

**Management Study of the
Construction Services Department**

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA



September 10, 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This initial chapter of the report introduces the approaches utilized in this study and summarizes key findings, conclusions and recommendations to be found in this report.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT.

The Matrix Consulting Group was retained by the City of West Palm Beach, Florida to conduct a review of the Construction Services Department and to provide a Plan for enhancing the operations of the Construction Services Department functions. As part of this study, the Matrix Consulting Group analyzed the following specific areas, as well as other related topics:

- Staffing levels in the Construction Services Department;
- Services currently provided;
- Opportunities to enhance services provided including specific focus on customer service and response times;
- The efficiency and effectiveness of operations in terms of the services provided, staffing, and productivity; and
- An evaluation of the existing standard operating procedures, policies and practices.

The review included an assessment and analysis of the best management practices in the construction services function and a comparison to other industry practices and the methods and practices utilized by best performing construction services divisions.

2. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY METHODOLOGY.

As part of the development of this study, the project team conducted the following activities:

- Detailed interviews with staff of the Construction Services Department and with selected other City employees.
- Conducted data collection to gather relevant information regarding the services provided, the volume of work staff has to manage, and the time frames in which the work is completed;
- Performed an employee survey to gauge employee perceptions regarding work practices and their employment;
- Performed a series of interviews and focus groups with members of the development community to assess their satisfaction and input with the services provided by the Construction Services Department;
- Completed a best practices comparison that gauged the current practices in the City of West Palm Beach against a set of “best management practices” for construction services functions in the industry; and
- Analyzed organizational policies and procedures, staffing levels, and staff allocations.

These activities enabled the project team to analyze the current performance of the Department, the duties assigned and allocated to staff, and the organizational structure. The analysis conducted has led to the recommendations that are contained in the later chapters of this report.

3. THE STUDY FOUND A NUMBER OF POSITIVE FEATURES IN THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

A management study tends to focus on opportunities for improvement. However, it is important to acknowledge, prior to addressing the opportunities for improvement, examples of positive aspects identified during the course of this study. Some of these positive aspects are noted below.

- The City utilizes an inter-departmental review committee to review, comment on, and develop conditions of approval for development applications.
- The department has a high level of technology implemented to assist staff in performing their construction permitting activities, including extensive online services for requesting and viewing inspection results and tracking plan reviews and comments.
- The Construction Services Department was the second community in the State of Florida and one of the first five in the nation, to achieve accreditation status with the International Accreditation Service (IAS).
- The department has a strong focus on continuing education and certification for staff providing ample opportunities for employees to maintain and enhance their skills.
- The department responds to inspection requests within one business day of receipt of the request.
- Contractors are able to view plan review results and to schedule inspections with the department on-line and through an IVR system.
- The department provides extensive information to the construction industry on the City's website for use by contractors and the public.
- The department conducts extensive and in-depth evaluations and plan reviews of submitted documents to ensure compliance with applicable building codes.
- Staff within the Construction Services Department are recognized as being among the most technically proficient, in terms of code knowledge, in the industry.

These are some of the positive aspects observed during the course of this study in the operations and organization of the Construction Services Department.

4. THERE ARE ALSO A NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

The table, which follows, provides a summary of the recommendations contained within this report. These recommendations are described in more detail in later sections of this report. It is important to note, prior to a review of the recommendations, some

key factors about what the project team concluded regarding some general areas of management.

While the project team has recommended numerous opportunities for improvement, these have been developed to improve the level of services provided but are not necessarily an indication of a department that is grossly mismanaged. Several key overriding concepts and principles should be kept in mind as the opportunities for improvement are reviewed. These include:

- Overall, the staff within the Construction Services Department are technically competent in the performance of their duties. In fact, in many cases, the level of code knowledge is greater than that found in other communities. This is both a positive and negative for the community – while it increases the level of review conducted during plan reviews, it also enhances the perception that the City is imposing requirements that are not required by other communities.
- The lack of a fee increase over the last several years has placed the Department in a difficult position relative to providing services. It is a best practice to review fees on an annual basis to ensure that: (1) fees are adequate to cover the full cost of the services provided; and (2) to minimize significant increases to the construction industry at any one point in time. The failure to annually review the fee has resulted in a depletion of fund reserves, to virtually none, while maintaining a high level of services to the industry.
- Existing services cannot continue to be provided at the current fee structure given the existing levels of construction activity within the City of West Palm Beach.
- The greatest areas of concern noted by the construction industry during focus groups, private interviews, and discussions, were generally not related to the technical ability of staff but rather the level of perceived customer service orientation of the Department.
- The lack of a true partnership between the City and the construction industry is not present. Many recommendations are designed to develop and improve this relationship through enhanced communication and services provided by the City. However, it will also require the involvement and commitment of the local construction and builders' associations to accomplish.
- The recommendations should be approached as a comprehensive approach to improvement within the City. A specific implementation plan should be adopted

by the City to indicate both the City’s commitment to improving services and the relationship with the construction industry, but also to providing benchmarks against which to evaluate the Department’s implementation.

The following table summarizes the recommendations contained within the report.

Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
TECHNOLOGY RELATED			
6.1	Future upgrades to the CommunityPlus software system should include the ability to provide more information, including detailed performance information regarding re-submittal plan review times.	Director	High
6.1	The City of West Palm Beach should continue exploration of plan review overlay software, and develop a plan of implementation based upon available financing.	Director	High
MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH			
6.2 (1)	A significant increase in the dialogue between the Department and the construction industry must be adopted, including quarterly training and meetings, newsletters, and frequent outreach for input.	Director	High
6.2 (1)	An annual and ongoing customer satisfaction survey should be conducted by the Department.	Director	Medium
6.2 (2)	The City through the City Administrator and Construction Services Director should provide training to all staff regarding the “focus” of the Department on providing high-quality services in a timely manner.	Director / City Administrator	High
6.2 (3)	Monthly performance reports outlining the percentage of plan reviews and inspections completed within established time frames should be revised, and posted to the Internet.	Director	High

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.2 (4)	The Department should develop a contingency plan that includes the use of external resources or overtime when they are unable to complete workload within required timeframes.	Director	High
6.2 (5)	The Department should develop a handout containing a matrix of who to contract for various issues to assist applicants in appropriately resolving issues.	Director	High
6.2 (5)	Chief Plans Examiners within the Department should be designated as the ombudsman for the receipt, review and resolution of all complaints regarding service levels related to code compliance issues raised during the plan review phase.	Director	High
6.2 (6)	The direct managers of the Inspections and Plan Review Sections should coordinate weekly training of staff and be responsible for the ongoing quality of in-house coordination.	CSD Management	Ongoing
6.2 (6)	The Department must assure that weekly training occurs for each plan check and inspection discipline at least one hour weekly. All employees should be assigned as presenters on a rotating basis.	CSD Management	Ongoing
6.2 (6)	The Department should establish and publish quarterly training agendas for joint training sessions between the Plans Reviews and Inspectors. Outside presenters should be utilized where appropriate.	CSD Management	Ongoing
6.3 (1)	The City should adopt a formal policy regarding fund reserve levels for the Construction Services Department that provides, at a minimum, three to six months of operating revenues in reserves.	Mayor / City Commission	High

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.3 (1)	The City should allocate a portion of annual permit fees to a “special reserve” that is intended to be utilized for plan review and building inspections services to be required in future years. The amount allocated should be based upon the estimated proportion of work to be accomplished in future years.	Mayor / City Commission	High
6.3 (2)	During the next cost allocation study conducted by the City, special attention should be given to the amount of charges allocated to the Construction Services Department for administration/overhead purposes.	City Administrator	High
BUILDING INSPECTIONS			
6.4 (1)	The City of West Palm Beach should develop a program to encourage and reward staff for achieving the ability to perform multiple trade inspections. The City should implement a classification and salary schedule that encourages and reward employees for attaining additional trade certifications.	Director / HR	High
6.4 (1)	The City of WPB should increase the utilization and deployment of more cross-trained building inspectors to better manage and adjust to changing workloads.	Director / HR	High
6.4 (2)	The scheduling of inspections for Building Inspectors should be modified to enable additional efficiencies by having CommunityPlus directly assign requested inspections to the appropriate inspector.	CSD Management	High
6.4 (3)	The Department should continue monitoring inspection services timeframes, and staffing levels should be adjusted when less than 95% of inspections are completed within one day of request or when overtime utilization to conduct routine inspections becomes regular and ongoing.	CSD Management	High

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.4 (4)	The Department should target a base staffing in the Inspections Division of 16 positions. This will require the filling of one currently vacant position. This position should be filled, if at all possible, with an individual with more than one trade specialization.	Director	High
6.4 (4)	Following implementation of the changes in building inspector functions and the change in the supervisory structure, Building Inspections staff should be assigned geographically (among two districts in the City).	Director	Medium
6.4 (5)	The Inspections Services Division should be structured to provide the elimination of the Inspections Services Manager position and the maintenance of the four Chief Building Inspector positions for the near term.	Director	High
6.4 (6)	The Construction Services Department should work with the City Administrator to request reconsideration of the change in take-home vehicles for Building Inspectors assigned to the field, given the approximate 12% reduction per inspector in time available for conducting field activities.	Director	High
6.4 (7) (a)	Inspection checklists should be developed and utilized by Building Inspectors to increase consistency. Completed checklists should become a component of the project file.	CSD Management	Medium
6.4 (7) (a)	Inspection checklists should be posted to the City's website for use by customers.	CSD Management	Medium
6.4 (7) (b)	The Inspections Services Manager or Chief Inspectors should periodically ride along with each building inspector – at least one-half day every quarter for on-going performance evaluation.	CSD Management	Medium

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.4 (7) (c)	The Construction Services Department should document official building inspection code interpretations and publish them on the Department's website.		
6.4 (7) (d)	Require that any new requirements not previously imposed (other than required building code requirements) will not be enforced on current construction and future jobs until the industry is informed and a 60 day waiting period is put in place.	CSD Management	Medium
6.4 (7) (d)	Initiate a policy that inspectors do not re-open a construction element previously approved by another building inspector without approval from their supervisor. This policy should discourage surprises or changes to previous field job approvals by building inspectors.	CSD Management	Medium
6.4 (7) (d)	Initiate a policy whereby inspectors do not take issue in public with a plan check approval. If an inspector questions a plan check approval or is concerned about an omission or discrepancy, the building inspector should review it with the plans examiner and if a problem is identified, have the Plans Examiner contact the contractor's architect for a change.	Director	Medium
6.4 (7) (e)	A pilot program of flexible work hours should be utilized to provide evening hours for handling expired permits and inspections for homeowners who are unable to schedule inspections during other times.	Director	Low
PLAN REVIEW			
6.5 (1)	Checklists should be utilized during the intake process to ensure submitted applications are complete. Incomplete applications should not be accepted.	Director	Medium
6.5 (1)	Checklists utilized should be made available on the City's website for use by the public in self-evaluating their own applications in advance.	Director	High

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.5 (1)	The City should implement a permit technician position, in lieu of the administrative staff, on the front counter to assist the public and review applications as received.	Director	High
6.5 (1)	The City of WPB should add an additional Chief Building Plans Examiner at an annual cost of approximately \$125,000 to \$140,000.	Director	High
6.5 (2)	The Department should implement a pilot program for the review of private provider applications to conduct an initial review for “critical” health, safety, and code compliance issues and only conduct full reviews on those that fail this checklist. Reports should be developed that summarize the review times for private provider applications and the number passing the initial checklist so that the program can be evaluated.	Manager	High
6.5 (3)	Plan review time performance should be measured monthly for each plan reviewer. The Manager should adopt caseload targets for each plan reviewer. Managers should address through training, evaluation and other methods, all individuals who are unable to meet established time review targets.	Manager	High
6.5 (3)	The City should post all plan review targets (by plan type) on the website for applicants to understand routine processing times.	Director	High
6.5 (3)	The City should formally adopt the time review standards recommended by the task force with the following changes: resubmittals should be performed in ½ the time of the original time review standard; and resubmittals resulting from internal staff disagreement on code requirements should be conducted within 5 days.	Director	High

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Section	Recommendation	Management Responsibility	Priority
6.5 (3)	The Chief Building Plans Examiner should develop workload targets for Plans Reviewers that provide guidelines on the average number of applications that are reviewed per day and the average number of hours each plan review should take for completion.	Director	High
6.5 (4)	The City should implement a cross training program for plans reviewers with an appropriate financial compensation. Additionally, all new hires should have multiple certifications when hired – when possible.	Director	High
6.5 (5)	The Department should better communicate the conditions under which it will utilize redlined changes and provisos for minor or administrative code compliance issues.	Director	High
6.5 (6)	The Department should implement an “expedited” plan review process that for an additional fee (to cover the cost of overtime) provides an expedited review for qualifying applicants.	Director	High

2. PROFILE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

2. PROFILE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

This document provides a short descriptive profile of the current organization and Descriptive Profile of the Construction Services Department. The purpose of the Descriptive Profile is to document the project team's understanding of the Construction Services Department's organization, allocation of staff by function, and principal assigned responsibilities of staff. Data contained in the Profile was developed based on site work conducted by the project team, including:

- Interviews with Construction Services Department staff to understand roles and responsibilities, etc. The project team interviewed the majority of the Department's personnel.
- Interviews with other departmental managers in the City to discuss quality of service issues, inter-departmental coordination, etc.
- Collection of various data describing organization and staffing, workload and service levels as well as costs.
- Documentation of key practices as that relates to work planning and scheduling, policies and procedures, as well as work processes.
- Observation of worksite, processes, workflow and staff activities.

The structure of this Descriptive Profile is as follows:

- Introduction and budget data.
- Organizational charts of key functions showing all staff positions by function and shift as appropriate, and reporting relationships.
- Summary descriptions of key roles and responsibilities of position in the Construction Services Department. The responsibility descriptions provided in the Descriptive Profile also summarize the team's understanding of the major programs and service activities to which staff throughout the Department are currently assigned. It should be clearly noted that responsibility descriptions are not intended to be at the "job description" level of detail. Rather, the descriptions

are intended to provide the basic nature of each unit and assigned positions, including staffing levels and work schedules, program targets and service descriptions.

The Descriptive Profile provides a summary of the current organization, staffing, and operations of the Construction Services Department.

