building permit applications “complete” when they are taken in.

We were also told that this issue has been a major concern in the past by the development industry.

A number of statutes address this issue including:

RCW 58.17.033 – Division of Land

This state statute addresses the division of land and says:

“(1) A proposed division of land, as defined in RCW 58.17.020, shall be considered under the subdivision or short subdivision ordinance, and zoning or other land use control ordinances, in effect on the land at the time a fully completed application for preliminary plat approval of the subdivision, or short plat approval of the short subdivision, has been submitted to the appropriate county, city, or town official.

(2) The requirements for a fully complete application shall be defined by local ordinance.”

RCW 19.27.095 – Building Permits

This statute addresses building permits and says:

“(1) A valid and fully complete building permit application for a structure, that is permitted under the zoning or other land use control ordinances in effect on the date of the application shall be considered under the building permit ordinance in effect at the time of application, and the zoning or other land use control ordinances in effect on the date of application.

(2) The requirements for a fully completed application shall be defined by local ordinance but for any construction project costing more than five thousand dollars the application shall include, at a minimum:” The text that follows deals with addresses name of owner, contractor and similar data.

RCW 36.70B.070 – Project Permit Applications – and RCW 36.70B.020

This section applies to project permit applications. These are described in RCW 36.70B.020 as:

“(4) “Project permit” or “project permit application” means any land use or environmental permit or license required from a local government for a project action, including but not limited to building permits, subdivision, binding site plans, planned unit developments, conditional uses, shoreline substantial development permits, site plan review, permits or approvals required by critical area ordinances, site-specific rezones authorized by a comprehensive plan or subarea plan, but excluding the adoption or amendment of a comprehensive plan, subarea plan, or development regulations except as otherwise specifically included in this subsection.”

Project permit applications are then subject to:

“(1) Within twenty-eight days after receiving a project permit application, a local government planning pursuant to RCW 36.70A.040 shall mail or provide in person a written determination to the applicant, stating either:

(a) That the application is complete; or

(b) That the application is incomplete and what is necessary to make the application complete.”

“(2) A project permit application is complete for purposes of this section when it meets the procedural submission requirements of the local government and is sufficient for continued processing even though additional information may be required or project modifications may be undertaken subsequently. The determination of completeness shall not preclude the local government from requesting additional information or studies either at the time of the notice of completeness or subsequently if new information is required or substantial changes in the propose action occur.”

“(3) The determination of completeness may include the following as optional information:

(a) A preliminary determination of those development regulations that will be used for project mitigation;

(b) A preliminary determination of consistency, as provided under RCW 6.70B.040; or

(c) Other information the local government chooses to include.

“(4)(a) An application shall be deemed complete under this section if the local government does not provide a written determination to the applicant that the application is incomplete as provided in subsection (1)(b) of this section. “

“(b) Within fourteen days after an applicant has submitted to a local government additional information identified by the local government as being necessary for a complete application, the local government shall notify the applicant whether the application is complete or what additional information is necessary.”

County Development Regulations , Title 18.40.020, PCC

“B. Check for Complete Application. An application shall be considered complete when it contains the following:

1. The correct number of completed Department master and supplemental application forms signed by the applicant which contain a detailed description of the proposed land use, proposed impervious surface, and description of all existing and proposed improvements and easements;
2. The correct number of documents, plans, or maps identified in the applicable Development Regulation, on the Department Submittal Standards form or application, as appropriate for the proposed project;
3. For preliminary plats only a completed land survey of the perimeter of the site;
4. A completed State Environmental Policy Act checklist, if required;
5. Payment of all applicable fees. In the event of insufficient funds on a draft, the application shall be deemed null and void; and
6. Proposed applications shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and applicable development regulations.

Why Is Completeness Important?

1. Completeness is likely important for many applicants since the statutes declare the project vested under current regulations once declared complete. This was evidently the case in the recent rush for building permits when the new International Code went in to effect. We can speculate that it will also be an issue should the Directions Package be adopted. The concern we have is item 6 in the County ordinance for completeness that says, “proposed applications shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and applicable development regulations.” We suggest that it is difficult, at best, to make this determination

at the counter. As such we recommend that this section be modified to simply determine if the proposed use is an allowed use in the Comprehensive Plan.

15. Recommendation: Section 6 of Chapter 18.40.020B, PCC should be modified to simply determine if the proposed use is an allowed use in the Comprehensive Plan. (Priority 2)

2. A second possible concern is clarifying what action constitutes completeness. We believe that the current practice of declaring building permits complete at the time of application is appropriate. Under the new procedures recommended in the Current Planning section of this report, we are also recommending a more formal intake of planning permits. As such, we see no reason why these permits cannot also be declared complete at time of application acceptance.

16. Recommendation: The County ordinance should specify that for purposes of completeness related to vesting of regulations, all applications that are accepted for processing, both building and planning, are declared complete. (Priority 2)

3. A third possible concern is how completeness relates to the County asking for additional information after the project is declared complete. In some states additional information may not be requested. However, in Washington under 36.70B.070 the County may still ask for additional information after the project is declared complete. As such, this concern is a moot point.
4. The fourth concern relates to statutory requirements for action on projects within 120 days from application completeness as described below. However, we believe this point is also moot since there are many exceptions in the statute to the 120 rule and there is no penalty if the County does not meet the timeline. In fact, many projects in the County do exceed the 120 days.

120-Day Rule

RCW 36.70B.080 says:

“The time periods for local government actions on specific complete project permit applications or project types should not exceed one hundred twenty days, unless the local government makes written findings that a specified amount of additional time is needed for processing of specific complete project permit applications or project types.”

The County’s interpretation of this ordinance is in Title 18. Section 18.100.010 indicates that the “Director or Examiner shall issue a notice of final decision on a

permit within 120 days, of County review time, after the Department accepts a complete application as provided in Section 18.40.020.” Additionally, Section 18.100.020 makes it clear that the 120-day timeframe excludes any time that the applicant is using to provide additional information.

For many permit types, we believe 120 days is too long. Additionally, there is no penalty for violating the 120-day rule. The main value may be using it as a guideline in making comparisons amongst communities. However, even this can be misleading because of the different ways communities handle completeness, that is, when the clock starts.

In the final analysis, we believe the 120-day criteria is not a significant measure and we recommend other measures as found in this report.

E. DATA

A problem with PALS performance measure relates to the way data is used and discussed. Some of this may relate to how data was collected in the old DCIS system or the type of reports that have been requested. It appears that PALS new permitting system will allow different forms of tabulations. Examples of the data problems include:

- **Age of DCIS Applications at Time of Approval/Denial Report**

This is a standard quarterly report that PALS has been using for sometime. It keys off the State requirements that permits be approved or denied within 120 days. The report shows that between 2001 and 2004, PALS has been meeting the 120-day requirement between 79.82% and 92.41% of the time. On the surface this sounds like good performance. However, a more realistic view of the data presents a different picture. The data for the first Quarter of 2004 is shown in Table 16.

Table 16
Age Of DCIS Applications At Time Of Approval Or Denial, Q1 2004

Days	Number of Permits
Same Day	2,476
1 to 30 Days	1,317
31 –120 Days	624
121-180 Days	154
181 – 365 Days	297
Greater than 365 Days	297
Total	5,098
Percent of the Approval/Denials that are granted within 120 days of Application	86.64%

This would appear to show that 86.64% of applications are processed in 120 days. However, the data mixes permits that should not be mixed in such as over-the-counter permits and a variety of other very short-term administrative permits. For example, if the same day permits are removed the percent drops to 74%. An even more likely way to look at the data would be to drop out also the 1 to 30 day data that drops the performance level to 48%.

- Another form of data confusion is the Development Center Transaction data that is included in each of PALS budget documents. This is nothing more than a cash register transaction and has little to do with PALS performance.
- DCIS provided a report of all application received in 2003. In analyzing this data we found data listed for applications or processes that the County no longer uses, for example it shows 106 rezoning cases when in actuality there were none in 2003 since the County no longer uses this process.
- Other issues include:
 - ✓ Voided and cancelled applications show up in all reports.
 - ✓ The wrong application type can be entered at the time of application and not corrected by the reviewing departments.
 - ✓ Inconsistent data entry procedures skew application volumes.
 - ✓ The computer automatically cancels applications if the applicant does not respond within the required timeframe outlined by Title 18. These applications may or may not be revived by the Current Planning Section.
- We also suspect that the time records that staff put into the permit system are not accurate. Part of the problem may be the difficulty of using the system and

also having a separate payroll system. The PALS+ wish list includes integrating the time system into PALS+ and also integrating this with the payroll system. Once pay is related to accurate time recording there will be an incentive to input complete data into the system. We understand that Public Works is already conducting an experiment as related to the payroll system.

17. *Recommendation: PALS and the County should give high priority to integrating the staff time system with the payroll system and incorporating this into PALS+. (Priority 2)*

18. *Recommendation: PALS should work to resolve the data questions raised in this report. (Priority 1)*

F. OFFICE SPACE

PALS works out of substandard office space that impacts the efficiency of staff and staff morale. If improvements are to be made in PALS, it is essential that the office space issue is addressed. The current space problem is one of the most severe we have seen in our studies. Specific issues and examples follow.

Development Center

The Development Center is too small and crowded for the amount of activity. There is not enough counter space and the counters provide no semblance of privacy. There are inadequate sit down counters. The self-help area is very crowded. We are not familiar with the many development centers in the general area. However, the County may wish to look at good examples include two of our clients. Kent, although a much smaller facility, has an outstanding customer service feature. Clackamas County, Oregon has excellent counters and an excellent customer waiting area.

Office and Work Spaces in PALS

- Many workspaces are inadequate and sub-standard in size. This is based on our observations and comments from most staff. If staff is to be expected to perform quality work, their work area needs to be adequate.
- The Director's office is much smaller than usual and does not lend itself to small work meetings. The Current Planning Director has to share an office with another employee – she needs a confidential space. Some of the technical staff have to lay out plans on the floor because of inadequate work spaces.

- In engineering, there is not enough room to comfortably open and work on a set of plans. We observed several Civil Engineers opening plans on the floor and bending over to work on them. There is little if any storage space for plans in progress. Each engineer should have adequate work area plus a dedicated plans storage area. There should be an open area plan table for staff to use when conferring on a plan.
- In the Building Inspection Division, Plans Examiners have compressed space that is hard to turn around in and not a comfortable area to do their work. Inspectors also have inadequate space in their workstations.
- **Number of Work Spaces**
This report recommends some additional staff but the current spaces are not adequate for this added staff.
- **Conference Rooms**
Many of the conference rooms are not sound proof and have poor air circulation, probably not meeting the requirements of the building code.

The solution would appear to be either a major remodel and expansion of space in the existing building or a new facility. Additional analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

19. Recommendation: Properly sized and standard facilities should be made available to PALS. The County should retain a qualified space expert to conduct a study and recommend options to relieve the existing overcrowded workspace conditions. (Priority 1)

G. OVERTIME

A small amount of overtime is budgeted each year in the PALS budget. The amount for 2004 was \$24,380 for the entire Department. The use of overtime may be requested by an employee and is approved by the supervisor. Overtime is then paid at 1.5 times salary or it may also be taken as comp. time at the same 1.5 rate. Employees are only allowed to book 40 hours of comp. time at one time.

In addition to budgeted amounts, overtime can also be spent using salary savings.

There can also be additional overtime when applicants agree to pay for expedited services. They sign a contract agreeing to pay \$66 per hour and we are told this is going to be raised to \$100 per hour. When approved, the Budget and Finance Department in effect adds these dollars to the Departments overtime account. This is an appropriate process.

Given the performance problems in PALS, it would be useful to substantially increase the annual overtime budget. As a first step we recommend that the annual amount be increased to \$100,000.

20. Recommendation: PALS overtime budget for 2005 should be increased to \$100,000. (Priority 3)

In order to clear up the backlog, we also have suggested that all staff be allowed a certain amount of overtime to help clear up the backlog, as discussed in Chapter I.

There is no internal PALS policy on how much overtime an employee may work. High overtime usage in 2003 included three employees in Building and seven employees in Development Engineering with overtime hours as follows:

- In Building 162, 315, and 387 hours per year.
- In Development Engineering 202, 297, 330, 440, 689, 716, and 910 hours per year.

The overtime usage in Development Engineering is the equivalent of the salary for roughly three employees. If this repeats year after year, it could be less expensive to hire full time employees.

Most employees in Pierce County actually work approximately 45 weeks per year. This means 162 hours of overtime would average 3.6 hours per week. An employee with 910 hours would average 20 hours per week. Given the backlog of permits in PALS, one could argue that so long as resources are available, employees should be encouraged to work overtime. On the other hand, there is a point of diminishing returns when working overtime undoubtedly impacts performance on the non-overtime hours. As such, the Department should develop an overtime guideline. For example, a policy might authorize no more than 10 hours in any given week for no more than two weeks in a row with an annual usage not to exceed 225 hours.

21. Recommendation: PALS should adopt overtime rules. (Priority 3)

H. PALS ON PALS

A PALS department wide staff retreat agreed that Department morale and the need for team building were key priorities of the Department. As an outgrowth of these discussions, the Morehead Associates consultants were hired to conduct a confidential survey of employee opinions.

As part of the contract negotiations for this audit, a discussion was held concerning how the Morehead study related to similar studies that Zucker Systems often uses in its studies. We suggested that the Morehead study be used instead of our study. The methodology of the Morehead study is good and in fact supplies more data than is possible with the approach we generally use. PALS should be complemented for launching the study.

Once the Morehead survey results were tallied, the various divisions and sections of PALS were charged with reviewing the material and coming up with action plans. These teams were assisted by a professional facilitator from the County's Human Resource Department as well as three facilitators selected from the Department staff. This group at first met weekly with the Departments senior management but currently meets roughly once a month.

Some of the positive findings from the survey included:

- 98% favorable – I like the kind of work I do.
- 98% favorable – I enjoy working with my coworkers.
- 93% favorable I am satisfied with the job security provided by this organization.
- 92% favorable – This organization supports my efforts to balance my work life and personal life.
- 92% favorable – When appropriate, I can act on my own without asking for approval.

The highest priority targets for improvement from this survey along with the % unfavorable included:

- 69% unfavorable - This organization rewards employees for high performance.
- 63% unfavorable - I am satisfied with the level of communication within this organization.
- 55% unfavorable - Different work units work well together in this organization.
- 54% unfavorable - There is effective communication between different levels within this organization.
- 54% unfavorable - My work unit is adequately staffed.
- 52% unfavorable - Senior Management creates a work culture that motivates employees.

These scores all match our observations made during the course of the study and will be addressed in this report.

The various teams are now preparing action plans designed to address issues uncovered in the surveys. We strongly support these efforts. However, as a general observation, we believe that many of the action plans do not get to the root of organizational problems. Additionally, we have received a substantial amount of confidential information that indicates that many staff feel that management does not have a true commitment to implementation of the results.

22. Recommendation: Management throughout PALS should maintain their commitment to the PALS on PALS action plans. The Human Resource facilitator and the PALS facilitators should provide additional candid feedback to management. (Priority 2)

I. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

A good development and permitting system requires good performance measures along with a measurement system and monitoring system. In 2001 the County's Performance Audit committee hired a consultant to advise on performance measures. PALS volunteered to be used as a test for some of this research and should be complimented for this effort. This effort resulted in a Corporate Balanced Scorecard. While somewhat useful, overall the effort did not produce the kinds of performance measures that are needed.

While there are many performance measures in the County's development processes, in some cases they are not well documented or should be changed. We have focused only on measures impacting development and permitting and will not comment on code enforcement or advance planning measures. Detailed measures, as appropriate, will be discussed in the related division or section.

A variety of measures and our comments are included in Table 17. We have indicated which of these measures came from the 2004 Budget, the 1999 Budget, and the Balanced Scorecard.

Table 17
Performance Measures

ALL DIVISIONS	
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>Return 100% of all phone calls and emails the same day received.</i>
Measure	Online permits will increase from 84 permits per year to 300 by end of 2004.
Source	2004 Budget
Consultant Comments	We like this measure and it should be updated for 2005.
Suggested Measure	<i>Online permits should increase to 600 by the end of 2005</i>
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete comprehensive first-time plan check on 98% of all project reviews.</i>
BUILDING PERMITS	
Measure	Complete review of 85% of the residential building plan submittals within 2 weeks of the application date.
Source	1999 Budget and Balanced Scorecard
Consultant Comments	This is a good measure with some slight editing.
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete first review of 95% of custom residential plan review within 10 working day of application submittal and second reviews within 5 working days.</i>
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete review of 95% of all residential base plans the same day as submitted.</i>
Measure	Complete review of 85% of the commercial building plan reviews within 4 weeks of the application date.
Source	1999 Budget
Consultant Comments	This is a good measure with some slight editing.
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete first review of 95% of the commercial building plan reviews within 15 working days of the application date, second reviews in 10 working days and third reviews in 5 working days.</i>
Measure	Perform a quality control check, including customer feedback of the building code plan review and inspection services for a minimum of 1% of the building permits issued per year.
Source	1999 Budget and Balanced Scorecard
Consultant Comments	We suggest customer feedback surveys every two years.
Suggested Measure	<i>Perform a quality control check, building code plan review and inspection services for a minimum of 1% of the building permits issued per year.</i>
Measure	Perform 93% of the scheduled residential and commercial building inspections during the next working day.
Source	1999 Budget
Consultant Comments	This is a good measure. We suggest the standard be 95%.
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete 95% of building inspections during the next working day after requested.</i>

Table 17 continued

CURRENT PLANNING	
Measure	Complete review of 90% of all initial submittals within 30 days.
Source	1999 Budget
Consultant Comments	Mixes apples and oranges.
Suggested Measure	<i>Give first response to 95% of applicants within 20 working days.</i>
Measure	Complete the review of 90% of the projects submitted within 120 days.
Source	1999 Budget
Consultant Comments	Mixes apples and oranges.
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete processing of 95% of applications as follows:</i>
	<i>Administrative permits without SEPA - 45 working days.</i>
	<i>Hearing Officer without SEPA or LUAC - 90 working days.</i>
	<i>Hearing Officer with SEPA or LUAC - 120 working days.</i>
	<i>Other Administrative Assignments - 100% in 15 working days.</i>
	<i>Staff reports with conditions to all interested parties - 100% in 5 working days before hearing.</i>
DEVELOPMENT CENTER	
Measure	On average, an applicant will spend no longer than one hour waiting in our lobby and finish applying for any permit within 1 hour of being served.
Source	2004 Budget
Consultant Comments	Averages should not be used for this type of measure as they can be very misleading. Additionally, a 1-hour wait time is too long.
Suggested Measure	<i>95% of customers shall wait no longer than 20 minutes before being assisted.</i>
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>90% of all requests for information and quick processing shall be completed within an average of 30 minutes from the time the transaction starts.</i>
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>90% of all scheduled appointments shall be concluded with 90 minutes from the time they start.</i>
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	<i>All customers request an appointment shall be seen within 48 hours of making the request.</i>
DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING	
Measure	Overdue engineering reviews for land use permits have averaged 60 calendar days in 2003. We will shrink the average overdue by 25% by the end of 2004.
Source	2004 Budget
Consultant Comments	The measure gives a suggestion for improvement but does not actually set the performance target.
Suggested Measure	<i>Complete 95% of first plan review within 20 working days and corrections within 10 working days.</i>

Table 17 continued

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Complete 95% of first reviews within 20 working days and second reviews within 10 working days.
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Wetland Review Applications:
	<i>SF Verification/Categorization/Delineation - 95% in 15 working days.</i>
	<i>General Verification/Categorization (non residential) - 95% in 20 working days.</i>
	<i>Analysis Report - 90% for first response in 20 working days and 10 working days for second.</i>
	<i>Non Compensatory Mitigation Plan - 90% in 30 working days.</i>
HEALTH DEPARTMENT	
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Complete first review for 95% of private sewage disposal systems within 20 working days of submittal and second reviews within 10 working days.
PUBLIC WORKS - SEWER	
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Complete 95% of sewer line extensions and sewer plan reviews in 15 working days with 7 days for second reviews.
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Complete 95% of tenant improvement reviews over the counter or within 5 working days.
PUBLIC WORKS - TRAFFIC ENGINEERING	
Source	New Measure
Suggested Measure	Complete 95% of first reviews for most cases in 10 working days and in 15 working days for complex cases. Second review should be completed in 5 working days.

Comprehensive First-Time Reviews

A standard complaint from customers is the adding of new requirements during a second or third review. At times, changes in the plans do call for new requirements. However, often the problem is simply the lack of a comprehensive review the first time. In order to accomplish comprehensive first time reviews, it will require a clear performance standard, additional staff training, and a monitoring system. We suggest that supervisors initially sample 10% of all second reviews as a way to enforce this standard. Once staff performs well, the percent of reviews checked can be reduced. This recommendation should apply to all departments involved in any aspect of permitting and development.

- 23.** ***Recommendation:** First-time plan reviews should be comprehensive. New items should not be added on subsequent checks unless project changes dictate new conditions. This standard should apply to all departments involved in development or permitting. (Priority 1)*

J. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The applicants in Pierce County need to be better informed on process requirements and design criteria in order to be better prepared before applying for permits. A program designed to provide public education should be initiated. It could consist of:

- Presentations by all divisions or sections such as the Development Center, Building, Current Planning, Development Engineering, Health, Resource Management, Public Works Sewer and Transportation and others. Presentations and materials should be presented in public meetings that are widely publicized.
- A monthly information bulletin that has a section for the Development Center, Current Planning, Building, Resource Management and Development Engineering. Each function should contribute to the bulletin about activity and issues of the day. This could be widely distributed and also posted on the website.
- E-mail lists should be created for all professionals active in the County as well as citizen groups and special interest groups. Those on the email list should receive the monthly newsletter by email. They should also be contacted for any pending ordinance changes and notified of any new code interpretations.

24. *Recommendation: PALS should develop a public information program. (Priority 2)*

K. SICK LEAVE

County employees are provided one day per month of sick leave, which includes illness, injury, family care, and family medical leave. Table 18 shows average sick leave use for the County and for PALS in 2003, and excludes employees hired in 2003 due to not being eligible for sick leave during much of the year. (New employees are eligible for sick leave after six months.)

**Table 18
Sick Leave Time Taken for 2003**

Category	Mean Average	Median
County	71.64 hours or approx. 9 days	63 hours or approx. 8 days
PALS	82.2 hours or approx 10.3 days	74 hours or approx. 9.3 days

NOTE: County employees work 7, 7.5, and 8-hour days, and the exact number of days is not easy to calculate. Most PALS employees work 8 hours per day, while management is paid for 7 hours per day. (Source: Pierce County HR analyst)

Sick leave must be examined on an individual basis. As a rule of thumb, there is cause for attention when a departments total exceeds the Countywide average or when an employee exceeds more than ten days or 80 hours per year.

We examined PALS records for 2003 and found that 50 of the 117 employees exceeded the 80-hour figure, or 43% of the employees analyzed. (For the first half of 2004, we found a similar percentage of employees who had taken more than 40 hours of sick leave.) We also analyzed the 2003 averages by PALS section, as shown in Table 19.

**Table 19
2003 Sick Leave by Average Hours for PALS Sections**

Division	Mean Average Sick Leave	Median Sick Leave
Building	73	63
Current Planning	69	65
Development Center	98	97
Development Engineering	60	57
Resource Management	77	74

NOTE: Based on analysis of preliminary data and does not exclude 2003 hires.

Based on this analysis it would be reasonable for PALS' management to examine the data in more detail with a particular focus on the Development Center.

25. Recommendation: PALS management should review sick leave data and monitor usage as appropriate. (Priority 3)

L. STAFFING ANALYSIS

Staffing analysis is presented in various parts of this report. Table 20 shows the base data that will be used in this analysis. Note that we have taken training time as a deduction since we believe that PALS has major training needs.

Table 20
Billable Hours Per Employee

Category	Building	Current Planning	Development Center	Development Engineering	Resource Management
Total Hours (40/week)	2,080	2,080	2,080	2,080	2,080
Holidays (12days/yr.)	-96	-96	-96	-96	-96
Sick Leave	-73	-69	-98	-60	-77
Vacation*	-100	-138	-133	-143	-117
Subtotal	1,811	1,777	1,753	1,781	1,790
Break Time (30 min./day)	-113	-111	-110	-111	-112
Training (2 Hrs./week)	-91	-89	-88	-89	-90
Total Billable Hours	1,607	1,577	1,555	1,581	1,588

*Based on actual averages for 2003

M. TECHNOLOGY

Technology can play an important part in addressing PALs customer service needs and assisting in staff efficiency. Specific items are discussed below.

Field Computers

State-of-the-art hand-held computers are being used in many communities for Building Inspectors to receive inspection assignments, review permit applications and data, and record their actions. There are systems available using wireless technology and equipment that can upload and download information.

The wireless systems will actually receive permit data from the permit files upon request when the inspector is on site. The data loading system could contain active permits if the storage capacity is adequate.

The following equipment is available:

- Palm hand held computers
- Pen based computers
- Laptop computers

- Radio-type “Pac Set” computers

It is advisable to use equipment that is durable, impact resistant, and capable of carrying substantial data. The system needs to be compatible with the permit system.

Currently, permit history is provided to Building Inspectors on a computer printout after the inspection call is received through an Inspection Voice Response System. The Inspector writes results of the inspection on the printout form and submits it to the office on the following day with notes reflecting their action. An office assistant types the Inspectors findings into the permit system.

Use of hand-held field computers will reduce paperwork substantially and bring the process closer to a paperless environment.

In addition to use by Building Inspectors there may be application for other PALS functions including Development Engineering Inspections and Code Enforcement. Inspectors in Public Works and Health can also take advantage of such a system.

26. Recommendation: Install and implement a Field Inspectors Hand-Held Computer System that is compatible with the new permit system. (Priority 2)

Geographic Information System

The County has an excellent GIS system that is continually being improved and expanded. There is a countywide commitment to data sharing with currently over 600 data sets and 25 users. New aerial photography is added every three years. Also, some eight cities, fire districts and a surveying firm subscribe to the County system. This allows PALS to see abutting data that is useful. The popular ESRI software programs are used. There is also a County View system that the County created. GIS is primarily funded out of the County’s General Fund without allocations to individual departments or functions. According to GIS staff such allocations would be very difficult due to the integration of the data. However, as a general estimate, PALS support could be as high as \$500,000 per year.

PALS is responsible for a number of data layers with several GIS specialists located in the Advance Planning division. These costs are absorbed by PALS.

Overall, PALS is a heavy user of GIS and has generally and appropriately been aggressive in this area. Possible issue areas include:

- **County View**

Because County View can be difficult to use, GIS staff and PALS created a program called Quick View which is a critical areas checklist. This can be

particularly useful at the counter as well as for general research and is more efficient than County View. For whatever reason, some PALS staff continue to use County View. This could relate to a lack of familiarity and training.

27. Recommendation: PALS should make clear to staff the advantages of Quick View and provide additional training as necessary. (Priority 3)

▪ **Addressing**

PALS is responsible for addressing which is a needed function for data systems and GIS. According to GIS staff there is sometimes a delay in getting information to the appropriate parties. GIS staff are prepared to work on a business process to help PALS in this function.

28. Recommendation: PALS should work with GIS staff to solve any concerns in relation to the addressing function. (Priority 2)

▪ **Plats**

New plats need to be added to the database and GIS system. This process would be facilitated if final plats were required to be submitted electronically. Since virtually all engineers and surveyors today work electronically, many communities have now required electronic plats.

29. Recommendation: Following discussion with the industry, the County should consider requiring electronic final plat submittal. (Priority 2)

Optical Imaging

Plan storage takes up lots of space in offices that are already over crowded. One of the current state of the art processes to minimize storage space is Optical Imaging. This consists of scanning equipment to load plans and store them in the permit computer system for retrieval. Equipment needed would be scanners that are capable of entering large plan sheets, and a system that will print them on retrieval in a readable form. A major asset of such a program is easy access of files from remote terminals. While initially this system should be installed in PALS, similar systems should be used by Public Works and Health.

30. Recommendation: Install and use an optical imaging system to allow storage and ready retrieval of plans and documents. (Priority 2)

Permitting System

PALS is in the midst of converting its permitting system from DCIS to PALS+. This is a good approach and a much needed improvement that can be particularly useful in the implementation of this report. According to PALS staff the current schedule and budget are as shown in Table 21.