1. INTRODUCTION.

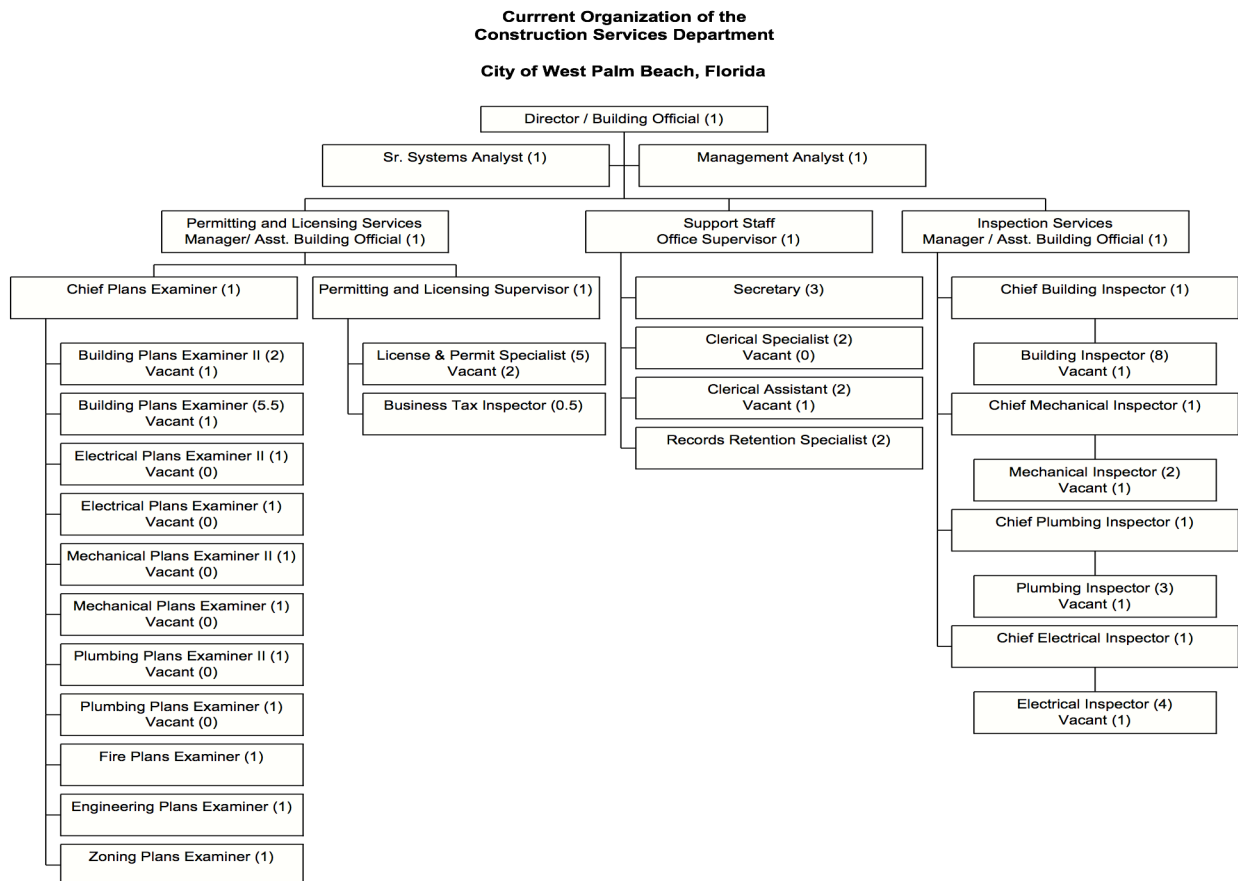
The Construction Services Department is responsible for enforcing the Florida Building Code and other related laws and ordinances through the review of plans, issuance of permits, and inspection of buildings, structures and facilities. They are also responsible for the issuance of business tax receipts. The Department is organized into several key divisions / sections including:

- **Administration Division:** This Division is responsible for the overall management and direction of the Construction Services Department.
- **Permits and Licenses Section:** This Section serves as the front counter and initial point of contact for customers submitting applications. In addition to performing the initial intake functions for building permits, the Section is responsible for issuing business tax receipts.
- **Plans Examination Section:** This Section is responsible for conducting plan reviews of building plans for various trades, including building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing. This Section is also responsible for conducting fire, engineering and zoning reviews of plans.
- **Office Support Section:** This Section provides general administrative and clerical support to specific Department programs, such as demolition, records retention, etc.
- **Inspection Services Division:** This Division is responsible for conducting field inspections of development activities for building, mechanical, plumbing and gas, and electrical work. Additionally, this Division conducts joint inspections with the Code Enforcement Department to determine properties that need to be repaired or demolished. This Division writes citations and follows up, as necessary, with court appearances.

The section, which follows, provides the organization chart for the Construction Services Department.

2. ORGANIZATION

The following organization chart presents the current plan of organization for the Construction Services Department.



The section, which follows, provides a summary of the key roles and responsibilities of the positions in the Construction Services Department.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Position	Number		Responsibilities
	Auth.	Actual	
Administration			
Director / Building Official	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves as Department Director. • Directly supervises top management staff of the department. • Serves as the City of West Palm Beach's building official / building code administrator responsible for all final code interpretations and compliance with the State of Florida's Building Code Requirements. • Supervises assigned staff and sets policy and management direction for the Department as a whole. • Establishes policy and procedures for the department. • Monitors department performance and expectations. • Oversees development and implementation of new projects and initiatives. • Responsible for budget development.

	Number		
Senior Systems Analyst	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes the Strategic Technology Direction for the Construction Services Department in conjunction with the Building Official along with support from the Management Information Systems Department • Identifies, reviews, assists in selection and implements CSD information technology and telecommunications advances providing for greater efficiency and customer service • Responsible for the ongoing operation and maintenance of technology systems and software, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – E-Gov Plus and related applications such as CommunityPlus real-time internet-based permitting and plan review – IP Telephony – Land Management System – Document Imaging hardware and related records management software applications • Coordinates the update, maintenance and care for all technology equipment including field reporting laptop computers, work stations, switches, aircards and related hardware needed to operate advanced technology • Manages major technology initiatives in CSD, which currently includes a proposed Digital Plan Review project and internet transaction capabilities • Assists in the extraction of data from existing systems to allow for advanced management reports and performance measures monitoring

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	Number		
Management Analyst	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists the Building Official in the overall business management Develops management and budget reports to assist the Building Official based on business objects Develops management reports to track and monitor business metrics, performance measures, revenues and expenses for the CSD Fund manager for the Building Fund (Fund 130) Program coordinator for IAS Accreditation Process and ISO community rating system review Developed and prepares monthly Dashboard reports to provide a summary of management information related to business operations Helps develop and update departmental policies and procedures Works on special management projects as directed by the Building Official, such as preparation of reports and PowerPoint presentations
Permit and License Services			
Manager / Assistant Building Official	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversees the overall permitting and plan review function. Assist the Director in overall departmental administration. Performs special projects as assigned. Responsible as a primary contact for problem resolution with pending applications and plan reviews.
Chief Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervises assigned plans examiners. Evaluates, supervises and manages day-to-day work activities of the division. Establishes programs for consistency and uniformity in conducting plan reviews.

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	Number		
Building Plans Examiner II	2.0	1.0	Same as Building Plans Examiner, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs more complex building plan reviews related to large commercial, large downtown and mixed use projects = “commercial board” projects • Reviews plans related to threshold level buildings (greater than 4 stories) • Discusses and provides consultation related to code interpretation matters with BPE’s and Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures proper implementation of new Building Code provisions in conjunction with Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures that building plan records on complex projects are complete, to include engineering shop drawings, product approvals, wall systems and other follow-up items needed for plan implementation and file completion
Building Plans Examiner	5.5	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews building construction plans for compliance with the Florida Building Code including any related Chapter 1 local amendments. • Focus is mainly residential, small commercial and commercial interior buildouts. • Identifies code compliance deficiencies and answers related code question inquiries from general contractors, owner/builders, architects and engineers. • Enters plans status codes, reasons for failures, and related comments in “CommunityPlus” building plan review computer system. • Ensures smaller project plans are processed within target turnaround times • Re-reviews previously submitted plans until code compliance is achieved. • Redlines plan drawings to identify contingent approval based on corrective actions to be submitted during implementation.

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	Number		
Electrical Plans Examiner II	1.0	1.0	<p>Same as Electrical Plans Examiner, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs more complex electrical plan reviews related to large commercial, large downtown and mixed use projects • Reviews electrical plans involving high voltages, complex circuitry and back-up electrical generation systems • Discusses and provides consultation related to code interpretation matters with BPE's and Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures proper implementation of new Building Code provisions in conjunction with Chief Plans Examiner, including the Florida Energy Code provisions of the building code • Ensures that building plan records on complex projects are complete, to include engineering shop drawings and other follow-up items needed for plan implementation and records completion
Electrical Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews electrical plans for compliance with the Florida Building Code including any related Chapter 1 local amendments • Focus is mainly residential, small commercial and commercial interior buildouts • Identifies code compliance deficiencies and answers related code question inquiries from general contractors, owner/builders, architects and engineers • Enters plans status codes and comments in "CommunityPlus" building plan review computer system • Ensures smaller project plans are processed within target turnaround times • Re-reviews previously submitted plans until code compliance is achieved • Redlines plan drawings to identify contingent approval based on corrective actions to be submitted during implementation

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	Number		
Mechanical Plans Examiner II	1.0	1.0	<p>Same as Mechanical Plans Examiner, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs more complex mechanical plan reviews related to large commercial, large downtown and mixed use projects • Reviews mechanical (HVAC) system plans involving complex, integrated heating, cooling, ventilation and fire control systems • Discusses and provides consultation related to code interpretation matters with BPE's and Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures proper implementation of new Building Code provisions in conjunction with Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures that building plan records on complex projects are complete, to include engineering shop drawings and other follow-up items needed for plan implementation and records completion
Mechanical Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews mechanical plans for compliance with the Florida Building Code including any related Chapter 1 local amendments. • Focus is mainly residential, small commercial and commercial interior buildouts. • Identifies code compliance deficiencies and answers related code question inquiries from general contractors, owner/builders, architects and engineers. • Enters plans status codes and comments in "CommunityPlus" building plan review computer system. • Ensures smaller project plans are processed within target turnaround times. • Re-reviews previously submitted plans until code compliance is achieved. • Redlines plan drawings to identify contingent approval based on corrective actions to be submitted during implementation.

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	Number		
Plumbing Plans Examiner II	1.0	1.0	<p>Same as Plumbing Plans Examiner, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs more complex plumbing plan reviews related to large commercial, large downtown and mixed use projects • Reviews plumbing plans involving great complexity such as plumbing requiring enhanced systems or pumping along with integration into sprinkler systems and other fire protection • Discusses and provides consultation related to code interpretation matters with BPE's and Chief Plans Examiner • Ensures proper implementation of new Building Code provisions in conjunction with Chief Plans Examiner. • Ensures that building plan records on complex projects are complete, to include engineering shop drawings and other follow-up items needed for plan implementation and records completion
Plumbing Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews plumbing plans for compliance with the Florida Building Code including any related Chapter 1 local amendments • Focus is mainly residential, small commercial and commercial interior buildouts • Identifies code compliance deficiencies and answers related code question inquiries from general contractors, owner/builders, architects and engineers • Enters plans status codes and comments in "CommunityPlus" building plan review computer system • Ensures smaller project plans are processed within target turnaround times • Re-reviews previously submitted plans until code compliance is achieved • Redlines plan drawings to identify contingent approval based on corrective actions to be submitted during implementation
Fire Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews all submitted plans for conformance with Fire Codes. • Conducts all initial and resubmittal plan reviews. • Identifies code compliance deficiencies and answers related code question inquiries from general contractors, owner/builders, architects and engineers • Serves as a resource to applicants in resolving issues regarding code compliance.

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	Number		
Engineering Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews primarily residential building construction plans for engineering impacts related to site interaction with the public right-of-way • Reviews commercial building construction plans for dumpster enclosure compliance and stormwater plan and water quality compliance by ensuring system tie-in is available • Reviews any applicable SFWMD permit pervious/impervious calculations for accuracy and Notice of Intent requirements on parcels > 1 acre • Checks drainage plans for finished floor plan elevations, lot sloping and NPDES compliance on commercial building plans • Verifies issuance of engineering right-of-way disturbance permits if applicable • Ensures driveway approaches and planned sidewalks are constructed to City code specifications
Zoning Plans Examiner	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews permit applications/plans for zoning and land use compliance • Focus is on single-family residential and small commercial projects • Residential project plan reviews include simple permits such as pools, fences, residential additions, generator installs, and landscaping updates • Reviews plans for landscaping/vegetation, building setbacks, easement encroachments • Reviews site plan to identify items that will impact the exterior of building and site • Identifies applicable Land Development Regulations and special zoning or overlay districts • Forwards plans to the Urban Design Planning Division if detailed special reviews are necessary, generally for Downtown and Mixed Use Development Districts (MUD's: Northwood, Curry Corridor, and Broadway) • Performs land use and zoning research to ascertain the legalities or grandfathering applicability associated with land/zoning uses related business rental license applications • Monitors "Buildout Board" to identify projects that may exceed 50% construction cost to current valuation to ascertain if a detailed zoning review or variance may be necessary

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	Number		
Permits and License Supervisor	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for the supervision and management of the Permits and Licenses Division. • Responsible for generating reports from CommunityPlus, such as housing report, new construction, weekly permits, revenue collections detail, new business, expired permits, etc. • Provide customer service, troubleshoot and resolve problems. • Answer phones. • Monitor front counter activity and provide backup when needed.
License and Permits Specialist	7.0	5.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with customers of the Construction Services Department to ascertain customers' needs • Performs initial intake to determine whether customer needs assistance with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Building permits – Business tax licenses – Rental tax licenses – Other related CSD services, such as requested Pre-Inspection Reviews • Reviews application type for completeness • Determines processing requirements, if product approvals may be required, and whether non-CSD reviews are necessary based on the type of application. Additional needs may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fire inspections (3 or more apartments) – Dept. of Business and Professional Regulation (5 or more apartments) • Enters required data into "CommunityPlus" permitting system to initiate the permit issuance process • Produces permit invoices for collection by the cashier • Answers telephone inquiries related to customer requirements for permit processing • Confers with or refers complex code questions to plan reviewers • Ensures proper signatures and notarization • Verifies licensing requirements of applications, such as validity of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – General Contractor's license – Business tax license • Performs special system research assignments to aid with updated expired/open permits to get permits reissued or closed out • Covers the telephone switchboard duties and the Plan Pick-up Intake Receptionist duties on an as needed basis

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	Number		
Business Tax Inspector	0.5	0.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – noon • Uses a “get businesses into compliance” approach rather than an enforcement and citation approach by providing business tax receipt applications for unlicensed, new businesses. • Responsible for identifying and bringing into compliance all businesses located in the City who do not have current business tax receipts. • Reviews tax license database in “CommunityPlus” for business tax receipts that were not renewed • Verifies City location in Palm Beach County Property Appraiser’s database by checking for City’s tax code within folio number • Assists in coordinating courtesy letters to obtain renewals for those companies still in business • Visits businesses to ascertain status of business tax receipts when renewals are not processed • Identifies business tax receipts fee amounts due based on a review of the City’s Business Tax Ordinance Fee Schedule and type of business found • Tracks and monitors results of compliance efforts and revenue generation in Excel database • Retroactively bills businesses that have not paid business taxes up to 3 year Statute of Limitations • Refers unresolvable compliance cases to Code Enforcement for further investigation and potential prosecution • Identifies businesses with multiple City locations to determine if each location has an individual business tax receipt • Occasionally reviews inventory to match against claimed inventory for discrepancies if readily accessible/observable
Office Support			
Office Supervisor	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly supervises all office support personnel on behalf of Department Director. • Conducts day to day performance monitoring, work assignments, and performance evaluation of assigned staff. • Assists Director as requested in conducting special projects and managing office operations. • Provides backup, as needed, to other staff during absence.

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
Analysis of Construction Services Department

	Number		
Secretary	2.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide general administrative and clerical support to staff in each Division. • Track time and attendance. Enter data for biweekly payroll. • Track leave time usage. • Process overtime slips. • Responsible for tracking 'incidents' such as tardiness, sick leave, etc. • Coordinate the administration of performance evaluations. • Maintain files. • Create purchase requisitions. • Process invoices and submit for payment. • Order materials and supplies. • Tracks 'red tags' (i.e., code violations).
Secretary – Demolition	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides support to the Building Inspector responsible for demolitions. • Process all paperwork for one of three types of cases: repair, demolition or emergency demolition. • Issue memos notifying pertinent departments and property owner of pending action (e.g., Housing and Community Development, Law Department, Historic Preservation, etc.) • Generate notice of condemnation. • Forward information to Law Department for title search. • For repairs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If a property is unclaimed, must publically advertise the notice of condemnation. – If the property is claimed (i.e., owner acknowledges receipt of notice), owner has 60 days to make repairs. A second notice is issued after 60 days if repair work has not begun. After 90 days of no response / action, the Department moves to demolish property. • For demolition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conduct same preliminary notifications (e.g., title search, notices issued to home owner or advertised if unclaimed). – Issue general notice to demolish. – Owner has 15 days to respond by getting a permit or appealing the decision.

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Analysis of Construction Services Department

	Number		
Secretary – Demolition (Continued)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For emergency demolitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conduct same preliminary notifications. – Issue notice to demolish to owner and Mayor’s Office. – Post emergency condemnation notice and issue notice to owner, who has 5 days to respond. • Work with the Purchasing Department to issue invitation for bids to demolish property. • Work with other City departments to place a lien on properties demolished by the City. • Maintain demolition schedule to track properties.
Clerical Specialist	2.0	2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One position is responsible for intake of plans. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Receive plans from front counter staff. – Review application and each page to determine, which trades will be required to review plans. – Ensure completeness of application. – Utilize boards in staff area to document pending work assignments, including large commercial projects, build outs (BOB), etc. – Route plans. – Receive and route re-submittals. Update boards, if necessary. – Provide customer service. – Research plan status and history for customers. Records Research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates Department’s records research program related to public records requests obtained through the City Clerk or public directly. • Researches records in EGov Plus (1999 to current) or separate databases if search pre-dates 1999 (Databases: 1988-1992; 1993-1998). • Determines if proper impact fees for planned developments have been previously paid. • Prepares cost estimates for research projects that are anticipated to take more than an hour. • Utilizes City’s records ordinance to determine anticipated and actual service charges for copies and/or extensive research. • Sends form letters and directs accounts receivable payments for completed research to cashier.