**Table 21
PALS+ Schedule and Budget**

Development Milestones	Was	Now
Online Permit information Internet, Requirement gathering starts		
User Developers Testing, testing starts		
Deng Testing, testing starts		
Production phase 1, deliver	Dec 2003	June 2004
Phase 2 Bldg, Requirements gathering starts	Dec 2003	June 2004
IVR PASS conversion	Dec 2003	July 2004
Phase 3 Fire, Requirements gathering starts	March 2004	Sept 2004
Phase 4 Planning, Requirements gathering starts	March 2004	Jan 2005
Phase 5 Resource Mgt, Requirements gathering starts	June 2004	April 2005
Phase 6 Utilities, Requirements gathering starts	Sept 2004	July 2005
Phase 6 Health ?, Requirements gathering starts	Sept 2004	?
Estimated Expenditures for 2004		
Contract Programmer	\$120,000	
Cash Register	\$10,000	
Plotter	\$10,000	
Backfill 2 User Developers for third year	\$170,000	
Total	\$310,000	

While there have been some delays in implementation, this is not unusual for a system of this type. Staff is also concerned about the slowness of the system. We were told that this is due to converting all of the old DCIS files to the new system which will take about a year to complete.

In our experience, systems of this type typically have some or all of the following problems:

- They are under-funded.
- Once the initial system is in place, additional useful add-ons are not incorporated.
- Needed corrections are slow in coming.
- There is inadequate staff training.
- Staff and policy makers expect the system to solve all problems in the organization that the system was not designed to solve.

31. Recommendation: The County should continue to support PALS+ with at a minimum the expenditures shown in Table 21. (Priority 1)

One of the key features of PALS+ is the ability to tabulate data for management purposes. In order for this to be successful, data entered into the system must be properly coded. As pointed out elsewhere in this report, this was a major issue in the DCIS system. We are not in a position to solve all the data entry problems but these must be addressed if PALS+ is to be successful.

Once data entry problems are solved, it will be possible using PALS+ to write detailed specifications for management reports. This has been a key problem in PALS. PALS has a lot of data but some of it is unreliable and managers are not using the data that is available to make organizational changes. Management reports should include:

- A clear distinction between County time and applicant time.
- A consistent way to code and count activities. For example, each preliminary plat should be counted as one project, not multiple projects.
- Staff turnaround times should be recorded for the sub-specialists. For example, on a specific building permit, how long did Current Planning's review take, Development Engineering's review, Resource Management's review and Building's review.
- Performance standards should be set for all parts of the process and for each specialist. Weekly or monthly reports should list all projects that have not met the performance standards, i.e. exception reports.
- Summary reports by month and year should be available and related to the performance standards. Reports should list the number of applications, what percent met the standard (for example 95% will be processed in 30 days) and the longest that did not meet the standard.

32. Recommendation: PALS management should prepare detailed specifications for data entry and management reports for PALS+. (Priority 1)

We asked the technical staff working on PALS+ for their wish list on upgrades. These are shown in Table 22.

**Table 22
PALS+ Wish List**

High Priority
Budget item to replace 1/3 of the computers each year with allocations for server upgrades and other misc. items.
Additional IT support staff (one person to help Ed).
Expand types of permits/services that can be done on the Internet (base plan permits, time extensions etc.).
Modify PALS+ to make it functional in the field when no connection is available (field use).
Incorporate file/plan check in/out into PALS+.
Wireless access to our network for staff in the permit lobby with tablet PC's they can bring with them when called to the counter.
Wireless access in the lobby for our customers (security must be addressed).
Timecard integration into PALS+
Medium Priority
Imaging system to store paper submittals (integrated with PALS+).
Integrate the cash register with PALS+
Permit kiosks in Lowe's/Home Depot to get permits that are available online and other info.
Integrate PALS+ with Groupwise (our e-mail and calendar software).
Low Priority
Convert PALS+ to a web-browser based application.
Establish a preferred customer system with benefits.
Enhance the inspection scheduling system.
Internet access to getting in line at the permit counter.

The items listed in Table 22 are good examples of useful enhancements to PALS+. We generally agree with the priorities except we would move the Wireless proposals in the High Priority category to Medium Priority.

33. ***Recommendation:*** PALS should establish cost estimate for PALS+ improvements and incorporate these into future budget requests. High Priority items listed in Table 22 should be added to future budgets. *(Priority 1)*

Telephone/Voice Mail

The telephone can be a major time saver for the applicant. Why should a customer drive to the County building in order to have a question answered when it could be done over the telephone? We believe the office should have adequate telephone lines

and staff so the customer does not get a busy signal and the phones should be adequately staffed. PALS currently has one staff member staffing the primary phone in queries. We are recommending two people for this function. The best current technology tells the caller how long the wait will be for a person and then gives the option to leave a phone number to be called back in the same order as called.

Contemporary phone systems also emphasize direct phone lines for all employees. While only a few numbers will be listed for general public information, once a customer is working with a staff person, direct phone calls should be used. This saves operator time and frustration for the customer. The direct phone numbers should be listed on the employee's business card as well as on the website.

Employees need to be encouraged to answer their phone during major parts of the day. Some non-access time is appropriate for concentrated work time but this should not be abused. When the phone is not answered the call should go into voice mail. However in all cases there needs to be a feature where the caller can proceed to a live operator or other staff member. If the employee is going to be out of the office or on vacation, the message on the voice mail message should so indicate.

The biggest complaint we received concerning PALS phone system is that phone calls are not returned or not returned on a timely basis. Many communities have adopted a 24-hour rule, asking all staff to return phone call within 24 hours. We have not found these systems effective. First of all, in today's fast moving times, customers expect faster service. Secondly, these systems are hard to monitor and enforce. We favor a system that requires all phone calls and voice mails to be returned the day received. In other words, no staff goes home at night until they have returned all their phone calls.

34. Recommendation: All development and permitting departments and divisions should adopt a policy that all phone calls be returned the same day received. (Priority 1)

35. Recommendation: All development and permitting departments and divisions should install a modern phone features for good customer service. (Priority 2)

Website

The Pierce County Internet Home Page has been reviewed. It has some impressive service as follows:

- Plan Check status for each permit application can be accessed on the website.
- Inspection activity can be accessed on the website.

- Permit information is provided on this website.
- Provides for some e-government permits

E-government allows permit applications and plans to be transmitted through the Internet. PALS has started this service and we are very supportive of its being expanded.

36. *Recommendation: Continue to expand the E-Government Service to allow applicants to apply for permits and submit plans through the Internet. (Priority 2)*

VI. BUILDING SAFETY DIVISION

A. PROFILE

The Building Safety Division reviews building plans and conducts inspections for conformance to adopted building codes. The Division also conducts code enforcement for building codes compliance, maintain records, and issue Certificates of Use and Occupancy.

Authority

The following ordinances and regulations are enforced by the Building Safety Division:

- International Building Code
- Pierce County Building Code Adoption Ordinance

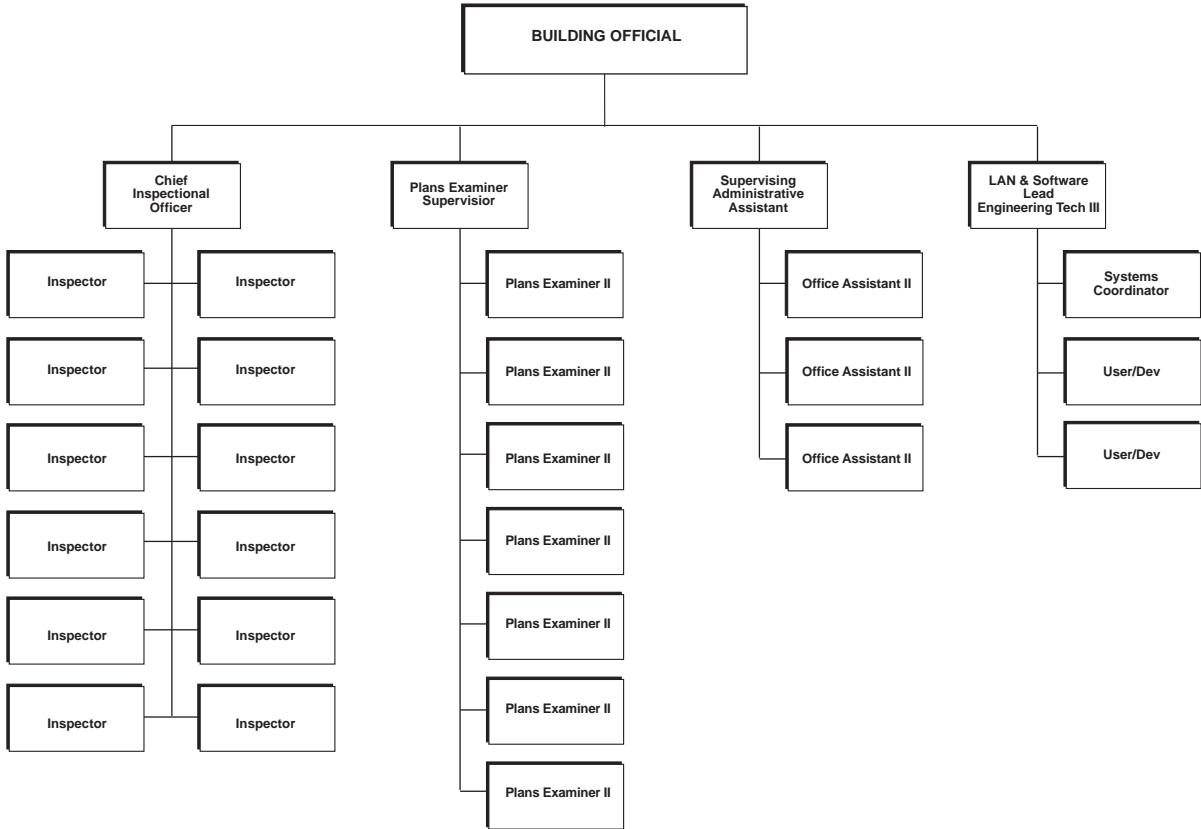
Organization

The organization of the Building Safety Division is shown in Figure 10 and Table 23.

Table 23
Staff Assignments – Building Safety Division

Position	Number of Positions	Responsibilities
Building Official	1	Manages, directs, and oversees all Building Department policies, and activities. Maintains the Building Codes. Reports to the Planning and Land Services Director.
Building Inspection Supervisor	1	Supervises Building Inspections. Reports to the Building Official.
Plans Examiner Supervisor	1	Supervises Building Plans Plan Check. Reports to the Building Official.
Supervising Administrative Assistant	1	Supervises all Building Division clerical functions. Reports to the Building Official.
Engineering Technician III	1	Lead position for Lan Network and Software. Reports to the Building Official
Building Inspectors	12	Conducts building inspections. Reports to the Building Inspector Supervisor
Plans Examiners	7 + 1 extra hire	Conducts plan check of plans submitted with permit applications. Reports to the Plans Examiner Supervisor.
Clerk Typists	3	Performs clerical functions that are the responsibility of Building Safety Division. Reports to the Supervising Administrative Assistant.
System Coordinator	1	Works on operations of the Department Computer Permit System. Reports to the Engineering Technician III.
User Developers	1	Development and operation of Department Computer Permit System. Reports to the Engineering Technician III.

**Figure 10
Organization Chart – Building Safety Division**



Permit Activity

The Building Permit activity in Pierce County during the past five years is shown in Table 24. The activity for 2003 of 7,284 permits closely matches the five year average of 7,308 permits.

Table 24
Building Permit Activity

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	5-year average
New Commercial Buildings						
Apartment Bldgs	25	37	11	20	14	21.4
Agricultural Bldgs	0	2	0	2	2	1.2
Bulkhead/Retaining Wall	13	8	15	16	10	12.4
Bank	3	0	2	2	0	1.4
Church	8	7	6	5	1	5.4
Deck/Dock/Shed	17	21	14	12	16	16.0
Fire Station	1	1	1	1	1	1.0
Garage Residential	58	109	56	2	5	46.0
Service Station/Repair Garage	6	13	5	7	5	7.2
Commercial Gate	9	8	21	22	18	15.6
Store – Grocery	2	1	3	0	1	1.4
Industrial Plant	5	2	0	3	1	2.2
Multi Family – Wood	1	8	14	0	0	4.6
Office	14	18	12	19	10	14.6
Other Structure	76	81	88	71	98	82.8
Theaters / Recreational Building	3	1	2	2	4	2.4
Store – Retail	14	11	13	4	9	10.2
Restaurant	6	3	6	4	4	4.6
Additions – Commercial						
Church	4	0	2	1	6	2.6
Agricultural	0	1	0	0	0	0.2
Commercial Gate	1	0	0	0	0	0.2
Store – Grocery	1	0	1	0	0	0.4
Industrial Plant	2	2	0	0	0	0.8
Office	2	1	6	5	0	2.8
Other Structure	1	2	1	1	2	1.4
Store – Retail	3	0	1	0	0	0.8
Restaurant	2	1	1	1	1	1.2
School – K12	6	0	0	0	0	1.2
Warehouse / Barn	2	0	0	2	2	1.2
Deck/Dock/Shed	0	2	3	1	0	1.2
Garage – Residential	0	1	0	1	1	0.6
Service Station Repair Garage	0	2	1	1	1	1.0
Apartment	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
Canopy	0	0	0	0	2	0.4
Public Parking Garage	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
School Higher Education	0	0	0	0	3	0.6

Table 24 continued

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	5-year average
Remodel – Commercial						
Apartment	3	2	6	2	6	3.8
Bulkhead/Retaining Wall	1	0	0	0	0	0.2
Church	6	2	0	5	7	4.0
Deck/Dock/Shed	1	1	6	4	3	3.0
Service station/Repair garage	3	0	0	1	6	2.0
Industrial plant	1	2	0	2	0	1.0
Jail	1	1	0	0	0	0.4
Medical Office	2	0	1	2	4	1.8
Multi Family – Wood	1	0	0	0	0	0.2
Office	23	19	31	19	26	23.6
Other Structure	27	12	27	15	20	20.2
Store – Retail	23	16	11	10	17	15.4
Restaurant	10	10	4	13	9	9.2
School K-12	22	6	1	11	4	8.8
Warehouse / Barn	6	6	8	3	7	6.0
Fire Station	0	3	3	2	1	1.8
Store – Grocery	1	1	1	0	2	1.0
Theaters/Recreational	0	1	0	0	0	0.2
Canopy	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
Public Parking Bldg	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
School – Higher Education	0	0	0	0	3	0.6
Residential Construction						
Single Family	3115	2657	2699	3086	3179	2,947.2
Duplex	110	53	37	44	106	70.0
Residential Additions	239	241	275	252	243	250.0
Residential Remodels	152	122	171	118	149	142.4
Manufactured Houses	1053	870	735	590	649	779.4
Decks, Docks, Sheds	235	272	234	241	225	241.4
Residential Garages	862	689	612	655	766	716.8
Separate Plbg Permits	945	781	676	588	676	733.2
Separate Mechanical Permits	1250	1140	998	938	956	1,056.4
Total Permits	8377	7250	6821	6806	7285	7307.8
% Change		-15.5%	-6.3%	-0.2%	6.6%	0.3%

NOTE:

1. On new residential construction, Building, Plumbing, and Mechanical permits are combined.
2. All electrical plan review and inspections are conducted by the State of Washington by State law.

B. POSITIVE FINDINGS

The following positive activities in the Building Safety Division were observed:

- Data is stored and retrieved efficiently.
- The Division is striving to streamline processes.
- Some plans are being reviewed electronically using the latest computer sciences.
- There is an efficient chain of command in the organization.
- The Scorecard monthly newsletter is distributed to staff and builders.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Equipment Budget

In the current budgeting process, there is no provision for small tools. Inspectors use small tools such as tape measures, levels, screwdrivers, gages, calculators, coveralls, and similar equipment necessary to perform their jobs. This equipment wears out with use. The Division uses salary savings when available to purchase equipment. There needs to be a specific budget for equipment, to create accountability and to make funds available when needed.

One tool that should be provided to each Inspector is digital levels. These tools provide specific degree of angles on construction for handicap ramps and degree of slopes on plumbing drainage piping to comply with codes. There is only one of these devices is available now, and each inspector needs to check ramps and slopes almost daily.

37. *Recommendation: Adjust budget to allow for specific equipment for Building Inspectors. (Priority 3)*

Information Bulletins

The Building Division has several handouts containing information that is useful to the industry. More need to be developed. It is suggested that an Information Bulletin Manual be developed and provided to the public as well as Staff. Printing costs could be covered by selling subscriptions for the manual and quarterly updates could be provided with new and revised bulletins.

The manual should, at the least, contain the following:

- A Current code adoption ordinance.
- Requirements for wood frame construction.
- Requirements for masonry construction.
- Requirements for concrete construction
- Permit submittal requirements.
- Inspection calls requirements.
- Plan Check turnaround expectations
- Printed code interpretations.

38. Recommendation: The Building Division should develop an Information Bulletin. (Priority 2)

Staffing Analysis

Table 25 reports available productive hours for Inspectors and Plans Examiners. Productive hours means the available time for field work or plan checking after deducting time spent on activity not directly chargeable to individual permits, but needing to be absorbed as overhead costs. The time shown is only for on line staff. It does not include time for Supervisors, Clerical or Managers who constitute overhead. Their activity is quality control, processing, and supervision.

**Table 25
Building Safety Division Productive Hours**

Category	Inspectors Hour per Year	Plans Examiners Hours per Year
Total Hours	2,080	2,080
Vacation	-100	-100
Sick Time	-73	-73
Holidays	-96	-96
Subtotal	1,811	1,811
Office Time	-245	-122.5
Training In-House	-49	-91
Total Billable Hours	1,517	1,597.5

Time expended on each job was estimated by the Building Official and our analyst because such data has not been recorded by Building Inspection Division Staff. In order to verify those times, data will need to be collected in the future by documenting each permit, updating the time collection system, and revisiting these assumptions.

The data available to us was by permits only. For each residential building there are combined permits covering building, mechanical, and plumbing. For commercial jobs separate permits are issued. (Electrical permits are reviewed and inspected by the State of Washington). Data used was for the year 2003 total permit counts.

Our analysis for Inspector and Plans Examiner needs is shown in Table 26.

**Table 26
Building Inspector and Plans Examiner Needs**

Permit Category	Volume	Inspection Ave Hours	Inspector Hours Needed	Plan Check Ave Hours	Plans Examiner Hours Needed
New Buildings Commercial					
Apartment Buildings	14	20	280	11.00	154.00
Agricultural Buildings	2	3	6	1.65	3.30
Bulkhead/Retaining Wall	10	1	10	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	30	120	16.50	66.00
Warehouse / Barn	7	15	105	8.25	57.75
Fire Station	1	10	10	6.00	6.00
Store – Grocery	2	12	24	7.00	14.00
Canopy	1	0	0	1.00	1.00
Public Parking Building	1	25	25	13.75	13.75
School Higher Education	3	35	105	19.25	57.75
Residential Construction					
Single Family Custom	1,440	5	7,200	3.00	4,320.00
Single Family Base Models	2,269	5	11,345	0.00	0.00
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
Total Hours			28,281		10,949.42
			Inspectors	18.6	Examiners
					6.9

The Division currently has 12 inspectors while the analysis shows the need for 18.6. The goal for next day inspections is 93% and it is estimated that currently 90% are being achieved. Our suggested goal is 99% since delayed inspections can be very costly in the development process. Additionally, we believe that some of the inspections are currently being rushed. However, given the estimates used in the data we are reluctant to recommend eight new positions at this time.

39. Recommendation: Add two additional building inspectors and monitor performance to determine if additional position is required. (Priority 1)

The Division currently has 9 plans examiners. Our analysis shows a need for only 6.9 plans examiners. However, we think this data may not be accurate. We do know there are long waits for plan approval. We suggest, initially, one more plans examiner or consultant be added and recommend performances be monitored to determine if this is sufficient. This assumes the backlog will be cleared through use of consultants.

40. Recommendation: Add one additional plans examiner or consultant and monitor performance to determine if this is sufficient. (Priority 1)

Training

The Plans Examiners and Inspectors have weekly meetings that cover administrative matters. They also review code issues for specific problems of the day. However, they are not conducting routine code training.

The required knowledge covers at least four model codes and numerous interpretations. It is important that routine training be conducted to reinforce staff knowledge and assure that there is consistency in codes application.

It is suggested that weekly code training be conducted for Building Plans Examiners and Inspection Staff as follows:

1. Prepare a quarterly training schedule and assign code chapters to individual staff for presentation. Have presenters prepare an outline for the training.
2. During training, document code sections that need written interpretation for clarification by the Building Official.
3. Have an information bulletin prepared and used as policy to identify areas of need.

Consistent training is as important as performing plan check and inspections. Training is important to achieve quality and consistency.

- 41. Recommendation: The Building Division should develop an expanded training program as outlined in this report. (Priority 2)**

D. PROCESS ISSUES

Completed Plan Reviews

When a plan is reviewed and corrections are required, or plans are approved, Building Plans Examiners call the applicant to inform them that the plans are ready either for pick up or permit issuance. In reality, when the Building Division approves the plans, the permit has to wait for approval by other County functions before the permit can be issued. For corrections, the communication and interaction between the Plans Examiner and applicant occurs until the permit is ready for approval.

Telephone call communications are good but it should be documented that the call occurred. A more formal process could be notification by use of a pre-printed postcard. When the plan is ready for pickup where corrections are required, a pre-printed postcard could be mailed by the Plans Examiner along with documentation in the permit file that it was sent. In the case of approved plans, a pre-printed post-card could be sent stating that the plan is approved by Building Plan Check and it was sent to the Permit Counter waiting for other required approvals, and notice would be sent by them when the permit is ready for pick up. Another way to provide notice is by email which has the added advantage of a documented record.

- 42. Recommendation: Notify applicants of plan corrections or approvals by telephone, postcards or email. In all cases, document that the notice has been sent. (Priority 3)**

Inspector Morale and Teamwork

There is a morale problem among the Building Inspectors. It involves mistrust between themselves, their Supervisor, and Management. This needs to be taken seriously. Inspectors are hesitant to speak out. It is suggested that meetings be held between them, supervision, and management with all assured of a safe environment where there will be no recriminations. If a meeting of the minds cannot be reached, a professional facilitator should be used. Good staff morale is essential to achieve an expected work product.

- 43. Recommendation: Convene meetings between the Building Inspectors, Supervisor, and Management to resolve concerns that are affecting**

teamwork and morale. If the issues cannot be resolved, a professional facilitator should be used. (Priority 2)

Job Building Card

Pierce County does not issue a Building Permit Card to be posted on the job site for sign-offs indicating approvals to cover each phase of construction and final approvals. The Inspectors provide notifications on an inspection report form handed to the contractor with a copy retained for County files. It is customary in most jurisdictions to issue a building sign-off card to record all approvals. Using these cards is a good method to document approvals and job progress information as they are posted on the job site. A sign-off could be included on these cards for Fire and Engineering.

44. Recommendation: Implement a Building Permit Card to be required to be posted on each job site. (Priority 2)

Plan Check Engineer

There are no professional Engineers on staff of the Building Inspection Division. Most building design contains engineering versus prescriptive code design because prescriptive design costs are prohibitive. While the Plans Examiners look at the path used to achieve codes compliance, they do not, and most cannot evaluate the engineering calculations. Instead, they trust the developers professional engineers stamp and signature. This defeats the role of government as a third-party non-proprietary review.

With a Professional Engineer on staff, the structural calculations could be reviewed in-house, and assistance could be given to Plans Examiners. Additionally, the Building Official could be given assistance where needed. The engineers in this community have indicated a desire for peer review.

45. Recommendation: Add a position of Civil Engineer III to the Building Inspection Division staff. (Priority 2)

Plan Review Turnaround Time

Table 27 shows the plan review turnaround times reported for May 2004, along with our recommendations.

Table 27
Building Plan Review Time

Type	Target	Actual	Recommended Goal
Residential – Custom Plans	14 days, none over 24 days	Average 45 days Oldest 57 days	95% of first plan checks should be completed in 10 working days
Residential Plan Re-Submittals	Same	Same	95% in 5 working days
Residential – Base Plans	Same day	Same day	Same day
Commercial	28 days None over 60 days	Average 49 days Oldest 53 days	Complete first review of 95% of custom residential plan review within 10 working days of application submittal and second reviews within 5 working days

The same goals should be met whether or not workload is heavy. The Plan Check Supervisor should review incoming plans and determine whether goals can be achieved through in-house staff. Those that cannot should be sent to qualified consultants who can deliver on time.

46. ***Recommendation:*** Establish turnaround time goals for Plan Check as shown in Table 27. *(Priority 1)*

47. ***Recommendation:*** When it is determined that established goals for Building Plan Check cannot be met, send plans to qualified plan check consultants. *(Priority 1)*

Plans Waiting for Review

A major issue is time plans sit waiting for plan review. The following is taken from data collected from the old permit system used until July 1, 2004:

Plans waiting for review:

- 54 Custom Homes
- 48 Base Plan Setups
- 48 Days Wait until Plan Checks start

- 78 Commercial plans representing 49 projects

In Chapter V, Section B we show how to theoretically calculate backlog. Given the lack of refined data it is difficult to make this calculation for Building. However, lacking any detailed data, and given the slow review times, we estimate that the backlog is at least as large as the 54 custom homes, 48 base plan setups, and 78 commercial plans.

48. ***Recommendation: Hire qualified consultants to clear up the backlog of building permits. (Priority 1)***

49. ***Recommendation: Have plans checked by consultants reviewed for quality control by the Supervising Plans Examiner, not the Plans Examiners. (Priority 2)***

Building Permit Application Process

The Building Permit application process is a straight forward process that works reasonably well. We see two changes that could improve the process.

- The determination whether a geotechnical report is required should be made in Building Plan Check where expertise lies rather than at the Permit Counter using established guidelines.
- Development Engineering should complete the geotechnical review if required and return approval. If Engineering corrections are needed, they should communicate directly with the applicant. When approved, they should transmit it back to Building Plan Check for inclusion in the approval package.

50. ***Recommendation: The need for geotechnical reports should be made by building plan checkers. (Priority 2)***

51. ***Recommendation: Development Engineering should communicate comments on geotechnical reviews directly to the applicant. (Priority 3)***

Use of Consultants

The current use of consultants is for expedited plan check. The Building Official approves consultants that can be used. When their review is completed, the plans are re-reviewed by in-house Plans Examiners. This slows the process.

A better process would be to hire consultants to work directly for the County. Expedited plan check requests could be sent to them for review. Instead of the re-review by line Staff Plans Examiners, have the quality control review conducted by the Plan Check Supervisor on a spot checking basis.

52. Recommendation: Adjust process of using consultants for Plan Check by having the consultant hired directly by the County. (Priority 2)

E. INSURANCE COMPANIES OF AMERICA (ISO) AUDIT

The Insurance Companies of America conducts audits of all Building Departments in the United States and their efforts to properly enforce the codes every five years. They rate Building Departments in several areas and rate them on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being the best and 10 being the worst. Pierce County received a score of 4.

Following are the results of the last audit of Pierce County reported on August 26, 2002, along with our comments. The ISO comments generally support and are consistent with our analysis.

Adopted Codes: A perfect score was received.

Modifications to Adopted Codes: A perfect score was received.

Training: .29 of possible 3 points was received. They expect at least 2% of the budget to be devoted to training. This, along with the training program we have recommended in this report should raise the score on the next audit.

Certifications: 6.69 of possible 8 points were received. This indicates that some staff is not professionally certified. Effort should be made to accomplish 100% staff certification.

Building Officials Qualifications, Experience, Education: 2.25 of possible 4 points was received. While a good score was awarded for experience, they discounted it for lack of license as an architect or engineer. This Building Official has qualified as a Certified Building Official by the International Code Council, publishers of the model Building Code adopted by Pierce County. His experience is equal to most Building Officials.

Design Professionals: 0 of possible 2 points was received. This is because Supervisors are not graduate or licensed Architects or Engineers. The Supervisors here are highly experienced and qualified. Their qualifications are equivalent to those in other jurisdictions.

Zoning Provisions: A perfect score was received.