	Number		
Clerical Specialist (Continued)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies documents and obtains from off site storage various public records, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parcel surveys – Building Plans – Certificates of Occupancy – As built plans – Site plans • Maintains database of records requests since inception of research program • Maintains electronic filing system folders for all data files previously provided via compact disc so repeat requests can be efficiently retrieved and provided • Developed “how to” e-mails and form e-mails to answer public records inquiries to include how to retrieve post 1998 records information on E-Gov Plus via the City web site
Clerical Assistant	2.0	0,0	<p>Two full-time support positions are provided via a temporary staffing services contract with “Office Team.” Assignments are:</p> <p>Main switchboard telephone receptionist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers the main incoming phone lines for CSD and directs calls according to customer needs • Forwards general customer questions to Permit Specialists in rotational order • Forwards detailed requests/inquiries to Chief Inspectors when related to building inspection issues or problems • Identifies and advises customers about automated resources such as the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephonic inspection system and internet services • Answers switchboard general questions from the public. <p>File Clerk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists in developing and maintaining paper filing systems for permit applications and plans. • Retrieves and replaces active permit and plan files as needed by plan reviewers and inspectors. • Obtains Excel database report from MIS to identify closed and voided permit files that can be stored off site based upon age of project.

	Number		
Clerical Assistant (Continued)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists Records Retention Specialists by preparing closed and voided permit files and plans for electronic scanning and off site storage. Assists with Expired Permits Program by matching old, expired permit numbers to newly issued permits in CommunityPlus system. Backs up the duties of the telephone receptionist as necessary.
Records Retention Specialist	2.0	2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jointly manage the CSD Records Retention Program via the FileNET digital based document management system. Responsible for creating a digital permit and plan file for all closed files to include the permit application, plans, CO, product approval documents, etc. Operates high-volume and wide format scanning equipment to create digital images from paper records. Indexes scanned images utilizing EZ Index software that populates the CommunityPlus records database. Creates DVD's of stored images and data. Coordinates off-site storage requirements using Versatile computer software program to create database of box contents and ensures shipment to offsite storage through the Clerical Assistant who coordinates pick-up of boxes.
Inspection Services			
Manager / Assistant Building Official	1.0	0.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly responsible for the operations of the Inspections Services Division including supervising and evaluating assigned staff. Ensures performance expectations are met by all staff. Assists in resolving concerns, issues, and problems related to the Inspections function. Performs special projects as assigned by Director.

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	Number		
Chief Building Inspector	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the building inspectors. • Receives and assigns workload daily based on requests for inspections. • Monitors workload and activities of staff. • Conducts side-by-side inspections with Building Inspectors. • Ensures consistency of interpretation of building codes. • Works with developers to resolve issues and / or complaints. • Conducts inspections, as needed. • Completes performance evaluations of staff.
Building Inspector	6.0	5.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for conducting field inspections. • Receive daily inspection assignments from the Chief Building Inspector. • Assigned based on workload and geographic distribution of inspections. • Inspect new construction, remodels / renovations, etc. for compliance with plans and Florida Building Codes. • Results inspections in the field. • Conducts re-inspections as necessary. • Proactively identifies issues, such as unpermitted work, etc. • Generate 'red tag' notices for violations. • Conducts follow up inspections. • Answer phones and respond to requests from contractors. • Conduct inspections of expired permits. • Inspects properties for business tax.

	Number		
Building Inspector – Demolition	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages the CSD involvement in the Unsafe Structures and Demolition Program. • Works with Code Enforcement Task Force and City Attorney’s Office on a step-by-step process of determining a building’s structural integrity, habitability and related life safety issues from the initial on-site inspection through building demolition. • Red-tags buildings determined to be unsafe, often in conjunction with other Code Enforcement and/or law enforcement matters. • Identifies a list of buildings requiring the initial 60-day notice to comply letter from the City Attorney’s Office. • Obtains information related to criminal activity from the Police Department to assist in determining public nuisance status. • Provides information to building owners by phone, in-person or by letter to advise what corrective actions are necessary for life safety code compliance. • Provides list of title searches needed from the City Attorney’s Office. • Provides second notice to comply letters. • Testifies regarding unsafe structure cases before the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals (CBAA). • Assists in the preparation of the proper legal advertisements and posting of notices on site to initiate condemnation and demolition. • Coordinates utility releases and shutoffs as needed. • Coordinates work authorization demolitions via bid awards as determined by City purchasing process. • Ensures recordation liens and other required legal documents with County and City once site is cleared.

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	Number		
Building Inspector – Threshold Sites	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for conducting regularly inspections, similar to other Building Inspectors. In addition, oversees projects on which there is a fulltime, onsite private building inspector. There are currently 12 projects with onsite inspectors. Responsible for monitoring inspections performed by onsite inspectors. Receive and review onsite inspector's daily journal. Conduct onsite inspections at threshold sites. Visits project sites a minimum of once every two weeks. Maintain records and documentation of threshold site inspector activities, including copies of the private sector inspector.
Chief Inspector – Mechanical	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Mechanical Inspectors. Receives and assigns workload daily based on requests for inspections. Monitors workload and activities of staff. Conducts side-by-side inspections with Mechanical Inspectors. Ensures consistency of interpretation of codes. Works with developers to resolve issues and / or complaints. Conducts inspections, as needed. Completes performance evaluations of staff.
Mechanical Inspector	3.0	2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for conducting field inspections. Receive daily inspection assignments from the Chief Mechanical Inspector. Assigned based on workload and geographic distribution of inspections. Inspect new construction, remodels / renovations, etc. for compliance with plans and Florida Building Codes relating to mechanical systems. Results inspections in the field. Conducts re-inspections as necessary. Proactively identifies issues, such as unpermitted work, etc. Generate 'red tag' notices for violations. Conducts follow up inspections. Answer phones and respond to requests from contractors. Conduct inspections of expired permits. Inspects properties for business tax.

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Analysis of Construction Services Department

	Number		
Chief Plumbing Inspector	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Plumbing Inspectors. Receives and assigns workload daily based on requests for inspections. Monitors workload and activities of staff. Conducts side-by-side inspections with Mechanical Inspectors. Ensures consistency of interpretation of codes. Works with developers to resolve issues and / or complaints. Conducts inspections, as needed. Completes performance evaluations of staff.
Plumbing Inspector	4.0	2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for conducting field inspections. Receive daily inspection assignments from the Chief Plumbing Inspector. Assigned based on workload and geographic distribution of inspections. Inspect new construction, remodels / renovations, etc. for compliance with plans and Florida Building Codes relating to plumbing and gas systems. Results inspections in the field. Conducts re-inspections as necessary. Proactively identifies issues, such as unpermitted work, etc. Generate 'red tag' notices for violations. Conducts follow up inspections. Answer phones and respond to requests from contractors. Conduct inspections of expired permits. Conduct plan reviews, as needed. Inspects properties for business tax.
Chief Electrical Inspector	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Electrical Inspectors Receives and assigns workload daily based on requests for inspections. Monitors workload and activities of staff. Conducts side-by-side inspections with Electrical Inspectors. Ensures consistency of interpretation of building codes. Works with developers to resolve issues and / or complaints. Conducts inspections, as needed. Completes performance evaluations of staff.

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
Analysis of Construction Services Department

	Number		
Electrical Inspector	4.0	3.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for conducting field inspections. • Receive daily inspection assignments from the Chief Electrical Inspector. • Assigned based on workload and geographic distribution of inspections. • Inspect new construction, remodels / renovations, etc. for compliance with plans and Florida Building Codes relating to electrical systems. • Results inspections in the field. • Conducts re-inspections as necessary. • Proactively identifies issues, such as unpermitted work, etc. • Generate 'red tag' notices for violations. • Conducts follow up inspections. • Answer phones and respond to requests from contractors. • Conduct inspections of expired permits. • Conduct business tax inspections.
Electrical Inspector – Office / Misc.	1.0	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the Chief Electrical Inspector. • Answers phones, provides technical assistance where needed on electrical requirements and codes. • Research expired permits and close out expired permits when possible. • Assigns business tax inspections.

3. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ANALYSIS

3. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ANALYSIS

While the study of the Construction Services Department is designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of operations, organization and staffing, as well as management, this chapter represents an important aspect of the evaluation of performance and operations of the Department. In order to make the assessments of operational strengths and improvement opportunities, the project team developed a set of performance measures which we call “best management practices” against which to evaluate these processes. These performance measures comprise the main thrust of this diagnostic assessment.

The measures utilized have been derived from the project team's collective experience and represent the following ways to identify departmental strengths as well as improvement opportunities:

- Statements of "effective practices" based on the study team's experience in evaluating operations in other agencies or “industry standards” from other research organizations.
- Identification of whether and how the City of West Palm Beach meets these performance targets.
- A brief description of potential alternatives to current practice.

The purpose of the diagnostic assessment was to develop an overall assessment of the Construction Services Department. It should be noted that every function is not covered in this report.

The detailed assessment of each best management practice is contained in Appendix A of this report. The following points, summarize some of the major findings

of this assessment in three critical areas: Building Inspections, Use of Technology, and Plan Review.

The section, below, identifies the strengths and opportunities for improvement for building inspections.

1. BUILDING INSPECTION.

There are a number of positive aspects regarding the delivery of the inspection services by the Construction Services Department. Examples of these positive aspects are presented below.

- Inspections are generally conducted within one workday of receipt of request for the inspection. Inspectors are typically achieving inspections workloads of 10 to 14 inspections per day – meeting best practices standards.
- Inspection requests received prior to 7 a.m. are assigned to a Building Inspector and completed that workday. Inspection requests are accommodated, when possible, even when made on the same day.
- The Construction Services Department enables inspection requests to be requested by contractors utilizing various methods including online and through the IVR (Interaction Voice Response) systems.
- Building Inspectors have laptop computers assigned for use in the field. All inspection notes, violations and approvals are entered directly into the laptop computer while in the field. Inspectors may access information regarding the status of permits and the history of the permit and inspections contained within while in the field.

There are also a number of opportunities for improvement in the building inspection practices utilized by the Construction Services Department. These opportunities are portrayed below.

- Daily inspector case assignments are done manually. The existing software has the capability to directly assign inspections based upon workflow requirements to the appropriate inspector based upon either trade or geographic assignment of the inspector.

- Recent changes in the utilization of take-home vehicles have reduced the ability of Inspectors to maintain the amount of field time and the daily number of inspections that were achieved prior to the change since they now must report to City Hall to pick up their vehicle and equipment.

The following section outlines the major discussion points regarding technology and software utilization.

2. UTILIZATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS.

There are a number of positive aspects to the management of the automation of building permit issuance and tracking by the Construction Services Department.

Examples of these positive aspects are presented below.

- CommunityPlus software is utilized to accept and issue all building permits. The software is utilized to monitor all plan check activities, including plan check status and time for completion for plans submitted to the Construction Services Department.
- The software is utilized to monitor building permit issuance and plan check progress against adopted performance goals.
- The software enables customers to submit or review all plan review comments online.

There are also a number of opportunities for improvement in the permit issuance and monitoring information systems utilized by the Construction Services Department.

These opportunities are portrayed below.

- Additional data capturing and tracking should be implemented to provide an enhanced assessment of the Department's performance specifically in reviewing the performance related to resubmittals.
- The Department has identified several electronic plan review software solutions that have the ability to increase the level of services provided by staff to applicants and to ensure a more thorough and timely review. Implementation has not occurred due to financial constraints.

The next section summarizes the assessment of the Building Permit Plan Review function.

3. BUILDING PERMIT PLAN REVIEW.

There are a number of positive aspects to the management of building permit plan review services provided by the Construction Services Department. Examples of these positive aspects are presented below.

- Plan review service is available over-the-counter five days a week for minor permits, including residential re-roofings, air conditioner units, and water heater changeouts.
- Current building permit plan check cycle time objectives are 30 business days for initial comments on all submitted commercial plans. Resubmittals are given “priority” over new submittals by plan review staff.
- Building permit plan checklists as provided by ICC are utilized for plan checking in each of the trade areas.
- The Department has implemented a “one stop” shop approach to service provision that includes Fire and Zoning reviews within the Construction Services Department.
- A most common plan check review comments / corrections listing is available on the Department’s website for use by applicants in conducting self-reviews of their plans prior to submittal.
- The Department digitally scans, stores and indexes all plan and permit documents.

There are also a number of opportunities for improvement in the building permit plan review services delivered by the Construction Services Department. These opportunities are portrayed below.

- The completed plan check record is not made a part of the permanent record for the project. The implementation of the document management module of the electronic plan check software would enable this to be accomplished.
- The Construction Services Department has prepared a comprehensive guide to the services it provides including covering the plan review process; however, this guide has not yet been implemented and made available to the public.

- Building permits are not issued over the Internet. Other cities that effectively utilize technology issue as much as 10% of their building permits over the Internet for simple trade permits.
- The Department does not utilize Permit Technicians for building permit plan intake and completeness reviews.
- A comprehensive policies and procedures manual is not maintained that encompasses building code interpretations or policies.
- An audit program for review of plans submitted through the private provider program has not been fully implemented that moves the Department from a full-review of submitted plans. The Department has developed and published an Implementation Standard for the use of private providers that is available on its website.

Each of the opportunities for improvement in these areas, as well as other improvement opportunities, are discussed in more detail in Section 6 of this report. Additionally, the detailed best management practices assessment is included as Appendix A of this report.

4. FOCUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH CUSTOMERS

4. FOCUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH CUSTOMERS

As part of Matrix Consulting Group's analysis of the Construction Services Department (CSD) within the City of West Palm Beach, the project team conducted three separate focus group meetings to assist in the evaluation of customer satisfaction and to identify issues and opportunities to improve the service provided by the Construction Services Department. Additionally, the project team members held individual interviews with over fifteen (15) prior customers of the Construction Services Department to gather input regarding issues such as the level of customer service provided, and the quality and timelines of services provided.

The customers of the CSD who participated in the focus group meetings were comprised of developers, general contractors, architects, consultants, business owners, owner/builders and citizens. In total, the project team obtained input from 28 focus group participants. Approximately 55 individuals were invited to participate in this process. All meetings were conducted on a confidential basis to obtain as much candid feedback as possible, with no City staff in attendance. These focus groups were conducted in three separate sessions in the afternoon and early evening on Thursday, May 29th. A short description of the attendees in each session is as follows:

- 1:00 PM – This group consisted of 20 individuals who work as developers, architects, professional engineers, consultants, real estate professionals, and contractors. This group also included one citizen interested in commenting.
- 5:00 PM – This group consisted of 4 individuals, including a general contractor / business owner, architectural professionals and a construction manager.
- 7:00 PM – This group consisted of 4 individuals, also including a general contractor / business owner and project / construction managers.

Comments and recommendations were received from all three groups and participation in the discussion was high, with most of the participants commenting. The first session was larger and more balanced in the comments and insight they provided regarding the issues and challenges of obtaining permits from the Construction Services Department. The attendees in the evening groups had a more negative overall opinion of the Department, in a couple of instances rather strongly negative, which focused specifically on the overall philosophy and leadership more than on the technical expertise of the Department.

It is important to note that focus groups are held to solicit information regarding the general perception of the community regarding the services being provided and to understand the types of issues that must be addressed in order to improve the general perception of the City's service provision. To this extent, specific comments provided during the focus groups are highlighted in the points that follow. These comments have not been edited but are provided as an indication of the perceptions that the construction industry hold relative to their interaction with the City of West Palm Beach. Where validity in the comments were determined through further field work and independent observation, the project team has made recommendations for improvement in Section 6.

Focus group participants discussed a number of service related issues from the use of technology, information availability and communications, to the Department's customer service philosophy. The following sections summarize the focus group perceptions regarding a variety of topics and issues. Words and phrases in quotes represent actual comments made by the focus group participants.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CITY'S CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

The focus group participants identified several areas where they felt the CSD was doing a good job as well as other areas where there were no particular complaints. This does not mean that the performance observations provided by group participants were uniformly present throughout the Department or at equivalent levels among employees. For example, accessibility and communication were rated good overall, but viewed as insufficient in the area of plan review. The Department's areas of strength were identified as:

- **Technology.** The focus group members were all aware of the availability of permit and plan status information on the Internet and they frequently use the system to check on plan and permit status. The participants agreed that the eGov Plus plan review and permitting system is an excellent method for providing data and information regarding their permit applications. There was consensus that this service level is highly valued and beneficial to the customers. The technology that is in place is a "best practice" by providing efficient access to information on plan and permit status as well as some of the required actions or remaining steps to achieve approval. This is related to another area of strength.
- **Information Availability.** Participants indicated that information is readily available on line and is entered into the system in a timely manner. They see no need to make any changes in the Internet technology that they find so helpful. Although information availability is good, a key related problem is that the information concerning plan rejections can be misunderstood, which can create additional resubmittals or unnecessary work when the meaning of the comment is not correctly interpreted.
- **Staff Accessibility.** Participants indicated that departmental staff are always willing to meet to discuss issues and approaches on major development projects. Delays on major projects may be avoided if developers and architects would take better advantage of pre-construction services and pre-inspection services. It was reported that when significant issues or problems are encountered, the Building Official, senior staff and/or the Chief Plans Examiner will make themselves available to get everyone on the same page.
- **Building Code Expertise.** Throughout the focus group meetings it was reported that the City of West Palm Beach regularly provides the most detail-oriented and

thorough plan review process of any City in the region. In essence, the group felt the City's CSD is the regulatory yardstick representing the highest level of scrutiny in the region. As discussed later in this report, many share the view that the City takes it to a level that is unnecessary. On the positive side, it was commented that if you can get your plans approved by the City of West Palm Beach, you will not only be successful in getting plans approved everywhere else, the end result will be general contractors and architects who will have an enhanced building code knowledge. A specific, related comment that was made is as follows:

“If you can get through the process in West Palm Beach, you will be a better builder or contractor.”

- **Field Inspections.** Participants indicated that departmental field inspections are performed in a timely manner when requested. Responsiveness to inspection requests was good and there were no particular complaints about the overall service level. The exception was an occasional consistency issue among inspectors as well as ensuring that the plan reviewer's expectations within the plan were carried out in the same manner in the field. This consistency issue is discussed later in this report.
- **Permit Fee Structure.** As a whole, the group felt that permit fees were not burdensome, and may even be low when compared to fees collected in other communities. There were a couple of negative comments about a recent e-mail regarding the possibility that technology would be discontinued due to lack of funding. This matter had been tied to the need for modifications in the City's permit fee structure. Focus group attendees felt it was inappropriate to link support for a planned permit fee increase to the future availability of technology that is currently in place and which they find very useful. From a strategic and customer service approach, whatever was inferred seemed to perturb some customers who use CSD services. This was viewed by one focus group attendee as a veiled threat to discontinue the use of technology unless the industry agreed to and supported fee increases. Specific comments made that were mostly agreed to by others included:
 - “I think the construction community will pay more for permits if the service level was there.”
 - “With a decline in volume, the responsiveness is up as to getting things done.”
 - “Technology is one of their strongest areas. Why would they threaten to get rid of it?”
 - “Their I.T. charges are excessive and this may be why they are having a deficit.”

The project team asked participants about the level of customer service provided in each area within the Department from the front counter, to plan review, to inspections. The focus groups were asked to comment on the timeliness and consistency of the process, effectiveness of the process, and overall perceptions of customer service. The identified issues and challenges are discussed in the next section.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES REGARDING THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

The focus group participants identified a number of problem issues and areas requiring improvement related to the effectiveness and efficiency of the permitting and inspection process in the City of West Palm Beach. Some of the issues are a matter of perception, however, there were themes repeated among many of the participants. Some were very strong in their feeling that change needed to occur while others were more diplomatic. The following sections identify those areas most commonly identified as problem areas requiring improvement (sometimes significantly):

(1) The Development Community Identified Plan Review Services as the Most Significant Problem in the Construction Services Department.

By far, the area receiving the greatest number of complaints is plan review services. As it relates to opportunities for improvement, the themes that were identified by the participants were as follows:

- **Plan Review Consistency.** Plan reviewers do not equally or similarly interpret the code, resulting in a review process lacking consistency. They also stated that plan reviewers frequently disallow plan items that were previously approved. This sometimes occurs when a different plan reviewer picks up a set of resubmitted plans and re-reviews areas that had previously been reviewed for which they or another reviewer originally had no comments or issues. Some plan

reviewers are performing what was termed an “industry standard” review while others are trying to identify every possible code issue that may or may not apply to the situation. Some admitted that they try to submit plans when certain plan reviewers are on vacation. Consistency issues are reflected in the following comments:

- “Plan reviews are inconsistent. They will review portions of a plan that were already reviewed during the first submission and there will be a whole new set of comments that were not there after the first review.”
 - “Plan reviews need to be streamlined.”
 - “They cannot find the middle ground or sweet spot.”
 - “They focus too much on matters that are not life safety issues.”
 - “They need to interpret the code rather than rely on industry standards and stop using that to hide behind and asking that standards be verbalized on plans is overkill.”
 - “They are policing to try to catch the “design professional for sale” situation.”
 - “They are not efficient in what they do as far as plan reviews.”
- **Thoroughness of Initial Plan Reviews.** A matter somewhat related to the consistency problem is the thoroughness or sufficiency of the initial plan review. It was reported that plans are often failed when a key problem is identified rather than fully reviewed for all remaining problems that can be corrected on the first resubmittal if they had been identified. Of greater concern is the fact that some plan reviewers appear to be rechecking the completeness of plan reviews in other trades that are not their primary responsibility or area of expertise. It is not known at what level this is occurring, or if this is a result of quality assurance and quality control efforts by superiors. Sufficiency and completeness issues are reflected in the following comments:
 - “Initial plan review comments are not comprehensive and are vague and ambiguous.”
 - “They do not review the whole plan. They find some problems and send it back only to find new problems when there has been no change to the plan in the area where the new problem was identified.”
 - “Some plan reviewers are looking at all areas of the plan that are not even in their field of review.”

- **Plan Review and Inspections Connectivity.** This problem relates to internal consistency. It was reported that inspectors have failed inspections that were implemented exactly to plan requirements, and when challenged the inspector stated that what was on the plan did not matter. This comment was agreed to by others. In essence, there was a perception of limited connectivity between the requirements imposed by plan reviewers and field inspectors. A similar issue was reported as it relates to reliance on threshold inspectors when they may not be needed and whether their expertise was really necessary. These matters are reflected in the following comments:
 - “There is no link between plan review and field inspections. They treat one another as two different agencies.”
 - “Interpretations of the code are inconsistent.”
 - “There is no consistency in the level of plan review.”
 - “They tend to over-rely on the outside threshold inspector for threshold buildings and delegation of authority can create problems.”

- (2) **The Focus Groups Believe That Staff Is Not Free to Utilize Their Discretionary Authority as Individual Professionals and Must Follow an Overly Regulatory and Enforcement Biased Approach.**

The consensus of the focus groups was that the tone of the agency is set by the department administration. There was an underlying concern that employees are not free to have a difference of opinion in the way they implement services or make individual decisions (however, it should be noted that during the employee study, employees did not indicate this as a concern). Some contractors believe that some staff have just given up while those that have had a “work with” approach are not being recognized and rewarded when they use a customer service approach.

Participants also stated that there is an overall lack of accountability and delegation of discretionary authority within the construction services process. This goes from high-level project meetings down to individual field inspections. A common theme among participants was that no individual takes ultimate responsibility for making their

own decisions. Specific comments regarding the issue of accountability and employee discretion were:

- “The Building Official does not delegate authority to his personnel or they are afraid to go out on a limb because they are fearful.”
- “Inspectors have no discretion or authority in the field. They fear they will lose their job if they approve something that they know others might not even if a minor, non-life safety issue.”
- “People cannot perform their jobs independently.”
- “The Building Official needs to shift and delegate authority.”

A related issue, discussed in the next section, is how the code is applied during plan reviews.

(3) The Focus Groups Felt the City’s Very Strict “Black and White” Application of the Building Code, Mainly During Plan Reviews, Indicates a Failure to Follow a Customer Service Philosophy.

The project team asked participants about their overall perceptions of customer service. There were several themes to the comments that indicate the feeling that the motivation of protecting the health, welfare and safety of the public is being used to be unnecessarily heavy-handed. That should not be interpreted as a lack of professionalism of CSD staff since there were no negative comments in that regard.

Identified issues are as follows:

- **Fixation on Code Book Rather Than Practical Field Application.** Although participants acknowledged it is normal for there to be some variation in the level of detail among plan reviewers, they felt that there was an underlying approach to “build by plan review.” The group stated that there are some employees who will attempt to “work with” the development community and it was also recognized that some professionals, such as architects, need to become much more familiar with the building code to avoid “design by plan submittal.” This was reflected in the following comment:

“People from out of the State that attempt to get a permit don’t have knowledge of building codes, which creates a problem for everyone.”

Comments related to the strict manner in which the code is enforced and applied by the CSD were as follows:

- “Code compliance is being handled in the document phase rather than in the construction and inspection process.”
 - “Code interpretation is being applied prescriptively rather than performance based.”
 - “They interpret the code as a black and white issue and it’s not.”
 - “The energy code is being applied in a capricious and arbitrary manner.”
 - “Problems and delays all seem to stem from code interpretation.”
 - “We are all professionals whose reputations and careers are at risk should we produce work that will get us sued. They hide behind their licenses. Our livelihoods are on the line, their licenses are not and that will not be brought up in court.”
 - “It is common knowledge among the construction community that it will take a minimum of three plan reviews to obtain a permit.”
 - “They are trying to nitpick and find problems.”
 - “They are questioning the legibility of signatures on seals and making us file copies of our signatures.”
 - “They made me recite industry standard language on the plan when these are obvious matters that are standard trade practice.”
 - “They constantly play “what if” scenarios to try to attempt to design a flawless project.”
 - “Simple generator installations are requiring the hiring of an architect and making the projects unaffordable to implement.”
- **Lack of Customer Service Focus.** The clear majority of the focus group participants feel that staff is expected to keep them at arms length, using an enforcement mindset. It appears to them that protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public means that they should not collaborate, comment or assist and that they should only react to what they are given, not be helpful in accomplishing project completion. This is reflected in the following comments:

- “There is a basic philosophical issue with a mentality that they must protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public and this creates an authoritarian / superior approach, not a building industry peer relationship. They need to understand that code compliance is also a responsibility of the general contractor, not just the CSD.”
- “The City feels that the customer is the general public and they must protect them from the construction community.”
- “There is a problem with understanding who the customer is.”
- “The philosophy of the Department has changed over time from customer service to regulatory.”
- “They take pride in turning in engineers and architects and are treating everyone as if they are not trustworthy.”
- “They have a CYA philosophy.”
- “The Department used to use provisos frequently to move things along and some are just now starting to use them again.”
- “We are guilty until proven innocent.”
- “People in CSD will not help or use a customer service philosophy because of upper management.”
- “The operation is geared to find fault.”
- “The balance is regulatory, not customer oriented.”
- “All flexibility is gone. They will fail inspections for moving a light switch unless new plans are submitted.”
- “They will give you a permit once you pass a “threshold of aggravation” and it doesn’t have to be that hard.”

The next section discusses what the focus group participants feel the impact the CSD is having on the business community and may help explain the formation of the Construction Industry Alliance.

(4) The Focus Groups Felt the City’s Construction Services Department Regulatory Philosophy Places the City at a Competitive Disadvantage.

A building department’s overall customer service philosophy impacts the ability for the construction and development community to quickly and efficiently implement development projects. This was a key area of concern shared by some of the business owner participants and was expressed in the following comments:

- “I cannot tell a client how long it will take to get a permit. I just don’t know and it hurts business.”
- “The City of West Palm Beach is at a significant business disadvantage because getting a permit just takes too long.”
- “Owners have backed out of projects because a permit cannot be issued in a timely manner.”
- “The perfectionism mentality makes it hard to do business or make money. Most contractors prefer to work in other communities.”
- “Contractors will not work in West Palm Beach for less than \$500K.”
- “The management and leadership of the CSD has cost the City tens of millions of dollars in lost development opportunities.”

These comments were not necessarily indicative of a belief that the City is imposing requirements above the minimums required by the State of Florida Building Code, but rather the lack of predictability for the issuance of a permit had a negative impact on their operations. The meetings were concluded by directing all participants to engage in a discussion of concrete examples, ideas and recommendations for improvement, which are discussed in the next section.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS REGARDING THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

The project team asked the participants what are the most significant and important changes that should be made. Some felt strongly about the need for a new direction and focused on service delivery philosophy and leadership. Ideas for improvement included the following:

- **Adopt an Improved Customer Service Philosophy.** Participants indicated that staff should be empowered to make final decisions and resolve issues using a “work with” approach that is more customer service oriented.
- **Improve the Level of Accountability and Performance.** Some felt the process was being managed in a way that minimized the poor performance of issuing plans in a timely manner. There was a specific reference to the Dashboard Report process. Participants indicated that someone should be monitoring and ensuring that performance timeframes for plan reviews are being met, not manipulated.
- **Improve Communications and Community Relations.** It was felt this could be accomplished if the CSD conducted periodic meetings with the development and construction community. Quarterly meetings to keep lines of communication open, enhance working relationships, and discuss the building business environment and major projects would be beneficial to both the City and development community.
- **Enhance Services via a Design or Plan Review Professional.** A recommendation was made to have the City set aside a specific day of the week where they would have a plan reviewer or design professional accessible to answer questions and assist on project approaches. This would be at a desk up front in the customer service area. This might avoid future delays and the calling of separate project meetings when implementation has begun and the clock is ticking.
- **Modify Administrative Chapters of the Building Code.** The initial chapter of the Florida Building Code is reserved for local ordinances and specific procedures that modify and clarify the Florida Building Code as it is implemented at the local level. Some feel that these sections of the code have been written in a manner that sets a regulatory, enforcement-minded tone or approach. They felt this section of the code, which is locally developed, needs review and revision.

- **Go in a New Direction.** Several participants felt that resolving these issues will require a new direction that implied a significant change in leadership and approach that is necessary if the development community and City staff are going to improve their relationship. While some comments received were based upon specific individuals, the overriding theme was a desire for a more responsive, understandable, and transparent process. The general consensus is that continuing along the same path, even with minor improvements, will not achieve the improved relationships that is desired by everyone.

Overall, the focus groups and individual interviews provided the project team with an extensive background into the perceptions of the customers of the Construction Services Department regarding service levels and approaches, and insight into changes that the development community felt would assist in improving the level of services provided by the City.

5. EMPLOYEE SURVEY

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The Matrix Consulting Group conducted a survey of employees assigned to the Construction Services Department for organizational, operational, and other issues within the Department. This survey was conducted as part of the management study of the Construction Services Department as an additional way for employees to provide input to the project team in addition to the personal interviews that were conducted with all staff. Surveys were distributed to all department employees. Of the 58 surveys distributed, 36 were received back by the project team. This equates to a response rate of 62%. Several responses received were only partial completed and one was completely blank. Partial responses were included where appropriate.

While the survey was anonymous, employees were asked to indicate to which division they are assigned. The table, which follows, shows the results.

Current Assignment:	
Administration	21%
Plan Review	44%
Inspections	24%
Other	12%

The project team reviewed the data to determine if there were any significant differences in response patterns between employee's assigned functions. No significant differences were noted, so all responses and summaries listed below are based upon the total responses received.

The detailed responses to each question are listed in Appendix A of this report. The following points summarize some of the key findings from the administration of the employee survey.

1. SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

The survey contained thirty-four statements to which respondents were asked to select one of the following responses: “no opinion,” “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” For purposes of analysis, each response was assigned a number; the lower the number the more positive the response.

The statements were designed to provide a better understanding of the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of departmental employees with respect to several key areas. The following points present a discussion of those sections:

- **Quality of service:** Respondents were asked to evaluate statements relating to Code Administration’s ability to provide a high quality of work and meet the expectations of its customers.
- **Organizational Structure:** Statements pertaining to management, organization, and structure as they impact performance and ability to meet objectives.
- **Tools and technology:** Analysis of the adequacy of supplied tools, technology, and software.
- **Training:** Availability of department-sponsored training in the form of seminars, classes, tuition reimbursement, etc.
- **Staffing & Workload:** Analysis of staffing and workload as they relate to performance and ability to meet demands with available resources.
- **Career development:** Statements about career paths, workplace environment, and relationship between supervisors and employees.