Contractor/Builders Licensing and Bonding: A perfect score was received.

Public Awareness Programs: 0 of possible 1 point was received. If Pierce County adds public programs included as recommended in this report, the score will be raised in the next audit.

Participation in code development activities: A perfect score was received.

Administrative Policies and Procedures: A perfect score was received.

Plan Review Existing Staff: 5.62 of possible 9 points were received. They feel that more staff should be on hand for activity occurring at Pierce County at the time of the audit.

Plan Review experience of personnel: 1.32 of possible 1.50 possible points were received.

Detail of Plan Review: A perfect score was received.

Plan Review performance evaluation and quality assurance: A perfect score was received.

Inspection existing staffing: 6.62 of possible 9 points were received. They desired more staff for work volume accruing at the time of the audit.

Experience of inspection personnel: 1.40 of possible 1.50 points was received.

Correction notices and stop work orders: A perfect score was received.

Inspection checklist: 1.13 of possible 1.50 points was received.

Special Inspections: A perfect score was received.

Inspections for natural hazards mitigation: A perfect score was received.

Certificate of occupancy: 1.40 of possible 2 points was received. They desire these for all occupancies. However, the model code does not require them for residential use.

Inspection performance evaluations for quality assurance: A perfect score was received.

Pierce County received 74.90 of a possible 100 points. This resulted in a rating of 4. The ISO audit affects insurance ratings only for new construction. The audit will be conducted soon again. Improvements achieved will result in a higher score. We normally like to see building departments with scores of 3 or 4.

- 53.** *Recommendation:* The ISO evaluation should be reviewed with appropriate changes made to obtain a better score in the next review. (Priority 3)

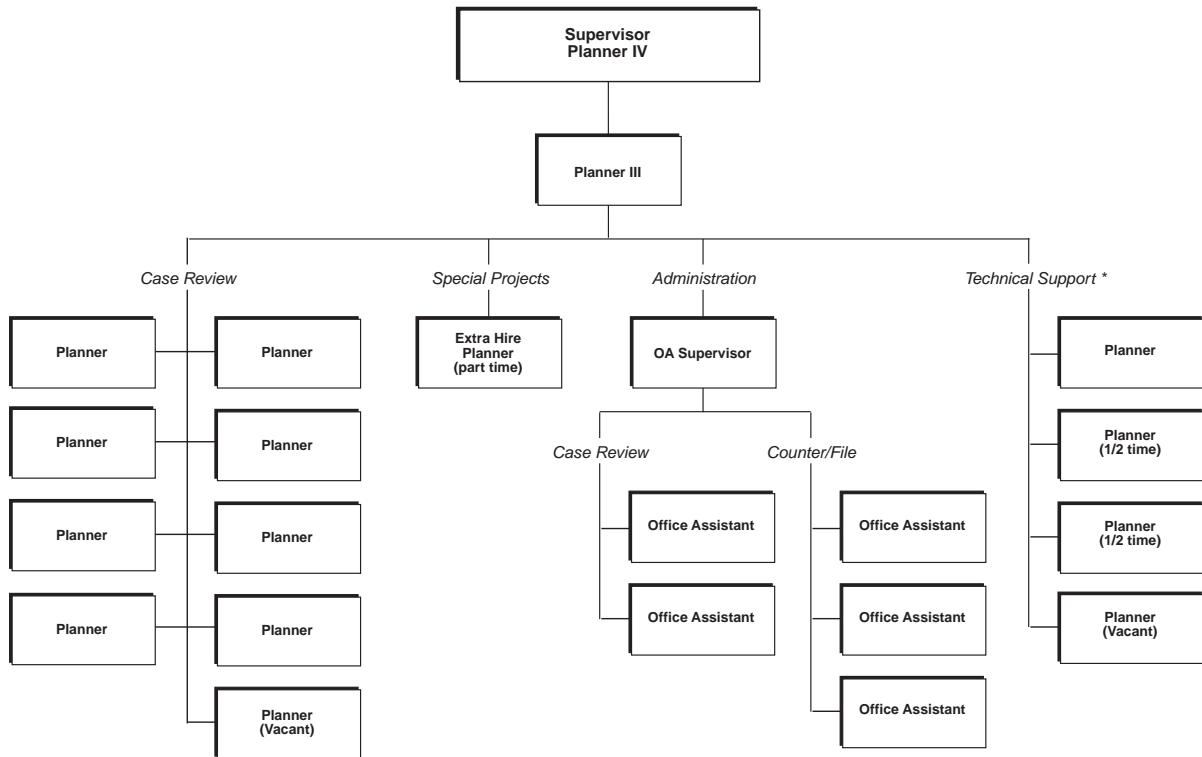
VII. CURRENT PLANNING

A. PROFILE

Staffing/Organization

The Current Planning section includes 21 positions as can be noted on Figure 11. Two of these positions are half time. A Planner IV manages the section with some assistance of a Planner III who helps with the supervisory responsibilities. The section has twelve full time permanent professional planner positions. Three of these planning positions are assigned as support technicians to the Development Center, eight are case planners and there is one part-time, extra-hire planner who handles special projects. In addition, the section has six office assistants. Two of the planner positions are vacant.

**Figure 11
Current Planning Organizational Chart**



*Supervised by the Permit Coordinator

The eight planners are referred to as case planners. Seven of them are assigned to specific regions of the County and handle discretionary applications within their

assigned region as well as handling a variety of non-fee administrative responsibilities. Three office assistants assist with this process. A single planner is responsible for most of the administrative case reviews and approvals. The Planner III does not process applications, although he is responsible for quality control of assignments and workload monitoring. In addition, there is one part-time extra-hire planner that is assigned special projects such as writing official code interpretations and policies, helping with budget preparation for Current Planning, and reviewing amendments to existing regulations.

The three remaining planner positions are assigned to Current Planning, but work directly with the Permit Coordinator at the Development Center. Their responsibilities and work assignments are discussed in the Development Center section of this report.

The three remaining office assistants are responsible for staffing the PALS public counter and maintaining all of PALS' files. Table 28 identifies each job classification, number of people in the position and position's responsibilities.

Table 28
Staff Position and Responsibilities – Current Planning

Position	# of Positions	Responsibilities
Planner IV	1	Supervisor of Current Planning. Manages, directs and oversees all activities. Reports to the Assistant Director.
Planner III	1	Assists the Planner IV with supervisory tasks and quality control of assignments and workload monitoring.
Case Planner	7	Process cases and provides information and assistance to public for assigned region of County. Also provides backup to a second region.
Case Planner	1	Handles administrative land divisions and other administrative permits.
Technical Support Planner	3	Provides technical support at the Development Counter including answering phone and questions. Reviews applications for completeness and checks building permits for compliance to the code.
Part-time Extra Hire Planner	1	Assists Planner IV with special assignments including writing policies and budget preparation.
Office Assistant	3	Administrative support for case planners including preparation for public hearings and LUAC meetings.
Office Assistant	3	Staffs PALS' counter and maintains central filing system.

Responsibilities

Current Planning is responsible for review and processing of discretionary applications. Related responsibilities include SEPA review, coordination with the Land Use Advisory Commissions (LUAC), and case preparation for public hearings. In addition, the planners coordinate their work efforts with Advance Planning, Resource Management, Development Engineering, and other County agencies such as Health, Fire Prevention, and Utilities. The rules and regulations for these processes are set forth in the following sections of the Pierce County Code:

Title 1 Chapter 1.22	Hearing Examiner Code
Title 2 Chapter 2.114	Current Use Assessment
Title 16	Subdivisions and Platting,
Title 18	Development Regulations-General Provisions
Title 18A	Development Regulations-Zoning,
Title 18B	Development Regulations-Signs
Title 18C	Development Regulations-Site Development
Title 18J	Development Regulations-Design Standards & Guidelines
Title 18 H	Forest Practice
Title 20	Shoreline Regulations.

Caseload

Generally Current Planning reviews two types of applications: those that go before the Hearing Examiner for consideration, and those that are approved administratively. Tables 29, 30 and 31 show summaries of Current Planning's type and number of applications submitted between January 1, 1999 and June 30, 2004. Some types of applications have been merged. The last column of the table is a projection from the half-year numbers and estimates the caseload for 2004. This information was obtained from the DCIS database. It should be noted that for a number of reasons there are problems with the statistical information provided from DCIS. Issues include how applications or projects are defined and consistency in recording data. The numbers contained in the following tables can be used for general trends, but may not be a definitive reflection of the applications submitted.

**Table 29
Current Planning - Administrative Caseload**

Administrative	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (six months)	2004 projected
Short Plats/Large Lots, application. & modifications	90	70	101	91	80	30	60
Boundary Line Adj./Lot Comb.	77	89	89	111	113	54	108
Administrative Use Permit	17	19	15	14	5	6	12
Design Review	0	1	56	68	32	42	84
Total	184	179	261	284	230		264
% Change		-2.7%	45.8%	8.8%	-19.0%		14.8%
			5-Year Average		227.6		

The total administrative caseload on Table 29 seems to vary significantly over the past five years with no apparent trend. However, the projection for 2004 of 264 cases is 16% higher than the five year average and 14.8% higher than 2003.

**Table 30
Current Planning - Hearing Examiner Caseload**

Hearing Examiner	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004*	2004**
Conditional Use Permits and Amendments	30	31	32	31	29	16	32
Non Conforming Use Permits and Amendments	6	3	7	9	3	3	6
Unclassified Use Permits	2	2	1	4	4	0	0
Preliminary Plats	57	59	72	84	87	22	44
Final Plats	65	57	53	45	63	27	54
Planned Development	0	5	3	9	7	4	8
Variance	38	35	26	25	28	11	22
Shoreline	53	69	55	108	160	81	161
Rezone	2	3	1	2	0	0	0
Total	253	264	250	317	381		327
% Change		4.3%	-5.3%	26.8%	20.2%		-14.2%
			5-Year Average		293.0		

*6 months

**Projected

As can be seen on Table 30, although the Hearing Examiner's caseload had slightly fewer cases in 2001, the overall workload has consistently increased over the past five years with a 50.6% increase in cases between 1999 and 2003. The projection for Hearing Examiner applications for 2004 is a 14.2% decrease from 2003. However the projected number is still 29.2% greater than in 1999 and 11.6% above the five-year average. Hearing Examiner cases have a major impact on PALS staffing.

Table 31 indicates land use applications and appeals where a fee was required, but did not necessarily fall into the category of a case or application. The 276 cases projected for 2004 is estimated to be 4.6% less than the five-year average of 289 cases.

**Table 31
Other Land Use Actions**

Type	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (six months)	2004 projected
Other Land Use Actions/Appeals	307	406	251	240	244	0	276
% Change		32.2%	-38.2%	-4.4%	1.7%		13.1%
			5-Year Average		289.6		

SEPA review is required as part of the review processes for most of the above permits and for some building permits. Case load is shown in Table 32. Current Planning processes the SEPA Review Checklist and prepares the documents. After this process is completed, and if the application is not determined to be exempt from the SEPA process, it is submitted to the Environmental Official Designate in the Resource Management Section for the issuing of a DNS, MDNS or processing an EIS. With the 23% increase in the Hearing Examiner cases, the number of SEPA reviews normally would increase proportionally. However, with the County's adoption of a number of impact mitigation ordinances, the number of SEPA cases did not increase proportionally to the caseload. However, it should be noted that there still was an 10.8% increase between the 1999 and 2003 caseloads and the estimate of 392 cases for 2004 is 20.0% higher than the five-year average.

**Table 32
Current Planning SEPA Caseload**

Type	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (six months)	2004 projected
SEPA Checklist	352	319	270	303	390	196	392
% Change		-9.4%	-15.4%	12.2%	28.7%		100.0%
			5-Year Average		326.8		

Current Planning also processes some Forest Practice applications. They are then reviewed by the Forest Practice Administrator in Resource Management before being forwarded to the State. Forest Practice permits will be processed in Resource Management under the proposed Directions package. The number of cases between 1999-2003 is noted on Table 33. The estimate of 86 cases for 2004 is 55.5% higher than the four year average. Data for 1999 was excluded as not being relevant.

**Table 33
Forest Practice Caseload**

Type	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (six months)	2004 projected
Forest Practice	1	52	47	49	73	43	86
% Change		5100.0%	-9.6%	4.3%	49.0%		15.1%
			4-Year Average		55.3		

Pierce County has started performing Forest Practice review relatively recently. In the four years that it has occurred, the number of cases have consistently increased with a projection for 2004 of a 40% increase over 2000 when the program was fully implemented.

It should be noted that in addition to the above fee related applications and services, Current Planning is involved with a number of non-fee administrative duties. These functions are free to the public and have no related fee. When reviewing the time and material information data, it appears that in 2003 an average of 49% of Current Planning's staff time has been spent on non-fee activities such as the phone, e-mail correspondence, enforcement, council inquiry etc.

B. POSITIVES

Generally, the Current Planners have been with the County for an extended period of time. They are experienced, skilled and knowledgeable. When given the opportunity they work well as a team. These qualities provide for a continuity of decision making.

Staff appears resourceful, and with more regulation and no additional staff, they feel that they issue more permits today than they did 10 years ago. The case planners are committed to doing a good job in an ever-changing environment of rules and regulations. They appear to genuinely like their supervisor and the supervisor cares about the staff.

Any request for information and assistance is handled professionally and in a timely manner. Staff appears truly interested in incorporating changes into the process in order to provide better service to the customer.

C. POLICY

Ordinances

Current Planning regularly makes recommendation to Advance Planning about necessary changes to the Ordinances they are responsible for implementing. This system seems to be working satisfactorily. However, when major plans and related policies such as community plans are developed, Current Planning has minimal input into the process. This can and does lead to problems with implementation. It would be better if a staff member of Current Planning were assigned to work with Advance Planning as part of the team when major policy changes are being developed. This does not mean that the Current Planner would be working full time on the project, but instead would be relied on for on going review and input prior to adoption of any new plan or ordinance.

54. Recommendation: PALS should establish a team approach between Current and Advance Planning for the development of major policies, ordinances and plans. (Priority 2)

Policy and Interpretation Documents

Current Planning has numerous processing policies and interpretations. However, they are not well organized or indexed and some appear to be out of date. Given the complexity of many of the processes and interpretations, good policy and procedure manuals are essential for staff consistency and training.