The section, which follows, presents a brief overview of the results of the employee survey.

2. KEY SURVEY FINDINGS.

The following are the key points and findings gathered from the employee survey grouped by area addressed.

(1) Departmental Management.

The employee survey contained several statements relating to the overall management of the Construction Services Department. Statements included overall formal management, communication, and work environment. The points, which follow, provide the results for the statements.

- In response to the statement, 'my department has clear, well-documented policies and procedures to guide my day-to-day work,' 69% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 22% selected 'neutral' and only 9% selected 'disagree'.
- When provided the statement, 'my division is effectively managed and operated efficiently' 63% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 22% selected 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree.'
- With respect to the statement, 'my department has established clear performance expectations for processing application' 63% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 28% selected 'neutral.', and 9% selected some level of disagreement with the statement.
- Regarding the question asking whether the department 'has an effective plan for responding to periods of high demand' for services, only 30% selected a response in agreement with the statement, 48% were neutral, and 21% were in disagreement.

Overall, respondents positively viewed the general management of the Codes Administration Department with some reservations regarding the ability of the Department to meet periods of high demand for services. It should be noted that the survey was conducted shortly after the elimination of overtime, which may have impacted individual's perceptions of this issue.

In addition to statements about the general management of the department, employees were asked about their ability to provide input and take initiative in handling work functions. The following point summarize responses received:

- When provided the statement, 'managers delegate responsibility for processing of plan review / permit applications to an appropriate level' 65% selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree.'
- Respondents positively evaluated the statement, 'I am encouraged to take initiative in resolving problems' 70% of respondents selecting 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 12% selected a level of disagreement.
- In response to the statement, 'managers are receptive to new ideas and employee suggestions for improvements' 66% indicated agreement with the statement, and 20% were in disagreement.

(2) Staffing, Customer Service and Interdepartmental Coordination.

The employee survey included several statements regarding workload and staffing, customer service and interdepartmental coordination. The points, which follow, present a discussion of the employee survey results with respect to workload.

- In response to the statement, 'the plan review processes are timely and efficient, 64% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with 18% indicating disagreement.
- Respondents had positive perceptions with respect to the statement, 'my division provides a high level of service to the City of West Palm Beach,' 91% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree.'

Overall, respondents had strong perceptions regarding workload, generally feeling that the service level provided is high and that the processes are timely and efficient.

Employees were asked to evaluate statements relating to customer service in the Construction Services Department. The points, which follow, present a summary of the employee survey results.

- In response to the statement, 'the plan review process results in a high level of service to the City of West Palm Beach, 91% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree.'

- When provided the statement, 'customer complaints are handled quickly and courteously,' 83% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with only 6% indicating disagreement.
- With respect to the statement, 'my division prides itself of providing fast, high quality service,' 78% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree.'
- Employees had mixed responses to the statement 'my department has established clear performance expectations for its services,' with 63% selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree,' 28% selecting neutral, and 9% selecting 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree.'
- When provided the statement, "the primary goal of my division is assisting applicants in reaching project approval," 73% selected agreement and 10% were in disagreement.

Employees had positive perceptions with respect to the level and quality of services provided to the department's customers. Respondents were also to evaluate statements regarding interdepartmental coordination and the departmental organization.

The points, which follow, present a summary of the results.

- With respect to the statement, 'the organization of my division is well suited to its responsibilities,' 82% indicated agreement and only 3% indicated disagreement.
- When provided the statement, 'coordination between my division and others involved in plan review and permitting processes is effective,' 71% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree,' 21% selected 'neutral' and 9% selected 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree.'

While employees viewed intradepartmental coordination positively, opinions were mixed with respect to coordination with other City departments.

(3) Technology and Professional Development Opportunities Provided to Staff.

Respondents were asked to evaluate several statements relating to the tools and equipment provided to staff, and professional development opportunities. The points, presented below, provide a brief discussion of the survey results.

- In response to the statement, 'My division has the technology it needs to accomplish its functions efficiently and effectively,' 74% indicated agreement with the statement, and 15% were in disagreement.
- When provided the statement, 'I receive sufficient ongoing training to maintain and improve my skills,' 70% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 18% selected a response indicating disagreement.

(4) Customer Support and Interaction on Technical Issues.

Employees were asked several questions regarding the support provided by the Department to applicants, as well as their perceptions regarding the quality of submissions provided to the City for processing. The following points summarize the responses in this category.

- In response to the statement, 'my division has clear well documented policies and procedures to guide my involvement in the plan review process,' 69% indicated agreement with the statement, and 9% were in disagreement.
- When provided the statement, 'The City of WPB makes it easy for applicants to obtain complete accurate information about all aspect of the plan review and permitting processes,' 79% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 9% selected a response indicating disagreement.
- In response to the statement, 'my division is clear and consistent in its interpretation of regulations and permit standards,' 77% indicated agreement with the statement, and 11% were in disagreement.
- In response to the statement, 'The City of WPB permit processes ensure that applicants are advised of all application requirements early in the process,' 79% indicated agreement with the statement, and 12% were in disagreement.
- Regarding the statement, 'it is rare that new requirements are added by staff after he applicant submits the project and the application is deemed complete,' only 56% were in agreement and 21% indicated disagreement.
- In response to the statement, 'applicants have easy access to staff to obtain information about permit application and approval requirements,' 81% indicated agreement with the statement, and 9% were in disagreement.
- In evaluating the statement, 'most of the time the information submitted by permit applicants is complete and adequate to allow prompt action on an application,' only 9% indicated agreement with the statement, and 59% were in disagreement.

- When evaluating the statement, ‘the City of WPB’s codes regulations and development standards do not present unreasonable or unnecessary obstacles to development,’ 59% indicated agreement with the statement, and 16% were in disagreement.

Overall, staff has a reasonably positive perception of their availability and provision of information to applicants, including the consistent application of codes; but indicated concern regarding the quality of submissions submitted by applicants and the implementation of new requirements by staff following deeming an application complete.

3. RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS.

The survey also contained three open ended questions to which staff were asked to respond regarding the best thing about working in the Department, improvements staff would like to see implemented, and a general question allowing staff to address any issue not previously covered which they wanted to share with the project team. In response to the open ended questions, staff provided a variety of comments and suggestions regarding improvement opportunities. The following summarize the key and recurring themes of these comments. It should be noted that these responses are not weighted or listed in order of priority.

In response to the question to list the three best things about the Construction Services Department, staff responses included the following (grouped by similar themes):

Staff / Teamwork Related:

- Other inspectors
- Plan Reviewers help
- Permitting staff
- Help customers
- Staff works well together, no matter what division
- Sense of being like a family
- Shared sense of pride in our work

- Level of knowledge, and willingness to share
- General attitude of staff towards each other is good.

Management Related:

- Management has an open door policy
- Honesty & integrity of management
- Positive workplace culture
- Cooperation and respect I feel from management
- Involvement in code development at State and National level (Training)

Process Related:

- One stop shop process for plan review – all plan reviews are done at one location (city hall)

Technology Related:

- Technology and advancement in this area
- Fast working computers to accommodate work loads
- Internet access for reviews

In response to the question to list the three improvements staff would like to see in the Construction Services Department, staff responses included the following (grouped by similar themes):

Customer Service Related:

- Prompt front counter service
- Clearer online of required inspection per permit.
- Contractors just submit for permit
- Contractors doing/making same error over and over
- Issuance of online permits

Process Related:

- Increase in the fee structure which has not increased in at least 5 years
- Improve efficiency in getting plans to reviewers
- Instead of denying plans, issue permits with more provisions

Technology Related:

- Working, comprehensive, and user-friendly website.
- Overlay software for plan review must be purchased to help with efficiency in that area.

Working Conditions Related:

- Electronic Plan Review (implement it)
- 4-day work week

- Return of a take home vehicle
- Cross-position training
- 4-hour block of time daily, no phone calls while plan review
- Better communication between elected city officials and departments

Management Related:

- Management treats us like children and without respect
- They poison the atmosphere of a “team” or group environment
- Everyone is treated fairly and equally.
- Do away with some “micro-management” issues from the building official’s staff

Staff / Teamwork Related:

- Improve communication between the field inspectors and the plan review team.
- Permit clerks to have official training and get certifications
- Better access to plan reviewers and chief inspectors.

Finally, staff were provided the opportunity to provide any general comments that they wished to share with the project team. The following comments were received.

- The problem is not plan review or the contractors. The problem is incomplete plans that are not code compliant from Engineers & Architects.
- Nothing will happen, contractors blames others.
- The political “posturing” often exhibited by the mayor’s office, city manager, etc. supporting developers and/or architects whose plans have not met the minimum standards required in the plan examination process.
- Depending on the results of electronic plan review, another building plan reviewer level II for large projects.
- There are double standards, depending on which way the political wind is blowing.
- For the most part, this is a very good place to work.
- A 4 day work week would save employees 20% on the fuel bill.
- Engineers, architects, contractors, etc. have a very limited learning curve: they submit plans with the same mistakes and missing information time after time.
- Enforcing the code is equal for everybody, without having preferences for those who have more money.
- Less politics

6. ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

6. ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION SERVICES DEPARTMENT

This chapter presents an analysis of the Construction Services Department – looking at all facets of operations including technology utilization, management of the department, community outreach, building inspections, plan review, policies and procedures utilized and staffing. The analysis focuses on a number of issues including the following:

- The level of service provided to the customers in both building inspection and plan review;
- The ability of applicants to have a transparent, timely, and understandable process for acquiring building permits;
- The ability to enhance skill levels within the department to improve services;
- Steps that should be taken to enhance the consistency of code interpretations; and
- The ability to increase the level of service provided to the public.

The recommendations provided will need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner over several years to achieve the full impact on service improvement that all parties are trying to achieve.

1. THE LEVEL OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE CUSTOMER CAN BE INCREASED THROUGH FURTHER ENHANCEMENT OF THE SOFTWARE SYSTEMS.

This department has overall a high level of technology utilization that places it among many of the top agencies providing building permit services. CommunityPlus is utilized as the primary software for the logging, tracking and processing of all permit applications and associated review and inspection data. Notwithstanding the high

utilization of the CommunityPlus software system (and the associated online access for scheduling inspections and retrieving inspection and plan review status results), there are additional opportunities for the staff to improve the use of technology.

The greatest area of improvement for internal staff management of the plan review process is through modifications to the amount and type of data that is captured in CommunityPlus regarding the tracking of plan review resubmittals. Ideally, the software should manage the process for staff and provide current status of all applications (initial and resubmittals) and provide reminders to staff regarding those applications that are nearing the deadline for plan review comments to be issued. To effectively utilize the system in this manner, accurate and complete data must be entered for each application that outlines: when the initial application was submitted; when original comments were issued; and for each resubmittal on that application, the date received, and date comments are due, and issued, should be entered. At the present time, the information regarding resubmittals is not easily accessed or utilized for reporting on an application's status. Implementing these data fields will require a change in the utilization of the system and depending upon approach, may require modifications to the system. However, the Department should attempt to implement and capture the necessary dates without modification of the base system, if possible, to limit cost impacts and the need to pay software modification fees on each upgrade of the software in the future.

The second area of major change to the use of technology is the future implementation of plan review overlay software that enables staff to accept electronic plan submissions for both initial review and resubmittals. Plan overlay software enables

the plan review staff to compare the electronic versions of the submittals and have the software redline all changes on the two sets of plans. This greatly assists the ability of staff to improve the level of review on resubmittals by focusing staff attention on areas that have changed between the two versions. This provides assurance to the applicant that all changes will be reviewed by the plan reviewer during review and also assists the plan reviewer by ensuring that no changes made are overlooked during their review. The implementation of the electronic plan review software, with the available document management module, will enable the Department to capture the required date fields without extensive software modifications.

The Construction Services Department has explored several software packages that provide plan review overlay functionality that will operate with their current CommunityPlus software system. Pricing to acquire and implement this plan overlay software are estimated to be in the \$150,000 to \$350,000 range depending on the system chosen and the equipment necessary to implement. The implementation of this recommendation will need to occur following the Department's resolving the current financial constraints on the Construction Services budget.

Recommendation: Future upgrades to the CommunityPlus software system should include the ability to provide more information, including detailed performance information regarding resubmittal plan review times.

Recommendation: The City of West Palm Beach should continue exploration of plan review overlay software, and develop a plan of implementation based upon available financing.

2. SEVERAL EFFORTS SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN TO IMPROVE THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS CONDUCTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVIDED AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY.

During the course of the study, it became readily apparent that one of the major issues facing the Construction Services Department is the lack of a strong positive relationship with the development community. This was noted in interview with staff, interviews with the development community and in the conduct of the focus groups. A severe perception currently exists in the development community that the staff of the Construction Services Department is not focused on customer service and isn't communicating a desire to partner with the development community in moving projects through the process. While the project team interviewed many individuals that expressed positive interactions with the Department and individual staff in resolving issues, there remains an overall perception that the Department is lacking in this critical area. It is interesting to note that generally, the level of customer service was generally perceived as better from applicants that work on a national basis versus those that work primarily on a local basis.

While one of the more difficult areas to address immediately, this area is perhaps the one that the City must focus on immediately if the implementation of other recommendations to improve service is to be given a reasonable chance of success. The following points identify some specific recommendations that are designed to address specific concerns raised to the project team during the study and assist the department in demonstrating to elected officials and the development community their full desire to implement a "culture of service".

(1) The Level of Dialogue Between the Department and the Development Community Must Be Increased.

The Construction Services Department needs to focus on providing a much higher level of communication, dialogue and interaction with the development community in a proactive manner – not simply working with them when problems arise. This should be started by implementing quarterly training sessions and meetings hosted by the Construction Services Department for those practicing in the construction industry to inform them of changing policies, new code requirements, providing education on the application of the codes. While the Department has conducted these types of sessions in the past, they were discontinued due to lack of participation. To address this issue, the project team suggests that the City of West Palm Beach partner with the local construction industry associations (Florida East Coast Chapter of the AGC, Associated Builders and Contractors Florida East Coast Chapter, and the Gold Coast Builders Association) to jointly sponsor these sessions and garner participation.

Most communities that implement this approach utilize a one hour to one and a half hour meeting that are focused on a specific topic and are held in a community center. The format should vary by topic, but typically would include a presentation by staff on the topic at hand, a period of questions and answers, and a time for informal interaction between the parties.

Additionally, the department should periodically issue a newsletter targeted towards information the construction industry can utilize in their interactions with the City staff. Typically, these newsletters would cover issues such as changing code requirements, training opportunities, education regarding new codes or code interpretations that are planned for implementation, etc. These newsletter should be

posted on the City's website and emailed directly to all individuals who sign-up to receive them.

Finally, the Department should consider implementation of an annual survey of the development community to evaluate the Department's level of performance. This can be accomplished through the use of a short online survey. Staff should consider whether there are a significant number of customers that wouldn't be able to respond online and if so, hard copy forms of the survey should be available in the permit center. Additionally, comment postcards should be made available to all applicants at the issuance of the permit, asking them to evaluate the level of services provided on their case. These postcards should be pre-stamped and addressed, and should be returned to another department for tabulation.

It is important to note that these educational and outreach efforts will require time on the part of staff to implement. This time will obviously reduce slightly their time available for performing other primary duties (such as plan reviews and inspections). However, given the identified concerns with the level of interaction between the Department and the construction industry and the perception that customer service is lacking; these efforts are critical to accomplishing the desired changes and must be valued as much as the technical duties of plan review and inspections.

Recommendation: A significant increase in the dialogue between the Department and the construction services industry must be adopted, including quarterly training and meetings, newsletters, and frequent outreach for input.

Recommendation: An annual and ongoing customer satisfaction survey should be conducted by the Department.

(2) Staff Should Be Trained and Educated Regarding the New Mission and Focus of the Department.

To effectively begin this “new chapter” in the Construction Services Department that the City is attempting to achieve through the implementation of recommended changes, it is absolutely critical that all staff fully understand the focus that will be attached to their primary mission of providing “high quality services in a timely manner”. This training should be conducted by the Department Management, with support of the City Administrator, and clearly communicate that the Department’s focus is not going to be one based simply upon a “regulatory” model of simply ensuring compliance with the codes but as equally important is the provision of these services in a cooperative, friendly, and timely manner.

A component of all employee’s annual performance should be their contribution to the Department’s success in transforming to this new mindset that values responsiveness to the customer as much as – but not to the exclusion of – quality plan reviews and inspections. The City currently evaluates employees on the provision of customer service as part of employee evaluations. Supervisors must ensure that they are evaluating staff in this area consistently with the desires of the Director and City Administrator.

Recommendation: The City through the City Administrator and Construction Services Director should provide training to all staff regarding the “focus” of the Department on providing high-quality services in a timely manner.

(3) Monthly Performance Reports Should Be Refined and Published Showing the Performance of the Department Against Their Plan Review and Inspection Timeframes.

The Construction Services Department has been acknowledged by the City Administration as one of the Departments that are consistently developing and issuing

the City's "Dashboard" reports that are designed to provide an indication of performance. These reports provide a good summation of the Construction Services Department's performance in each of the functional areas. The project team would recommend that the Department slightly refine the reports to provide additional information, including differentiating performance based upon initial plan review time and resubmittal plan review times. These reports should be standardized so that they can be easily developed from data captured in the CommunityPlus system rather than requiring staff to expend significant time in their development. Additional items that should be included with the summary reports include the number of submittals that came from private providers. For this measure, the Department should not only report on the number that were processed in accordance with the established review time, but those that passed and failed the initial quality review (as discussed later in this report).

Additionally, there should be varying level of details for these reports based upon the intended audience. For example, there should be a more detailed report for use on a day to day basis by project managers and staff assigned to the plan review and inspection process (so that performance by trade – especially in plan review functions – can be ascertained, monitored, and evaluated), and a more summary report should be prepared and provided to the Mayor and City Administrator for use in understanding the current status of projects. Finally, a report should be prepared that is suitable for monthly distribution to the City Commission Members that outlines project status. These reports should show (as is currently done in the dashboard report) the percentage of applications (or inspections) that are completed within the established time frames.

Copies of the report distributed to the City Commission should also be posted to the City’s website. This will enable staff to share information regarding performance with the Development Community and interested citizens on the level of activity occurring and the performance of the City against established performance levels.

Recommendation: Monthly performance reports outlining the percentage of plan reviews and inspections completed within established time frames should be developed, distributed to key administrative and elected officials, and posted to the internet.

(4) A Contingency Plan Should Be Developed by the Construction Services Department to Address Key Workloads.

The adoption, publication and monitoring of work activities against established timeframes for completion will create (appropriately so) an expectation from the development community that the established timeframes are real – and will be met by staff. This is not a current perception within the community at this point. The industry perception is that the time it takes to get review comments issued significantly exceeds the established timeframes. This is the one of the single largest issues of concern with the Department’s customers that were expressed to the project team. The following table summarizes actual performance for the Department over the last six months in key areas:

Function	Goal	% Meeting Goal					
		February	March	April	May	June	July
Residential Plan Reviews	<=14 days	100%	100%	91%	68.4%	65.2%	47.1%
Commercial Plan Reviews	<= 30 days	75%	78%	79%	86.2%	84.6%	86.2%
Permit Inspections	Same Day	100%	100%	100%	99.9%	99.8%	99.9%

As can be seen from this summary, the department is tracking the percentage of plan reviews and inspections conducted in compliance with their established performance time goals. As previously noted, the major change that the project team would recommend is that the performance measures for plan reviews (both residential

and commercial) be separated into two categories – performance on completion of first review and performance in completing resubmittal reviews. It is interesting to note that the overall performance of the plan review function for residential projects has declined over the six month period while at the same time the performance of plan reviews on commercial projects has improved slightly over this same time period.

To ensure that timeframes established can be met, the Department needs to take a proactive approach and develop a contingency plan that outlines the steps that will be taken to meet performance standards when changes in workload exceed the capacity of the existing staff to meet them. This contingency plan should outline the conditions under which different options will be utilized. The options should include the use of the following:

- Overtime – for staff to work additional hours;
- External Resources – such as Private Providers contracted with the City or the utilization of external part-time plan reviewers. The City currently utilizes a part-time plan reviewer to assist with peak workloads;
- Professional Resources – such as the utilization of the ICC Plan Review service.

The actual resources utilized are less important than the development of an effective strategy to address workload increases. The contingency plan should provide examples of when each type of resource will and will not be utilized and ensure – in the case of external resources – that appropriate preparation has occurred to have these resources available when needed (i.e. – evaluating, selecting, and pre-approving certain private providers for use by the City). The establishment of performance standards alone will not improve the performance of the Department's operations. These

standards must be ones that can consistently be met – meaning that performance to the goals should be targeted at 95% or above.

Recommendation: The Department should develop a contingency plan that includes the use of external resources or overtime when they are unable to complete workload within required timeframes.

(5) The Department Needs to Formalize a Contact within the Department for Applicants to Utilize in Resolving Problems.

A common complaint heard during the study was the fact that many, if not most, issues could not be resolved at the appropriate level within the Department and that many individuals were not aware of who to contact for assistance when they encountered problems in either the quality or timing of services provided. While many individuals who do significant work with the City contact either the Director or Assistant Director directly, many others indicated a difficulty navigating their way through the system despite the availability of employee contact lists on the City's website (and contact information contained on all comments issued). These individuals are either contacting the wrong individual or choosing to by-pass the Department entirely and contacting elected officials for assistance. The perception that resolution can be achieved faster through the involvement of elected officials is not a situation unique to West Palm Beach; however, in reality, this approach generally causes both the expending of significant staff resources unnecessarily or a delay in resolving the process compared to when the applicant directly contacts the correct individual who can assist them with their issues.

As part of the educational effort described earlier in this report, initial efforts should be made to educate the construction industry on the appropriate individuals to contact to resolve various types of problems or issues. Obviously, individual plans

examiners should be initially contacted for questions regarding the comments they issued or the individual inspector if there is a concern with the reason for failure. However, when the issues rise above this level, it needs to be made clearer who the applicant should contact within the Department for assistance. This needs to be individuals below the Director or Assistant Director level. These individuals should be involved in the resolution of only the most complex and difficult of issues. If they are routinely involved in handling minor issues, the time they have to spend on addressing the larger issues involving the management of the department will be significantly reduced. The Department leadership needs to empower staff at a lower level to feel comfortable providing assistance to applicants in resolving processing issues.

The Department should develop a matrix that shows the appropriate contact for various types of issues and widely distribute this information. This matrix should clearly indicate when the Chief Building Plans Examiner or Chief Inspectors should be contacted versus what types of issues should be taken to the Director / Building Official.

Since the area of concern was generally regarding resolving plan review issues related to code requirements (rather than issues related to inspections), one individual in the Plans Review Division should be designated as the ombudsman to handle issues between applicants and plans reviewers that are not successfully resolved between the applicant and plans reviewer. At the present time, this function has been performed by the Inspections Services and Permitting Manager / Assistant Director in a de facto manner – but this prevents him from having the appropriate time to dedicate to other assigned duties. For the near term, the project team would recommend that this individual be one of the Chief Building Plans Examiners.

Recommendation: The Department should develop a handout containing a matrix of who to contract for various issues to assist applicants in appropriately resolving issues.

Recommendation: One individual (Chief Plans Examiner) within the Department should be designated as the ombudsman for the receipt, review and resolution of all complaints regarding service levels related to code compliance issues raised during the plan review phase.

(6) A More Formalized Employee Training Program Needs to Be Implemented.

The Construction Services Department needs to implement a more structured and formalized training program for staff to address several customer service and operational issues that are impacting their ability to deliver services as effectively as possible. Each of the direct supervisors of the Plan Review staff and the Inspections Staff should hold a weekly training session that provides on-going and refresher training for their assigned staff. This is critical not only to ensure the level of knowledge and skill remains high; but, as importantly, to ensure consistency between staff members. Applicants are easily frustrated when staff do not provide consistent answers, reviews, or inspections. The easiest method to maintain internal consistency between staff is to ensure frequent and ongoing training and discussion.

During the focus group discussions, two concerns were expressed regarding the consistent enforcement of codes. These concerns included: (1) that code requirements were not enforced consistently from Inspector to Inspector (resulting in differing requirements for the contractor/builder depending upon the building inspector); and (2) that an Inspector filling in for the normally assigned Inspector would identify an issue that was not previously identified as a concern on prior inspections. Similar examples were provided regarding plans reviewers. Both of these issues, while infrequent, are

examples of inconsistency that significantly impact the perception of the Department and their level of performance and skill.

Dedicated time for codes training, which is separate from, or a part of, weekly staff meetings is essential. It is an important factor in achieving consistency among staff and developing interpretations that are utilized consistently throughout the Department by all staff. It is recommended that these meetings be regularly scheduled and coordinated by the Supervisors of the Plan Review and Inspections Divisions. Assigning training subjects to inspectors and plans examiners is an approach that works well for most communities. There is significant training and accomplishment achieved when people have to prepare and present training. The Building Official should present training on problematic subject areas involving significant code interpretations or application.

In addition to weekly scheduled training for inspectors and plans examiners, coordination and consistency can be enhanced by periodic meetings between fire inspectors, plans examiners, building inspectors, permit technicians and all personnel who participate in the permitting process to review operations and contribute to the efficient delivery of services. Involving everyone who serves in the permitting process will assure that all good ideas are heard and allow everyone to participate and take advantage of resolution of all matters. If consensus cannot be achieved, supervision and management may have to make decisions and publish their findings. This kind of effort will give all personnel the opportunity to be involved, provide input and take ownership for the process.

Additionally, at least quarterly meetings should be held between the plans examiners and building inspectors. These meetings should be focused on two primary areas: (1) joint training codes and code interpretation / application; and (2) discussing problems that have arisen in the past quarter that involved differing opinions between the plans reviewers and inspectors regarding code interpretation and application.

Recommendation: The direct managers of the Inspections and Plan Review Sections should coordinate weekly training of staff and be responsible for the ongoing quality of the in-house coordination.

Recommendation: The Department must assure that training occurs for each plan check and inspection discipline at least one hour weekly. All employees should be assigned as presenters on a rotating basis.

Recommendation: The Department should establish and publish quarterly training agendas for joint training sessions between the Plans Reviewers and Inspectors. Outside presenters should be utilized where appropriate.

3. SEVERAL CHANGES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT.

At the present time, the Construction Services Department is facing a significant issue regarding its ability to finance existing services at current staffing levels with the current permit fee structure and levels. The rapid change in type of construction, with the economic downturn that significantly reduced the number of applications, coupled with decisions made to not review fee levels over an extended period of time has resulted in a “perfect storm” situation for the Construction Services Department that has resulted in the utilization of approximately \$3,000,000 in reserves over the last year to maintain operations. Reserves are estimated to be completely utilized within the next several months.

While the actual level of fees is being addressed separately, there are several issues related to financial management that need to change in order for the Department to better manage available resources in the future.

(1) The City Should Adopt a Policy Addressing Fund Reserves.

The first action that the City should undertake is to formally adopt a Construction Services fund reserve policy that clearly outlines the desired level of fund reserves that will be maintained by the City. Most fund reserves are established to provide, at a minimum, three to six months of operating revenues as an appropriate fund reserve balance. The policy should also outline the appropriate utilization of the fund reserves in terms of when it is accessed and for what purposes. Given the current status of the fund reserve (virtually none), the project team recommends that the City adopt a six-month fund reserve target. It may take several years for the City to build this reserve back up given the current level of development and the depleted reserve. Given these factors, the City should target building up these reserves over a three to four year period. For example, if a three year plan were developed, the City would target having two months of reserve in place within one year; four months within two years; and achieving six months within three years.

In addition to the emergency fund reserve, the project team would recommend that the City also establish an “obligated operating fund reserve” to address the change in permitting activity that has developed in the City. Unlike in past years, the City is facing a larger proportion of projects that span multiple years operating budgets due to the size of the project. While the plan review activities and initial inspections may be completed within the same year as the permit fee is received, a significant portion of

work activity related to inspections is occurring in subsequent years. In the past, revenues were consistent and growing and this did not create a problem. A portion of the permit fee received should be allocated on a proportional basis to this special operating fund reserve to cover work activities in future years.

For example, if a high-rise project is applied for and permitted during this year, the proportion of the fee that would be equivalent to the inspection activities that will occur next year should be allocated to this fund. These funds will then become a revenue line in future budget years. This approach may assist the Department in reducing the immediate impact of major changes in permitted activity on a specific year's budget.

Given the current financial situation, this approach may be difficult to implement at one time and may need to be phased in to prevent a major impact on the current budget. Phasing in over a two to three year period may be preferable for financial stability.

Recommendation: The City should adopt a formal policy regarding fund reserve levels for the Construction Services Department that provides, at a minimum, three to six months of operating revenues in reserves.

Recommendation: The City should allocate a portion of annual permit fees to a "special reserve" that is intended to be utilized for plan review and building inspection services to be required in future years. The amount allocated should be based upon the estimated proportion of work to be accomplished in future years.

(2) The Amount of Administrative Charges to the Construction Services Department Should Be Reviewed.

The amount of City overhead and administrative charges charged to the Construction Services Department are set through a formal cost allocation plan that is conducted by specialized financial consultants. These plans are developed to fully

comply with State statutes governing appropriate charges to revenues received from permits and to ensure that charges are designed to cover only the services directly received. During the next cost allocation study conducted by the City of West Palm Beach, a special emphasis should be placed on the review of the assumptions utilized in calculating the amount to be charged for these charges. These charges are a significant portion of the Department's budget and each dollar allocated to these charges is not available to directly provide services to the public. This is a more critical issue now given the current status of finances for the Department.

Given the recent reorganization, staff reductions, and changes in service approaches (including those that may result following implementation of recommendations within this report), a critical review of the continued appropriateness of the assumptions for allocation of costs to the Department is warranted. Additionally, consideration should be given, in limited cases, to whether the costs for certain services (such as IT) could be reduced either through the hiring of a staff member within the Department or the utilization of some external resources on an on-call basis.

Recommendation: During the next cost allocation study conducted by the City of West Palm Beach, special attention should be given to the amount of charges allocated to the Construction Services Department for administrative and overhead purposes.

4. SEVERAL CHANGES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE BUILDING INSPECTIONS AREA TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY.

The Building Inspections Division of the Construction Services Department is similar in organization and operational practices to most similar divisions in Florida. Inspectors are assigned to rough geographic area within their specific discipline. Inspectors are assigned to a specific discipline (for example – plumbing, mechanical,

electrical, etc.) based upon their state certification/licensing, and they conduct all field inspections as requested by the contractor.

The City of West Palm Beach has implemented a very effective technology program for building inspectors with the utilization of wireless laptops in the field that enable inspectors to enter inspection results immediately upon completion of the inspection. This enables contractors to get inspections results online in virtually real-time. This use of technology has effectively increased the productivity of the staff by effectively eliminating most of the need for office time. The project team compared the Inspection Services Division to 'best management practices.' The points, below, highlight a number of best practices in place in the Inspection Services Division.

- Inspections are responded to within one workday of the request. Additionally, request for inspection can be made up until 7:00 AM using the automated system on the day of the inspection.
- Inspections can be assigned using both the internet and voice-activated inspection request system.
- Inspectors utilize a 'mobile office,' whereby they are able to access information on the property and inspection results in the field. Data are "real time" and are provided through laptop interconnectivity with the eGov plus database.
- Inspectors maintain certifications and complete required continuing education units.
- Inspectors are deployed geographically by trade to minimize the impact of travel time on productivity.
- Inspectors spend more than 90% of their time in the field conducting inspections and other related work.

As the points above demonstrate, the Inspection Services Division has implemented several best management practices.

The following sections outline major recommendations related to opportunities to improve the administration of the building inspections function.

(1) Changes Should Be Implemented in the Requirements For Building Inspector Positions.