55. Recommendation: Current Planning should prepare a well indexed policy and procedures manual. (Priority 2)

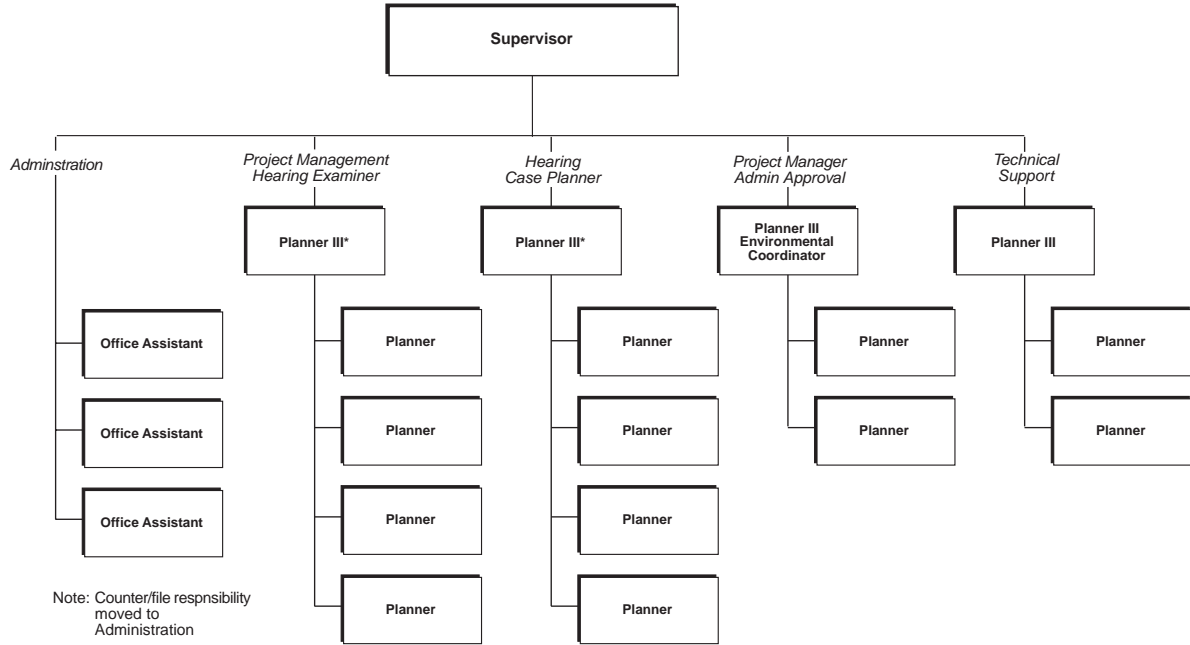
D. ORGANIZATION

As can be seen in Figure 12, Current Planning's Organizational Chart designates a single Planner III to act as an assistant to the supervisor. All functions are under both positions. We believe there are too many positions for this type of organization to function successfully. Therefore, we are recommending a number of changes to the existing organization. The proposed changes include the following:

- Transfer the Environmental Coordinator (now in Resource Management) to Current Planning.
- Add two new planner III positions.
- Have three teams of case planners, two teams for Hearing Examiner cases and one for administrative cases.
- Assign a planner III to head Planning's function of tech support.
- Transfer the PALS counter and files responsibility to the proposed new Administration Section.
- Have case planners become project managers.

Figure 12 delineates the proposed organization. Following the figure is a discussion of each of the proposed changes.

**Figure 12
Proposed Current Planning Organizational Chart**



*Promoted, Transfer, or New Hire

Environmental Coordinator

Originally all SEPA review was done in Resource Management. For efficiency and consistent review it was determined that the case planners should be responsible for the SEPA review. We concur with this decision. Presently Current Planning prepares the SEPA documents. They are then reviewed and approved by the Environmental Coordinator who remained in Resource Management. The reason stated for keeping the Coordinator in Resource Management was that the Supervisor of the section was an expert on SEPA. We believe that the Environmental Coordinator should be in Current Planning. If the Coordinator needed additional expertise, he could still consult the supervisor in Resource Management.

The Coordinator is presently also acting as the Forest Practice Administrator. Resource Management is scheduled to perform Forest Practice reviews in the proposed Directions program, therefore, this function should remain in Resource Management. When the Environmental Coordinator is transferred to Current Planning, in addition to being the Environmental Coordinator, he would also be responsible for supervising a case management team.

- 56. Recommendation:** The Planner III currently acting as the Environmental Coordinator and most of its functions should be transferred to Current Planning. (Priority 2)

New Planner III Positions

The staffing analysis found later in this chapter indicates that there is a need for additional staffing in Current Planning based upon the existing workload. We are recommending that three new planner positions be added to Current Planning.

Two new Planner III positions should be created. Promotion, transfer, or new hire could fill these positions. If the Planner III position is filled by a promotion or transfer, the positions that are vacated should be filled. One new Planner II position should be added.

The Planner IIIs will be working planners. They will both supervise a team and handle the more complex applications. It is envisioned that at least half their time will be spent as project managers and the remainder of the time managing a team and assisting the supervisor of the section.

- 57. Recommendation:** Two new Planner III positions and one new Planner II position should be added to Current Planning. (Priority 1)

Planner III Should Lead Current Planning's Tech Support

The customer surveys and focus groups had numerous complaints about how the front counter and tech support are working. We are proposing numerous changes to the counter operations, which are discussed in another chapter. We are also proposing additional responsibilities for the Tech Support positions.

We believe that staff at the front counter needs to be very knowledgeable about Planning's rules and regulations. In addition they also have to be committed to customer service and be able to make decisions regarding these rules. A higher-level staff position should be readily available for consultation. Therefore we are recommending an experienced Planner III be assigned to work at the counter. In addition to supervising staff, this position will also work at the counter and review plans as needed.

- 58. Recommendation:** A Planner III should be assigned to the Tech Support team. (Priority 2)

Four Teams of Project Managers

We are recommending that there should be four teams of project managers:

- One team in Tech Support
- Two teams handling Hearing Examiner cases
- One team handling administrative cases

This organizational change will take some of the immediate supervisory responsibility off of the Current Planning's supervisor and give her additional time to do more management responsibilities.

59. *Recommendation: Current Planning should be organized into four teams each headed by a Planner III. (Priority 2)*

PALS Counter and Files Transferred to Administration Division

The PALS counter and its files are an administrative responsibility that services the whole organization. These types of functions more appropriately belong in an Administration division of the organization. A new Administration division is proposed in Chapter V.

Case Planners Become Project Managers

Each new planning application is assigned to a planner (case planner). While this would appear to be a project manager system, in reality the case planners take a more limited role than we suggest. Starting with the submitting of the application, throughout the comment period and into the hearing process the case planner needs to be proactive. He or she needs to reach out to the various departments and agencies in order to obtain the necessary information to process the applications in a timely manner. One of the most important changes we are recommending is that the case planners become true project managers. The project manager handles the total project from the initial stage through the approval hearings and implementation monitoring. Although it may not be easy to empower the planners, there are numerous advantages to this approach. Many of the procedural changes proposed in the Process Section facilitate this approach. The planner will be responsible, and in return respected, for assisting the project through all its necessary approvals.

Functions of the project manager should include:

- Conducts pre-application/pre-development meetings and review as appropriate.
- Reviews application at intake and confirms 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 project manager is changed from a regulator and collector of others' opinions to a problem solver.

As project managers, the planner's responsibilities will be increased. The planner will continue to be Current Planning's advocate, but will also be responsible for assuring that all other aspects of the project is handled in an appropriate manner.

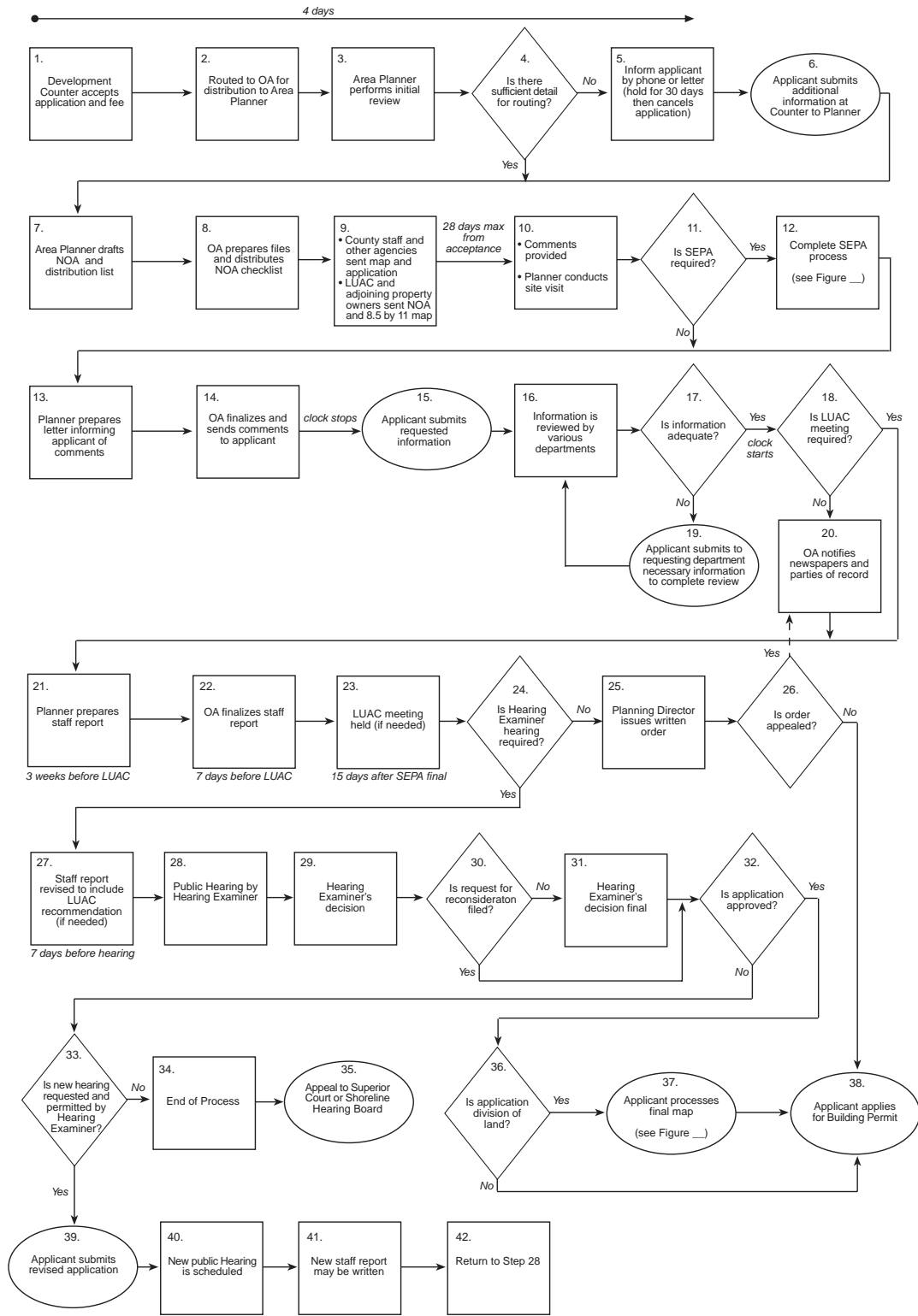
60. *Recommendation: A comprehensive project manager approach to project review should be implemented. (Priority 1)*

E. PROCESS

Project Process

Current Planning handles numerous types of applications. Generally speaking they can be divided into two types—administrative approvals and those that require a public hearing before the Hearing Examiner. There are, other differences in the process such as the need for SEPA review or a LUAC meeting. However the general process has been mapped in a single diagram, Figure 13, Permit Process. Each step is numbered used as a reference as needed in the discussion that follows.

Figure 13 Permit Process



Step 1 starts with the Development Center accepting the application after it has been reviewed by various tech support personnel. We are recommending that the area planner as the project manager do his or her initial review at this time and accept the application for distribution. This would eliminate the need for informing the applicant after the application has been accepted that there is insufficient information to start the review of the application (Steps 4, 5 & 6).

61. Recommendation: 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 propose. (Priority 1)

In Step 7 the case planner drafts the Notice of Application (NOA) and prepares the distribution checklist. We strongly support this early notice procedure and believe it should be expanded. This list should include the appropriate LUAC (Land Use Action Committee) and any other existing community groups

Step 8 indicates that the office assistant prepares the final document and distributes as indicated. In most organizations the Office Assistants no longer check and finalize documents of this type. Since NOA are basically a form document that should be available on the computer, there is no good reason for the planner not to prepare the final NOA.

The distribution of the NOA takes between four to seven days. When the case planner does the initial review at submittal, the time required for distribution should be reduced. We are suggesting three days, thus allowing additional time for the reviewing departments.

62. Recommendation: The following changes should be incorporated into the Notice of Application (NOA) process:

- **Community group such as LUACS should be sent NOA and encouraged to comment early in the process.**
- **The case planner should be responsible for preparing the final NOA.**
- **NOA should be distributed as quickly as possible after the application is submitted, not more than three days. (Priority 2)**

After the NOA is distributed, the various departments and agencies are given 28 days to comment. Unfortunately this deadline is frequently missed. No comments are sent to the applicant until all comments are received. When all comments are received the

case planner prepares a draft letter. The office assistant finalizes and sends the letter to the applicant. This process is delineated in steps 10 through 14.

In order to facilitate the process and speed the information received by the applicant we believe a meeting should be scheduled three weeks after the NOA has been mailed. This meeting should be with the applicant and the various departments and would be similar to the now optional pre-application meetings. However, this would not be an optional meeting.

At the meeting any deficiencies in the application would be identified. Staff would indicate to the applicant all outstanding issues and required reports. Also a time line would be discussed with possible hearing dates suggested. It is recognized that it is the applicant's responsibility after this meeting to perform. However, if the applicant performs in a timely manner, staff's timely action should be expected.