As noted, the Construction Services Department utilizes specialty inspectors (e.g., building, electrical, mechanical, plumbing and gas). While this is not the prevalent practice in Florida, the use of combination inspectors is also a common approach in other states, and is an increasing trend nationally. The implementation of combination inspectors for residential projects is easier to accomplish under the Florida regulations than combination inspectors dealing with the trades – but both approaches should be pursued to improve the ability of the Department to effectively utilize staff and deploy them as needed based upon workloads. Advantages of this approach include:

- **Utilization of combination dwelling inspectors enhances the efficiency of inspection services.** A combination inspector increases the efficiency of inspection operations as the inspector can make all of the plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and building inspections in a single stop. With specialized inspectors, three different inspectors – a Building Inspector, a Plumbing Inspector, a Mechanical Inspector, and an Electrical Inspector – would all have to inspect the structure during four different stops. This results in increased non-productive travel time and reduces the number of potential inspections per day.
- **The combination dwelling inspector provides continuity of contact with the contractor and better public relations.** The use of a combination inspector removes stumbling blocks to the timeliness of inspection services for contractors. A combination inspector can approve the electrical, building, plumbing and mechanical work; four different inspectors do not have to make four different inspection stops to approve the construction work performed by the contractor.
- **The use of combination dwelling inspectors will enable the Department to better accommodate inspection vacancies.** The use of a combination inspector approach rather than inspection specialists significantly reduces the workload impact of vacant inspection positions since there is a broader pool of inspectors to allocate the workload amongst.

The use of combination inspectors is not unusual. A number of municipalities in the southeast, including Florida, utilize combination inspectors to increase their construction services department's flexibility in responding to inspection requests and handling inspection workload.

While the Inspectors currently assigned to the Department possess a number of certifications, the Matrix Consulting Group recommends that the Construction Services Department work to implement a program that will move toward having each inspector able to provide inspections in at least two trade areas. Obviously, the Department will need to develop the plan such that each discipline has increased coverage by staff. The application of combination inspectors has the potential for broader application beyond these two areas depending on the complexity of the construction.

The Department should develop a training program for each of these staff based upon a training needs assessment. In addition, the Department should provide a financial incentive to staff that obtain multi-certifications. While recognizing that the financial incentive will need to be developed in conjunction with the Human Resources Department, a pay incentive of 5% per additional certification is not uncommon in compensation plans and the financial cost to the municipality is minor relative to the benefit received in increased productivity and utilization of staff. Additionally, in the future when vacancies occur and staff are hired, the Department should seek to hire individuals who already possess multiple certifications.

The project team's estimates indicate that two inspectors could be reduced from the workforce upon successful implementation of this cross training effort.

Recommendation: The City of West Palm Beach should develop a program to encourage and reward staff for achieving the ability to perform multiple trade

inspections. The City should implement a classification and salary schedule that encourages and reward employees for attaining additional trade certifications.

Recommendation: The City of West Palm Beach should increase the utilization and deployment of more cross-trained building inspectors to better manage and adjust to changing workloads.

(2) In the Future, the City Should Utilize the Capacity of the CommunityPlus Software to Automatically Assign Inspections to Staff Based Upon Geographic Assignments and Trade.

The CommunityPlus software has the capability to utilize various “workflow systems” to automatically assign requested inspections to the appropriate inspector. These workflows can be set up to recognize, based upon the inspection requested and its location, which inspector should be assigned the work. At the present time, supervisors are manually assigning these inspections at the beginning of each workday. While the time commitment of the supervisor is not large, the project team sees no benefit to not utilizing the software’s capabilities to automate this function. The system can be set up to ensure that a particular inspector is not assigned more inspections than he or she is capable of completing within the workday.

This recommendation can be implemented at any time as the system can be modified to account for changes in geographic areas, changes in inspector certification, etc.

Recommendation: The scheduling of inspections for Building Inspectors should be modified to enable additional efficiencies by having CommunityPlus directly assign requested inspections to the appropriate inspector.

(3) The Monitoring of Inspection Completion Should Continue.

The Construction Services Department is currently appropriately monitoring inspection requests, inspection completion and generally is completing all inspection requests within one day of request. The Department has adopted a standard of

conducting all inspections requests within one day of receipt. This is the appropriate standard that should be utilized as it is the prevailing practice in the industry. This activity should be continually monitored and staff deployment and assignment should be modified when less than 95% of inspection requests are completed within one day of request. The Department should utilize overtime as its first defense against dropping below this standard, but if it is routinely unable to meet the same day standard or the use of overtime becomes routine and on-going, additional staff should be considered.

Recommendation: The Department should continue monitoring inspection services timeframes, and staffing levels should be adjusted when less than 95% of inspections are completed within one day of request or when overtime utilization to conduct routine inspections becomes regular and ongoing.

(4) Several Changes Should Be Implemented in the Organizational Structure and Management Approach Utilized to Manage the Building Inspections Function.

The Inspection Services Division is staffed with 26.0 fulltime equivalents. The points, which follow, provide a brief discussion of the staffing in Inspection Services.

- There is 1.0 Manager / Assistant Building Official responsible for the management and oversight of the Inspection Services Division. It should be noted that the Department has proposed elimination of this position as part of its 2009 Budget.
- There are 4.0 Chief Inspectors, including one over each specific discipline / trade: Building, Mechanical, Plumbing and Electrical.
- Inspectors are licensed in a single trade and are responsible for conducting inspections of building activities that fall within their trade. The number of authorized inspectors by trade is: 8.0 Building Inspector, 3.0 Mechanical Inspector, 4.0 Plumbing Inspector and 5.0 Electrical Inspector. There are five vacant positions – 1 in building, 1 in mechanical, 2 in plumbing and 1 in electrical.
- In addition to inspecting building activities, staff in this Division are responsible for inspecting expired permits, condemning properties, performing new business inspections and inspecting work performed by contract inspectors at large construction sites.

The project team developed a number of assumptions with respect to the analysis of the Division's staffing requirements. The points, below, present a summary of those assumptions.

- The net availability by days of inspectors is 70%, which includes holidays, vacation, sick leave, training and general administrative time. Thus, inspectors are generally available to conduct inspections a total of 182 days per 260 available work days.
- Inspectors will meet the benchmark of an average of 10 to 14 inspections per inspector per day. 'Best practice' agencies meet an average of 14 inspections per inspector per day when fully utilizing technology including the utilization of take-home vehicles to report immediately to filed inspections and the use of laptops for entry of inspection results in the field. The ISO Building Code Effectiveness rating utilizes a benchmark of 10 inspections per day per full time inspector but have adjusted this standard based upon the additional field time achieved due to take-home vehicles and laptops.
- As discussed in the following section, there are efficiencies to be gained by cross training and multi-discipline certifications of inspectors. This will occur from the ability to better schedule and assign inspectors (reducing multiple inspectors necessary at a site) and reductions in travel time for inspectors.
- Given the availability of partial data for 2008, the project team utilized inspection data from calendar year 2007. Thus, the total number of annual inspections, including sub-permit inspections, is 40,694.

The table, below, presents the staffing requirements for the Inspection Services Division at the lower and upper end of the range of inspections per inspector per day.

Item	Number
Number of Work Weeks	52.0
Number of Work Days	5.0
Number of Total Work Days	260.0
Net Availability (at 70%)	182.0
Number of Inspections	40,694.0
Target Number of Inspections per Day	14.0
Number of Days Required (Inspections)	2,906.7
Number of Inspectors Required	16.0
Total Number of Authorized Positions	20.0
Plus / (Minus)	(4.0)

The points, below, provide a discussion of the information presented in the table above:

- As previously noted, workload has significantly decreased over the last five years. Staffing levels have not matched the decline in workload.
- The project team assumes the Construction Services Department can achieve the range of 14 inspections per inspector per day. The Construction Services Department has successfully embraced technology in order to improve the efficiency of inspectors in the field (i.e., access to CommunityPlus, mobile officers, etc.)
- The project team recommends that the Construction Services Department should transition from specialty inspectors to combination inspectors. There should be a financial incentive for achieving multi-certifications. This will result in a learning curve for staff and will impact staff productivity (i.e., number of inspections conducted by inspector per day). Estimated efficiency for this change should result in 5% to 10% increase in productivity upon full implementation.
- In addition to responding to requests for service (i.e., inspection requests), inspectors are responsible for conducting proactive inspections, such as non-permitted work, as well as inspections for expired permits, new business inspections, and code enforcement, etc.

With that said, the project team recommends the following:

- Establish as a baseline staffing for the number of inspectors at 16. Given the current authorized staffing contingent of 20 positions, and the fact that there are currently five (5) vacancies, this will require the hiring of 1 inspector. The other four vacancies should be eliminated.
- In filling the one vacancy, the Department should seek a cross-trained inspector who can perform inspections in more than one area.
- Longer term, the Department should develop a plan to implement targeted cross training of existing inspectors and provide financial incentives for obtaining multi-discipline certifications. The project team recommends an increase of 5% per additional certification achieved by the inspectors for a total of up to 15% of base salary. At a minimum, staff should obtain a combination dwelling inspector certification.
- Utilization of combination inspectors will impact the Division's operations. As such, the project team assumes a productivity level of 14 inspections per inspector per day. This also assumes that the Department continues the current

utilization of field entry of inspections, and ideally the reinstatement of the take-home vehicle program for field inspectors.

- Utilize additional staff resources to allow for formal training, as well as on-the-job training, such as shadowing, code review, plans examination in the various trades.

Recommendation: The Department should target a base staffing in the Inspections Division of 16 positions. This will require the filling of one currently vacant position. This position should be filled, if at all possible, with an individual with more than one trade specialization.

Recommendation: Following implementation of the changes in building inspector functions and the change in the supervisory structure, Building Inspections staff should be assigned geographically (among two districts in the City).

(5) Several Alternative Organizational Structures Were Reviewed for the Building Inspections Division.

The project team considered several alternatives for the organizational structure of the Building Inspections Division to better align personnel resources with current workloads while enhancing or improving the level of supervision and customer service.

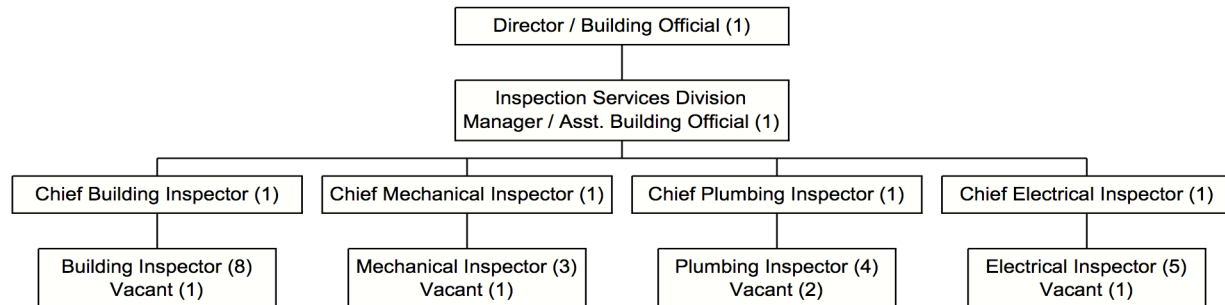
(a) Alternative 1 Assumes Maintenance of the Inspections Services Manager Position and Elimination of Two Chief Inspector Positions.

In this alternative, the project team evaluated the benefits of maintaining the existing Inspections Services Manager position and the elimination of two Chief Inspector positions. Current Chief Building Officials have varying spans of control from 1:3 to 1:8. Each position should be able to effectively supervise a staff of eight to ten.

The current organization of the Inspection Services Division is presented in the plan of organization below.

**Current Organization of the
Construction Services Department
Inspection Services Division**

City of West Palm Beach, Florida



The points, which follow, provide a discussion of the Division's plan of organization.

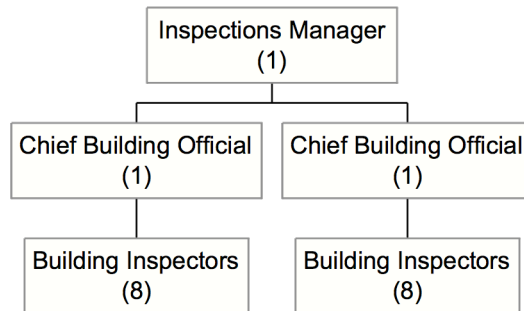
- As with the inspector positions, the Chief Inspector positions are specialty positions, with each supervising staff in a particular trade.
- Spans of control range from 1: 8 authorized positions in the Building Section to 1: 3 authorized positions in the Mechanical Section.
- The overall span of control for the Division is 1 manager / supervisor to 4.2 line employees. The span of control in the Division is narrow.
- The project team has recommended a reduction in the overall staffing levels in the Inspection Services Division from 20.0 inspectors to 16 inspectors.

Under this alternative, the project team recommends the following with respect to the Inspection Services Division:

- Eliminate 2.0 Chief Inspector positions.
- Maintain the Inspections Services Manager position.
- Organize multi-discipline teams that would be responsible for a geographical portion of the City (i.e., each team would be responsible for 50% of the City). This would be phased in over time as the organization transitions to cross-trained inspectors.
- Reinstate the recently eliminated Inspections Services Manager position in part from the savings achieved through the reduction in the Chief Building Inspectors Position. While the Department intends for the Department Director to assume

this supervisor function, it is the project teams belief that other recommendations that will require his time are more critical for him to spend time on and the organization warrants maintaining this Manager position.

The new (long-term) plan of organization for the Inspection Services Division under this approach is presented below.



The estimated financial impact of this change is estimated in the following table (note the project team utilized the midpoint of salaries for the Chief Inspector position:

	Salary	Benefits	Total Cost
Inspection Services Manager	\$103,126	\$46,031	\$149,157
Chief Inspector	(\$69,941)	(\$20,847)	(\$90,788)
Chief Inspector	(\$69,941)	(\$20,847)	(\$90,788)
TOTAL	(\$36,756)	\$4,337	(\$32,419)

This approach would generate a savings of approximately \$32,000 annually. The primary benefits of this approach as a better span of control for supervisory personnel, the existence of a Management level between the Chief Inspectors and the Executive Staff of the Department, and the beginning implementation of the cross-training approach to the provision of Inspection services in the City of West Palm Beach.

(b) The Second Alternative Structure Evaluated Maintains the Existing Approach of Single-Trade Chief Inspectors and the Elimination of the Inspection Services Manager Position.

Under this alternative, the project team evaluated the benefits of eliminating the Inspections Services Manager position and maintaining the four Chief Inspector positions that are currently in place over each trade. This is essentially the structure under which the Department has been operating for the last several months since the retirement of the Inspections Services Manager.

Under this approach, there would be no additional costs savings to the Department from the current status quo. However, the 2009 budget would reflect a reduction from the 2008 budget of approximately \$149,000 that represents the salary and benefits cost of the Inspections Services Manager. During the last several months of operating under this structure, the Department has recognized several difficult to quantify but tangible benefits to this approach including:

- An increased empowerment of the Chief Inspectors in making decisions and resolving conflicts that arise in the field.
- An increased level of interaction between the Chief Inspectors and the Director through increased communication, discussions, and problem resolution.
- Enhanced job satisfaction.

This approach basically maintains the existing organizational structure but eliminates the Inspections Services Manager position. The Chief Inspectors currently report directly to the proposed Assistant Building Official directly. While this increases the span of control for this position, both the Assistant Building Official and the Director have identified this approach as providing an enhanced level of service during the short period of time that it has been in place and feel the increased staff empowerment is a

positive improvement in the organization. The major detriment to this organizational structure is the increased number of individuals that are reporting directly to the Permitting and Licensing Services Manager / Assistant Building Official.

(c) The Project Team Recommends That, In the Short Term, the Construction Services Department Continue With the Existing Organizational Structure That Is In Place.

There are both benefits and negatives associated with both of the considered organizational structures evaluated. However, in the short term, the project team believes that a continuation of the approach currently being utilized (alternative 2) should be given a chance to succeed. While this approach involves the top management of the Department more significantly in the day-to-day supervision of the Inspections Services function, the project team is encouraged by the self-reported increase in staff empowerment (and the elimination of one level of management in the organization) and believes that this approach is more likely to achieve the overall goals that are attempting to be recognized – namely, problem resolution at lower levels of the organization and increased empowerment of staff to make decisions.

For these reasons, among others, the project team recommends a continuation of this approach at least for the short-term. As the number of staff with cross-functional abilities increase, and the Department is able to more fully implement cross-trained staff for the performance of inspections, a second look should be given to implementation of alternative 1. Additionally, should time constraints impact the ability of the Director or Assistant Director to effectively supervise the Inspections Services area, alternative 1 should be reconsidered for implementation.

Recommendation: The Inspections Services Division should be structured to provide the elimination of the Inspections Services Manager position and the maintenance of the four Chief Building Inspector positions for the near term.

(6) The City Should Reconsider the Recent Modification in the Utilization of Take-Home Vehicles for Building Inspectors.