63. Recommendation: 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. (Priority 1)

After the meeting, the case planner prepares a written letter summarizing what was discussed at the meeting and what is required of the applicant. The case planner, and not the office assistant, finalizes this letter. Attached to the letter would be any requests for additional information and/or changes to the application. This letter would be sent within 28 days of the NOA. After the letter is sent no additional significant requests for information should be made. The two exceptions to this rule is if a health and safety issue is identified or if the additional information submitted by the applicant reveals substantial changes in the proposed project. Additional information cannot be requested just because staff forgot to ask for it the first time or the request of information arrived after the 28 days dateline.

64. Recommendation: 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. (Priority 2)

Please note that Steps 11 and 12, which identify the SEPA process, are discussed separately.

Steps 15 through 19 address the need for additional information from the applicant. Presently this step proceeds with little supervision from the case planner. Instead the applicant works directly with the various divisions, sections and agencies until all the

issues are resolved. Although this system may sometimes work smoothly, other times the applicant has difficulty receiving timely responses. It should be the planner's responsibility to assure that the applicant submittal material and reports are reviewed within the set timelines. The review period for a first submittal should be no more than 15 working days. Review time for each subsequent submittal should decrease, 10 working days for the second review, and 5 working days for the third review. If for some reason additional submittals reviews are required, the review period would be 3 working days. The planner should monitor how long it takes for other divisions, sections, departments and agencies to respond. If there is a problem between the applicant and the other divisions or sections, the planner needs to act to resolve the issue.

65. Recommendation: 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. (Priority 1)

Presently there are seven LUACs in the County. However, as additional Community Plans are adopted there will be more. They meet and discuss the planning applications and make recommendations to the Hearing Examiner. This occurs after the draft staff report has been prepared (Step 23). An often-heard complaint is that LUAC input is too late in the process to impact the decision. We are recommending that the LUAC receive a NOA, SEPA documents during the public comment period as well as the draft staff report. Although staff only attends the meeting that discusses the draft staff report and receives comments to forward to the Hearing Examiner, it should be possible for the LUAC to make earlier comments. They might assign various members of the committee to investigate and comment on the project at the NOA stage. They could also establish a system to comment on the SEPA documents prior to becoming final and could even appeal the SEPA decision, if they believed it was incorrect. However much of this work effort would either have to occur without Current Planning's support or additional staffing would be necessary.

We note that in the County Council directives for the 2005 budget there is a recommendation for "full funding to staff the existing Land Use Advisory Councils. The extent of funding is a local policy issue beyond the scope of this report. We do point out that existing staffing in Current Planning is not in a position to absorb any additional LUAC work.

66. Recommendation: 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. (Priority 3)

- 67. Recommendation: County Council should determine the level of staff support it desires for the LUCA function and staff as appropriate. (Priority 2)**

The remainder of the steps for case processing proceed without an issue. However, we are recommending that the planner who processes this application be responsible for reviewing the final plats and/or building permits for planning issues.

- 68. Recommendation: The Project Manager Planner should review for planning issues that related to any final plats and/or building permits. (Priority 3)**

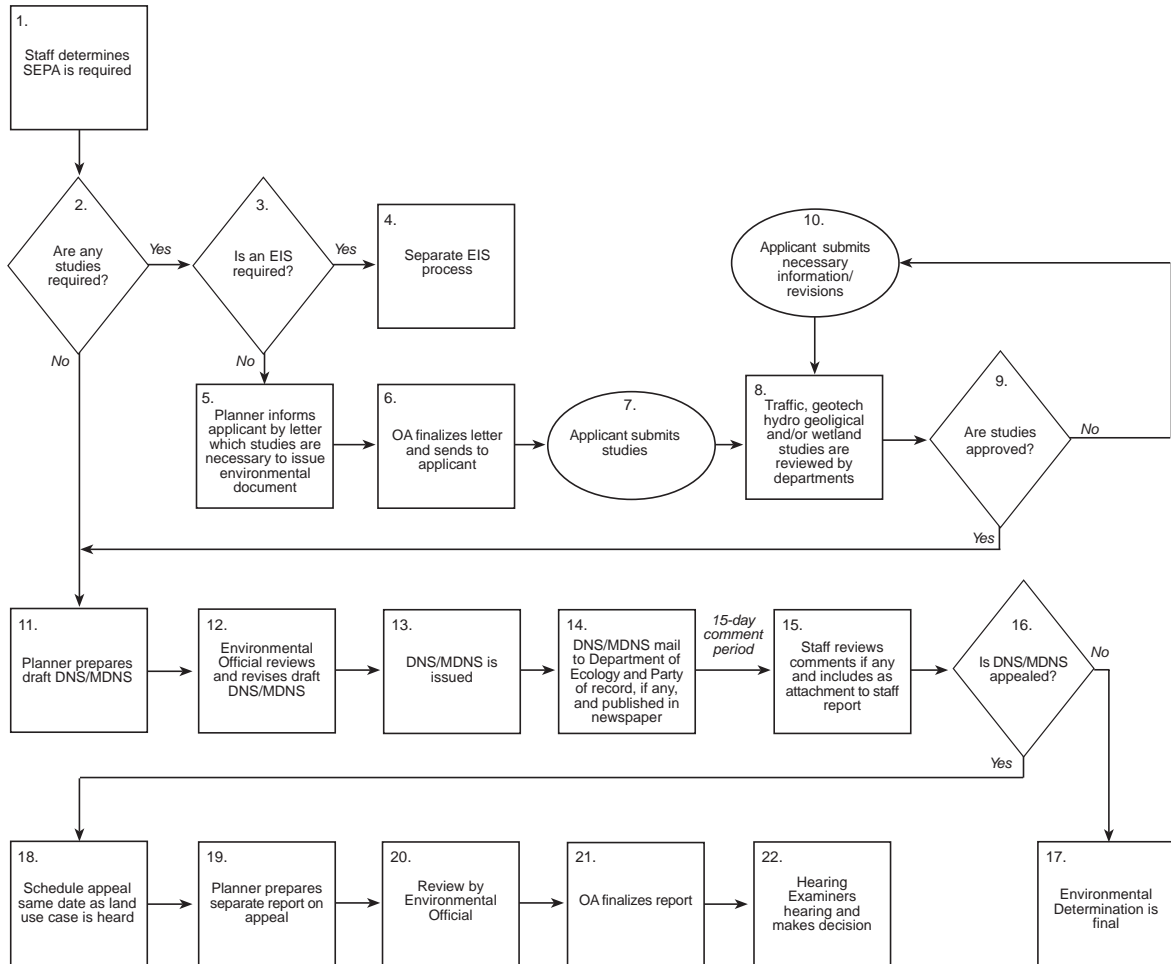
SEPA Process

Current Planning staff does SEPA review. The Environmental Official, who is in Resource Management, reviews and approves the environmental decision and related document. Figure 14 delineates this procedure. Each step of the process is numbered and used as a reference in the discussion that follows.

Many of the environmental issues requiring review in the past have been resolved with the implementation of ordinances that contain development rules and mitigation fees that eliminate the need for environmental review. We are very supportive of these actions. SEPA review is necessary when there are traffic, issues that need to be addressed. Other issues could include geo-technical, hydro-geological and wetland issues. Systems and standards have been established to handle all of these issues that may arise from these studies with the exception of Traffic. Traffic mitigation requires a Traffic Impact Analysis Report (TIA) followed by negotiations on how the identified impacts can be resolved. If there were a traffic impact fee much of the time delay caused by the present process could be eliminated. We support the establishment of a reasonable fee that would eliminate the need for traffic related SEPA review in most cases.

- 69. Recommendation: 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. (Priority 2)**

**Figure 14
SEPA Review Process**



Most SEPA reviews are required for discretionary applications. However, some building and grading permits also need SEPA review. Presently all SEPA review is done by the case planners. Presently the tech support planners determine if a building and grading permits conforms to the zoning and whether it needs environmental review. These planners should be trained to complete the SEPA review for building and grading permits. This would entail SEPA review for approximately 35 building permits and 15 site development applications per year.

70. Recommendation: The tech support planner, not a case planner, should perform SEPA review for those projects that do not require a discretionary permit. (Priority 2)

As indicated by Steps 11 and 12 the planner prepares the draft DNS/MDNS and the Environmental Official reviews and approves the document. The planners are in Current Planning and the Environmental Official is in Resource Management. We believe that both the planners and the Environmental Official should be in Current Planning. There is no good reason that the two functions should not be in the same section. We discussed and recommended this change in the organization section of this chapter.

Step 14 identifies the public notice portion of the SEPA function. Presently community groups and LUACs are not considered parties of record and therefore do not receive notices. We believe they should be given notices and kept informed on the environmental process. This is important for two reasons:

- The community knows the existing situation and related problems better than anyone in PALS could, thus providing valid information to PALS
- When the public is informed early in the process, there is additional time to resolve issues prior to public hearings.

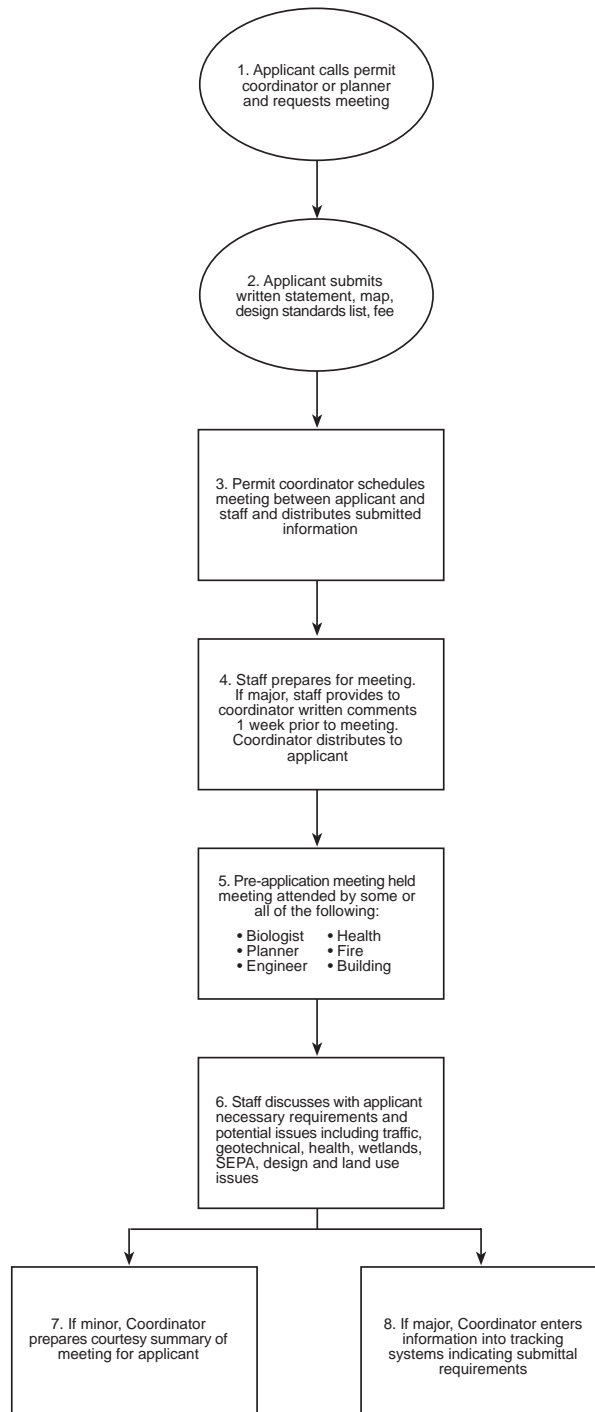
71. *Recommendation: LUACs and other identified Community groups should be considered parties of record and be sent copies of the environmental documents. (Priority 3)*

Pre-application/Pre-development Process

Prior to submitting an application for a discretionary permit or building permit, the applicant has the option of requesting a pre-application meeting for a new discretionary permit or pre-development meeting for minor discretionary permit or building permit. Figure 15 delineates this procedure. Each step of the process is numbered and used as a reference in the discussion that follows.

- Presently the Pre-application/Pre-development Meeting process is an option offered to the applicant. Some applicants use it, while others think it is unnecessary. We strongly support this process as it gives the applicant a detailed understanding of what is expected from him, what is needed to succeed in the process and what can be expected from the County. If this process were mandatory for all applications needing a hearing or SEPA review, the applicant would know what special studies were required prior to submitting the application. Preparation of the studies could begin immediately, and if completed prior to application submittal, could influence the final design of the project prior to its submittal. Even if some or all of the studies were not completed until after the application was submitted, the time it takes to complete the review of the project could be reduced by 28 days since the applicant would know in advance which studies are needed.

Figure 15
Pre-application/Pre-development Process



72. Recommendation: PALS should consider requiring Pre-application/Pre-development Meetings for all applications that require a hearing or SEPA review. *(Priority 2)*

We observed an actual meeting and participated in a mock meeting. It should be noted that in neither meeting written comments were available. Therefore, both meetings would be considered pre-development meetings.

The real meeting we observed, did not start on time, various staff members came into the meeting presented their information, answered the applicant's questions and left shortly thereafter. The meeting took between one and a half hours and two hours. The only staff member that attended most of the meeting was the person in charge. However, he also left the meeting occasionally, evidently to find missing staff members. The last person to speak was the planner who provided information that made many of the previous comments irrelevant.

73. Recommendation: The Pre-application/Pre-development Meeting process should be restructured. Changes should include the following:

- The project manager who will process the application should lead the meeting when it is a discretionary application (minor or major).
- Meetings should not take more than 45 minutes for staff comments. If there is standard information that applies to all applications, written handouts should be prepared and given to the applicant.
- The first person to discuss outstanding issues should be the project manager/planner.
- The next person or persons to talk are people with “project killer” issues. The applicant can then request that the meeting be continued to resolve the problem(s) or request to hear the other comments.
- If there are no “project killer” issues the next person to speak is the representative from Development Engineering, followed by the representative from Resource Management. Representatives from Health, Fire, Building etc. follow in a specified order.
- All staff should stay in the meeting, unless they have no comments, until everyone has spoken and the applicant's questions are answered. Total time for meeting should be one hour. *(Priority 2)*

F. STAFFING NEEDS

One of the public's complaints frequently heard is that it takes too long to get an application processed. There are a number of reasons for this problem, one of which is inadequate staffing. In order to determine if there is adequate staffing we start by looking at how much time it takes to process various types of applications.

Table 34 indicates the type and number of applications projected for the year 2004 and the average number of planner-hours required for processing each application. Then a total-hour projection is made for the each type of application. In most cases the average number of hours required to process each application has been obtained from the 2002 database. However, for some types of applications this information was not available and an estimate of time was used. By totaling these numbers and dividing them by the hours worked per year we can project the number of case planners required to process the applications.

On an average the typical case planner works 1577 hours per year. (Table 20 in Chapter V indicates the number of hours worked per year for each section of PALS.) By dividing the total number of hours needed to process cases by the number of hours a typical case planners works per year we are able to determine that 8.1 case planners would be required. This assumes that they spend 100% of their time on processing applications. However, this is not the case.

**Table 34
Projected Staffing Hours**

Type	2004 projected	Labor Hours/ Application	Total Hours
Administrative Applications			
Short Plats/Large Lots, application. & modifications	60	4.80	288.00
Boundary Line Adj./Lot Comb.	108	1.30	140.40
Administrative Use Permit	12	3.00	36.00
Design Review	84	2.00	168.00
Subtotal	264		632.40
Hearing Examiner			
Conditional Use Permits & amendments	32	17.20	550.40
Non conforming Use Permits & amendments	6	9.60	57.60
Preliminary Plats	44	26.30	1,157.20
Final Plats	54	7.23	390.42
Planned Development	8	20.70	165.60
Variance	22	18.00	396.00
Shoreline	161	25.40	4,089.40
Subtotal	327		6,806.62
Other			
SEPA Checklist Applications	392	10.50	4,116.00
Forest Practice	86	4.30	369.80
Other land use actions/appeals	276	3.00	828.00
Subtotal	754		5,313.80
TOTAL	1,345		12,752.82

Additional hours must be added for non-fee activities that are not included in Table 34 in order to determine the total staffing needs of the section. According to the Time and Materials database, the case planners in Current Planning spend approximately 51% of their time on processing planning applications. The remainder of their time is spent on a variety of related work activity such as:

- Public questions including phone and email
- Correspondence not related to an application
- Meeting with the public
- Staff meetings
- Planner of the day (at the Development Counter)
- Enforcement
- Council inquiry
- County Attorney meetings

The above functions are considered non-fee administrative work. Although it is common for case planners to spend some time on all of the above items, it is unusual for them to spend the substantial amount of time indicated on Table 35, Non-fee Administrative Workload. It should be noted that some of this time expended might contribute to the understaffing of the Development Counter, tech support function.

**Table 35
Non-fee Administrative Workload**

Administrative Activity	Average Hours/Years/ Case Planner	Total Hours	Planner Work Year
Phone/ email	317.00	2,542.00	1.61
Correspondence	114.00	914.00	0.58
Meetings w/public	129.00	1,032.00	0.65
Staff Meetings	99.00	792.00	0.50
Planner of Day	96.00	768.00	0.48
Enforcement	83.50	578.00	0.37
Council Inquiry	31.70	254.00	0.16
County Attorney	40.10	321.00	0.20
Total	910.30	7,201.00	4.55

When adding the projected staffing needed for case processing in 2004 (8.1 planners) to the administrative time spent in 2003, 12.7 planners appear to be needed to handle Current Planning’s workload in a timely manner. However, overall the numbers in Current Planning do not seem to balance as can be seen in the backlog discussion to follow. We speculate that the planners may not be accurately reporting their time and the time to process cases may be substantially higher.

A higher percent of the administrative responsibilities, in particular the general phone and e-mail inquires, simple correspondence and meeting with the public should be handled at the Permit Counter by the permit techs and the planning support staff. It is recommended that a Planner III be located at the Development Counter to be readily available to handle more complex issue as they arise. In order for the case planners to handle their assignments in a timely manner, they need to be handling less informational calls and e-mails.

74. Recommendation: The Development Center should make an effort to decrease non-fee supported administrative work for the case planners. A screening processing should be developed by the Development Center to minimize the number of informational calls, e-mails, and meetings reaching the case planners. (Priority 1)

Even if administrative duties were decreased, there is more work than available case planner hours. In order for applications to be handled in a timely manner there is a need for more people processing cases. A review of Tables 35 and 36 indicates labor hours for 12.7 case planners are needed to staff Current Planning; however, with the changes that are recommended to the organization including:

- Transferring all of Forest Practice to Resource Management
- Having the planners assigned to Development Counter do SEPA review for building permits
- Having the planners at the Development Counter handle more public information questions.

Thirteen planners might be too high. Instead we are recommending that three planners be added to Current Planning's staff. Additional discussion of these positions can be found in the Organization section of this chapter. After one year of increased staff the section should reevaluate their workload, frequency of meeting performance measures and remaining backlog to determine if an additional staff is necessary. If found necessary, additional staffing should be provided.

Backlog

Progress cannot be made in meeting suggested new timelines until the backlog of cases is removed. However, given the current data we found it difficult to calculate the size of the backlog. We were furnished the data for five major categories of permits as shown in Table 36.

Table 36
Current Planning – Year End Carry Over

Type	Applications Approved							
	2000 Received	2000 Approved	2001 Received	2001 Approved	2002 Received	2002 Approved	2003 Received	2003 Approved
1. Preliminary Plats	31	40	41	38	47	39	53	28
2. Conditional Use Permits	25	22	28	26	20	26	20	17
3. Administrative Use Permits	17	8	14	17	14	18	5	6
4. Shoreline Substantial Development Permits	45	20	32	33	39	21	52	24
5. Short Plats	53	56	50	56	67	38	68	39
Totals	171	146	165	170	187	142	198	114

1. Preliminary Plat data generated from the Plat Monthly report document.
2. Conditional Use Permit data generated from the CP files and the Hearing Examiner decisions for the specified years.
3. Administrative Use Permit data generated from the AUP files and DCIS.
4. Shoreline Substantial Development Permit data generated from the SD files and the Hearing Examiner decisions for the specified years.
5. Short Plat data generated from DCIS.

NOTE:

Application numbers do not include those that were voided.
Not all land use application types are included in this report.

Preliminary Plats, Conditional Use Permits and Shoreline Substantial Development Permits are considered approved when the Hearing Examiner issues a decision. The Examiner is required by regulation to issue the decision within 10 days. This requirement is not enforced or met with regularity.

Approval for Administrative Use Permits is determined by the date the Administrative decision is issued by the Land Use Planner.

Approval for Short Plats is determined once the mylar is signed by all necessary Departments.

The data in this table tends to indicate a backlog of cases for these categories of permits of 120 cases at the end of 2003. This is arrived at by accumulating the difference between the applications received and the applications either approved or denied each year. PALS appears to be doing reasonably well in the Conditional Use Permit and Administrative Permits category. However, a backlog is building for Plats and Shoreline Permits.

Current Planning processes other cases in addition to the five categories listed in Table 36. In Chapter 5 we discussed the overall backlog issue within PALS. Table 10 in that chapter indicates that in 2003 Current Planning approved 514 less applications than they approved. For our estimating purposes we think the backlog could be somewhere between the 120 cases and the 514 cases and we are using a figure of 300 cases.

In order to complete a backlog strategy, the first step should be to calculate the size of the backlog. However, even while this is being done we suggest the County proceed by adding the three recommended planners as well as two planning consultants and several Advance Planners on temporary assignment to begin to work on the backlog.

75. Recommendation: Current Planning should complete an accurate assessment of the backlog of cases. (Priority 1)

G. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Current Planning uses a variety of performance measures. The PALS scorecard originally included 18 measures which were reduced to nine measures. While useful, many of these measure count of activity and these are not actual performance measures. Much of the monitoring is reactive in nature and some of the necessary information is difficult to assimilate.

The 2004 budget contains four performance measures for PALS, none of which apply to Current Planning. Current Planning's performance measures are inappropriately grouped with the Development Center indicators. The general complexity of the discretionary applications, and the need for environmental review, public notice and hearings make the process significantly different from ministerial permits processed by Building and Safety. Merging data from both sections into a single Budget measure leads to incorrect conclusions.

The budget from 1999 includes two standards that are applied to Current Planning as well as Building and Safety performance. (We are only evaluating these standards in relationship to Current Planning in this chapter.)

1. Complete review of 90% of all initial submittals within 30 days.
2. Complete the review of 90% of the projects submitted within 120 days.

In regards to Standard 1 above, we believe that 100% of the applications submitted should have a written response regarding outstanding issues within 20 working days. It is the project manager's responsibility to pursue other sections or departments for their comments. We were unable to complete a detailed analysis of timelines due to the lack of reliable data or special computer print outs. It is clear that in general, Current Planning is not meeting the 1999 standards. In some cases, the problem is the responsiveness of other sections or departments. Staff prepared the data shown in Table 37 for three typical plats in 2001, 2002, and 2003. Typical response times for Development Engineering ranged from one month to nine months with a median response time of three and a half months. Response times for Public Works Traffic from the application date to comments ranged from two months to 10 1/2 months with a median response time of two months.

**Table 37
Plat Comment Timelines**

Year	Number of Lots	Months to Initial Engineering Comment	Months to Initial Public Works Traffic Comment
2001	37	4.5	10.5
2001	73	3.5	3.0
2001	97	4.0	3.5
2002	40	9.0	2.0
2002	55	1.0	2.0
2002	71	0.5	2.0
2003	45	1.0	2.0
2003	49	4.0	2.5
2003	235	2.5	2.0
Mean		3.5	2.0

In regards to Standard 2 above, we believe that there should be different performance standards for different types of applications. For applications requiring SEPA, LUAC and public review, 120 days of staff time is a good goal. For a simple application, it is an unreasonably long timeline.

Table 38 delineates the recommended performance standard for Current Planning.

**Table 38
Recommended Performance Measures**

Recommended Performance Measures	Standard	Compliance
1. Phone calls returned	same day	100%
2. First response to applicant	20 working days	95%
3. Processing time for land use applications (days):		
Administrative Permits w/o SEPA	45 working days	95%
Hearing Officer w/o SEPA or LUAC	90 working days	95%
Hearing Officer with SEPA or LUAC	105 working days	95%
Hearing Officer with SEPA and LUAC	120 working days	95%
4. Other Administrative Assignments	15 working days	100%
5. Staff reports with conditions to all interested parties.	5 working days before hearing	100%

76. Recommendation: The performance measures identified in Table 38 should be adopted by Current Planning. (Priority 1)

Qualitative indicators that should be added to the above performance measures should include the following items:

- ✓ Develop an ongoing effort to streamline application processes.
- ✓ Create a more unified approach for communication between Current Planning, outside agencies and in-house sections and departments.
- ✓ Develop and implement the project manager approach to handling planning applications.
- ✓ Establish a system of early integration of the public into the review process.

77. Recommendation: The qualitative indicators identified above should be incorporated into Current Planning’s work effort. (Priority 2)

H. OTHER ISSUES

Advance Planning-Current Planning’s Relationship

Both Advanced and Current Planning are staffed with planners. However their work assignments and related work pacing are quite different. Since their final work products are interrelated and impact the other, it is important that the staff of each section understand the issues and problems in the other section. We believe the best way to accomplish this goal is the crossing training of staff. PALS needs to establish a policy that requires the rotation of staff from one section to the other after a period of time, perhaps two or three years. Not only would this system help with departmental understanding, but it would cut down on the stress related burnout that is frequently experienced by planners who continuously face short timelines.

78. Recommendation: PALS should establish a mandatory program of planner rotation. (Priority 2)

New community plans are one of the major work-products coming from Advance Planning,. These plans frequently change the rules and regulations under which property can be developed. Current Planning is required to implement the plans through its review and approval of applications. This is not always an easy task, especially when the plans are new.

Additional training is necessary for the counter techs, planning techs and the case planners to fully understand the intent of the regulation changes and to appropriately implement them. To ease the transition from the existing regulations to the new rules

help is needed from Advance Planning. This help needs to be more than one or two training classes. Instead, a planner from Advance Planning who worked on the new community plan should be assigned as a liaison contact person for case processing. This person should meet regularly, perhaps once a week in the beginning, with the team working in his or her community planning area. These meetings are intended to clarify issues as they occur with real applications. Training meetings should also be held with the counter techs and planning techs to clarify issues that might impact their work responsibilities and decision making.

- 79. Recommendation: Advance Planning should assign a liaison person to assure correct implementation of new community plans by the Development Review Counter and Current Planning. (Priority 2)**

Private Office for Current Planning's Supervisor

As discussed earlier in this document, PALS' existing facilities are grossly inadequate and should be replaced. In Current Planning, the supervisor shares the office space with another staff person. In addition, the County Attorney assigned to PALS uses a small portion of her office space when on-site.

Current Planning's supervisor needs to have a private office in order to effectively manage the section and to handle confidential matters. Until new facilities are constructed, something needs to be done in the interim to correct the existing situation.

- 80. Recommendation: PALS should modify Current Planning's existing office space in order to provide a private office for its supervisor. (Priority 2)**

LUAC Training

LUACs are County Council appointed committees that act as community representatives. They are charged with implementing their community plans by reviewing and commenting on discretionary applications. Their comments are included within the staff report and considered by the Hearing Examiner when considering an application.

In order for the LUACs to operate effectively they need to be trained. They should understand their responsibilities including:

- What is within the scope of their review and what is not
- How and when to respond to case applications
- How the meetings should function

Current Planning needs to establish a training program for the LUACs. It might include regular meetings for all chairpersons, special sessions for individual LUACs, a handbook of policies distributed to all members, and/or an annual training meeting for new appointees.

81. *Recommendation: Current Planning should establish a training program for LUAC members. (Priority 3)*

Subdivision Ordinance

The Subdivision Ordinance is out-of-date. PALS has been working on revising it for over three years. However, it is always being put on the back burner as more pressing items come up. Current and Advance Planning should recognize that the Ordinance is important. Assigned staff should be told it is a priority and that they need to continue revising the Ordinance without stopping for other priorities.

82. *Recommendation: A timeline should be established for updating the Subdivision Ordinance and appropriate staff should be assigned to completing the task. (Priority 2)*

Project Manager for Final Plats

After the preliminary plat is approved, the applicant must comply with a number of conditions prior to recordation of the plat. Most, but not all of these conditions, relate to surveying and engineering requirements. Due to the heavy focus on non-planning issues, the project manager for this phase should be Engineering Development with Current Planning providing input as appropriate. A recommendation that addresses this issue is found in the Development Engineering chapter of this report.