Prior to a recent change in City policy, inspectors were assigned take-home vehicles and would start their day by proceeding directly to their first inspection (daily inspection logs are downloaded wirelessly each morning) and conduct inspections up to the end of working hours. The recent change was implemented as part of a citywide review of the take-home vehicles assigned to all City staff. While the project team is cognizant of the City's need to manage its fleet, reduce operating costs, and ensure consistency among departments, this change does have a significant impact on the number of inspections that can be conducted with existing staff.

Presently, inspectors must pick up and drop off their vehicles and laptop computers at a designated location which has resulted in the reduction of available hours to conduct inspections due to travel time. It is estimated that this change in practice results in the loss of approximately 1 hour daily per inspector – or the equivalent of a loss of approximately 12% of time available to perform inspections in the field. This reduced field time is the equivalent of a loss of two inspectors based upon current staffing. Strictly from a financial perspective, the reduction in costs due to the elimination of the take-home vehicles would have to approach \$100,000 to offset the personnel costs that would be required to replace lost time with new employees.

Recommendation: The Construction Services Department should work with the City Administrator to request reconsideration of the change in take-home vehicles for Building Inspectors assigned to the field, given the approximate 12% reduction per inspector in time available for conducting field activities.

(7) Several Changes Should Be Implemented in the Operations of the Building Inspections Area to Improve Services to the Customer.

An objective of the Inspections Services Division is to provide not only timely inspection services, but also to ensure that the inspections provided are consistent interpretations of the building codes. There are a number of steps that should be taken to enhance the level of consistency in building code interpretations. These steps are described in the sections below.

(a) Provide Inspection Checklists to Each Inspector and Require Their Use on Each Inspection.

Although provision of training and periodic staff meetings can be utilized to ensure consistency of interpretations, another approach to enhance consistency of inspection code interpretations is through the development and use of inspection checklists.

The Division should review existing checklists and develop or revise additional ones for conducting building inspections. While not an exhaustive list, examples of checklists should include the following types of projects:

- Residential Foundation
- Wood Frame Shear Walls
- Underground Plumbing
- Rough Plumbing
- Rough Electrical
- Mechanical
- Insulation Drywall
- Interior and Exterior Lath

- Swimming Pool Spa and Hot Tub
- Building Inspection
- Water Heater and Hot Water Storage Tank Replacement
- Temporary Service Pole
- Re-Roofing
- Copper Water Line Re-Pipe
- HVAC Unit Change-Out

Interviews with inspections staff indicate that inspections checklists are not routinely utilized during inspections. The lack of use of these checklists can result in a deterioration of a standard level of service provided by the Department, both in terms of content and quality. Use of checklists will improve consistency and increase transparency in the inspection process. The Department should also make these checklists and inspection results a part of the permit file.

Recommendation: Inspection checklists should be developed and utilized by Building Inspectors to increase consistency. Completed checklists should become a component of the project file.

Recommendation: Inspection checklists should be posted to the City's website for use by customers.

(b) The Chief Building Inspectors Should Allocate a Proportion of Time to Quality Control and Consistency of Code Interpretation.

Another best practice utilized to ensure consistency in building inspections is the use of an effective quality control program. The Department has implemented a Quality Verification Audit program as required for maintenance of its International Accreditation Service Building Department accreditation. A quality control program assists in the development of feedback and identification of any problems with consistency, and

feedback regarding expected employee performance. This program should include the following:

- The Chief Building Inspector should ride for at least one half day every quarter with each Inspector to observe their inspection procedures.
- The Chief Building Inspector should visit major jobs periodically to review the results of inspections by the Building Inspectors and visit with contractors and architects regarding the demeanor of the Building Inspectors.
- Document the activity and findings and submit written reviews and findings monthly to the Director.

Recommendation: The Inspections Services Manager or Chief Inspectors should periodically ride along with each building inspector – at least one-half day every quarter for on-going performance evaluation.

(c) The Construction Services Department Should Develop Policies Regarding Code Interpretations for Inspections and Publish These Policies at Its Website.

Another measure that is utilized by progressive cities to ensure consistency in the code interpretation and inspection process is to formally document code interpretations regarding building inspections. This approach ensures transparency as to how inspections will be conducted and interpretations of the code. As an example, the City of Lee's Summit, Missouri, publishes documents on its website related to one- and two-family dwellings, uncovered decks, and the electrical and plumbing codes. These documents provide a condensed summary of code requirements for various types of construction and provide applicants with common interpretations and frequent problems encountered.

The Construction Services Department should develop policies for documenting code interpretations. These policies should document the process for establishing official interpretations of the Division. These policies should also require that

interpretations are not published until they are reviewed by supervisors and managers within the Division.

Recommendation: The Construction Services Department should document official building inspection code interpretations and publish them on the Department's website.

(d) The Department Should Communicate New Building Code Requirements to the Construction Industry Before These Requirements Are Enforced.

When inspectors bring new information received at outside training about changing code requirements, or realize that something that they have not been requiring is in the codes, they should take a proactive stance in informing the construction industry about these changes. For changes covered by Florida statute, the Department has little leeway in enforcement mechanism – they must enforce the existing regulations. However, outreach to the construction industry to educate regarding changing requirements should be conducted. For internal policy changes or enforcement, staff should provide a notification period prior to implementation of new requirements or processes to provide time for applicants to adjust. This provides notice time in order to prepare for requirements not previously imposed for costs and impact. It is reasonable that any changed requirements not previously invoked, other than statutory requirements, be communicated in advance, and a 60 days implementation period be provided, and that these new requirements should not impact jobs already under construction.

Similarly, the Department needs to implement a policy that indicates inspectors do not take issue with a construction element previously approved by another building inspector without first obtaining approval from the Chief Inspector. This approach ensures that contractors can rely upon the approvals previously granted by inspectors,

but that in cases where changes must be imposed following prior approval in order to comply with legitimate code requirements – a City supervisor is involved and can work with the Inspector and Contractor in finding a workable resolution.

Finally, several cases were noted during the study where conflicts arose between the building inspector's inspection approval (or disapproval) contradict the plans approved by the plans examiner. In these cases, where the contractor has built according to approved plans yet the building inspector is not comfortable approving the inspection, the Building Inspector must take the initiative to contact the plans examiner and resolve the dispute internally rather than requiring that the contractor assume this role. This proactive approach will demonstrate the City's willingness to provide assistance to the construction industry and assist in resolving disputes between plans approved during the plan review phase and compliance during the construction phase. Note the project team is referencing situations that go beyond changes necessary due to field conditions, but those limited cases where plan review approval is in conflict with the inspector's requirement. In cases where a change must be made and the contractor must alter plans and submit for review and approval, the City should commit to a short turn around time (ideally two or three days) following receipt.

Recommendation: Require that any new requirements not previously imposed (other than required building code requirements) will not be enforced on current construction and future jobs until the industry is informed and a 60 day waiting period is put in place.

Recommendation: Initiate a policy that inspectors do not re-open a construction element previously approved by another building inspector without approval from their supervisor. This policy should discourage surprises or changes to previous field job approvals by building inspectors.

Recommendation: Initiate a policy whereby inspectors do not take issue in public with a plan check approval. If an inspector questions a plan check approval or is concerned about an omission or discrepancy, the building inspector should review it with the plans examiner and if a problem is identified, have the Plans Examiner contact the contractor's architect for a change.

(e) The Department Should Implement a Pilot Program of providing Evening Hours for Selected Types of Inspections.

While after-hours inspections can be scheduled currently through the request and payment of a fee, the City should consider the implementation of a pilot program that provides evening hours to handle expired permit inspections and inspections for small projects being conducted by homeowners. This would not eliminate the provision of these services during other work hours, but provide an opportunity for individuals with limited ability to schedule inspections during typical work hours an alternative timeframe for scheduling inspections. Smaller projects are ones that typically are difficult for homeowners to schedule inspections during the day.

The availability of inspectors to conduct these during the evening – typical non-work hours for many applicants – would greatly increase likelihood of voluntary compliance by applicants, potentially reduce the number of non-scheduled inspections by applicants, and increase the ability of staff to complete these inspections in a timely manner. If scheduled inspections are insufficient to fill the time of the assigned inspector, the inspector should conduct work on expired permits in the remaining time. Obviously, it will require a cross-trained inspector to handle this program. The project team would recommend that the City begin with one night a week – with inspections available from five to eight p.m.

Recommendation: A pilot program of flexible work hours should be utilized to provide evening hours for handling expired permits and inspections for homeowners who are unable to schedule inspections during other times.

5. SEVERAL CHANGES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE PLAN REVIEW DIVISION TO ADDRESS OPERATIONAL CONCERNS AND IMPROVE THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE PUBLIC.

The plan review function, both in terms of comments issued and time for receiving comments, was by far the most significant concern expressed among all individuals interviewed from the construction industry. While significant concerns were expressed regarding the comments issued (i.e. the City of West Palm Beach requires code compliance not required in other communities), the vast majority of the concern was expressed regarding the time to actually receive the comments. Many, if not most, of the architects and design professionals indicated during private discussions that they ended up agreeing with the code interpretations of staff and the changes required, however, the delay in receiving initial comments impacted their overall perception of the timeliness of the process.

There is probably a level of validity in the first criticism regarding the level of detail conducted during reviews. The City of West Palm Beach is fortunate to have on staff a cadre of employees that are among the best in the state in terms of code knowledge and understanding. Unfortunately, with this extensive knowledge comes a more in-depth review. Where in other communities issues may not be addressed during plan review but addressed in the field (if at all), the City of West Palm Beach attempts to address all issues on the front-end of the process. The project team cannot fault the City for having highly knowledgeable staff. However, there are several areas where changes can be implemented to improve the services provided. Absent a change in this

area (coupled with the enhanced focus on truly building a partnership with the construction industry), the overall perception of the service levels provided will not improve and the City will not attain the desired result of improving the relationship between the Construction Services Department and construction industry.

As previously noted in prior recommendations, the level of training and coordination between the Plan Review function and the Building Inspections Division must be increased and improved. These two divisions and staff must work in conjunction with each other as a team and provide consistent information and code interpretations to the public.

(1) The Department Needs to Modify the Staffing of the Intake Process and The Supervision of Plan Reviewers to Enhance the Services Provided.

The first area of change that must be implemented within the process is a change in the intake process and procedures for permit applications. The front counter staff, those individuals that directly interface with the public on an on-going basis, have a significant impact on the performance levels of the Department. At the present time, the individuals responsible for the intake function have limited code and process knowledge to assist the applicant at the counter.

The City of West Palm Beach should implement a permit technician approach at the front counter. This is a very common approach – if not prevailing practice – for building departments, based upon the project teams experience, on a national basis. The permit technician would be responsible for not only first-line interaction with the applicants, but to review submitted plans for completeness. The permit technician should notify the applicant immediately if the application is incomplete, and the application should not be accepted. When deeming an application complete, the permit

technician is noting whether all required information is present in the application packet, not whether the information is accurate. For example, the permit technician would ensure that all required calculations are present, but not review the calculation for accuracy.

It is estimated that each of the permit technician positions would have a financial cost of approximately \$65,000 to \$75,000 inclusive of all salary and benefit costs. This recommendation is one of the higher priority recommendations that can be immediately implemented to impact service provision. The ability to identify, early in the process, applications that are not complete saves time for both the plan reviewers (from reviewing incomplete plans) and the applicants (who can revise and resubmit plans before the initial round of review).

While it will be a change for the City to reject incomplete applications, if appropriately implemented with extensive public education and the provision of detailed checklists regarding submission requirements, the quality of applications being reviewed will increase over time. Based upon the project team's experience with other communities that utilize a permit technician approach, the City should also note a decrease in the number of reviews conducted, as items that previously would have been noted as incomplete on the first plan review cycle should be significantly reduced. As noted, checklists must be developed for each functional plan review type and these need to be made available to the public for their use in self-evaluating their applications prior to submission.

The second area of major staffing change in the plan review process is the addition of another Chief Plans Review Examiner. At the present time, the Chief Plans

Review Examiner is responsible for the oversight, management, evaluation, and problem resolution for approximately sixteen plans reviewers. This level of span of control exceeds what one individual can effectively handle while addressing all other assigned duties (problem resolution, code research and interpretation, public assistance, etc.). For this reason, the project team recommends that an additional Chief Plans Review Examiner position be established to reduce the span of control and increase the amount of time that individuals in this position can spend on support to applicants in resolving issues. As noted earlier in the report, this position has been identified as the position that should be utilized for performing an ombudsman role for the City to improve problem resolutions regarding code applications during the review phase. The addition of this position will have an estimated annual cost of approximately \$125,000 to \$140,000 (inclusive of all salary and benefits costs) based upon the experience of the individual selected. The existing plans examiners should be divided equally between the two Chief Building Plans Examiners to provide a span of control of approximately eight plans examiners per supervisor.

Recommendation: Checklists should be utilized during the intake process to ensure submitted applications are complete. Incomplete applications should not be accepted.

Recommendation: Checklists utilized should be made available on the City's website for use by the public in self-evaluating their own applications in advance.

Recommendation: The City should implement a permit technician position, in lieu of the administrative staff, on the front counter to assist the public and review applications as received.

Recommendation: The City of WPB should add an additional Chief Building Plans Examiner at an annual cost of approximately \$125,000 to \$140,000.

(2) The Department Should Implement a Pilot Project to Review Private Provider Applications Based upon an Audit Approach.

Another area of significant concern heard from several individuals during the study was the City's approach to utilization of private providers. The City of West Palm Beach effectively treats private provider applications no differently than they do other applications. Under the Florida statutes, the private provider program has been designed to provide an alternative method for applicants to get plans reviewed. While the City retains the obligation to issue to permit, there is liability associated with the private provider ensuring that the plans fully meet codes. The approach utilized by a few other Florida communities, that were reviewed during the study, could best be characterized as an "audit" approach where they may review only a sampling of private provider applications rather than every one.

In reviewing several cases with the Construction Services Department, the project team reviewed files and cases where significant code issues were identified during the Department's review that required correction in order to meet code compliance. These issues were major one including improper building classifications for calculations. Clearly, these types of issues should not be overlooked. The Department's desire to ensure that all permits issued are for plans that fully meet codes is commendable and shouldn't be seen as a negative. However, it was also conveyed to the project team that some plan reviewers have adopted a philosophy of attempting to find problems with an application specifically because it was submitted through this program. That approach is not an appropriate review method.

The project team recommends that the Department develop a specific checklist of items that all private provider submitted plans will be reviewed against. These would

include both major life safety issues as well as other critical code compliance issues. Plans that pass this initial checklist would be approved without further review. Those that fail, would be placed in the normal process for a complete plan review. The project team feels that this middle ground approach will enable the Department (and the public they serve) to accomplish their major goal regarding building safety and code compliance while still implementing the goal of the private provider program to provide an effective alternative to the plan review process. The Department should develop a report that summarizes on a monthly basis the number of private provider applications that pass the checklist review and the time it took for evaluation.

Recommendation: The Department should implement a pilot program for the review of private provider applications to conduct an initial review for “critical” health, safety, and code compliance issues and only conduct full reviews on those that fail this checklist. Reports should be developed that summarize the review times for private provider applications and the number passing the initial checklist so that the program can be evaluated.

(3) Several Recommendations Were Developed Related to Plan Review Time Targets and the Process for Conducting Plan Reviews to Improve Services to the Public.

The project team reviewed the processing targets identified by the prior task force and as adopted by the Construction Services Department for appropriateness and concur that these targets are appropriate for use by the City of West Palm Beach. The general target of 30 business days for the performance of an initial plan review for commercial and multi-family projects is appropriate. Additionally, the project team concurs with the utilization of a 14 business day review time period for residential projects.

However, the project team would recommend that the time for all resubmittal plan reviews should be modified to 15 days for each commercial resubmittal and seven

business days for each residential resubmittal. Our experience with other communities is that high performing operations attempt to set the re-review target at approximately one-half of the initial review time frame. There are several reasons and benefits to this including keeping projects moving forward and ensuring that resubmittals are addressed in a timely fashion and don't get lost in the work pile behind new submittals. At the present time, the Construction Services Department gives priority to resubmittals over new project submittals, but has not established a specific timeframe. We would recommend that the Department utilize a target of one-half the original plan review target and monitor their progress against this standard to ensure that it is a reasonable target.

The project team would also recommend that any resubmittal (plan revision) that is a result of conflict between requirements imposed by the Building Inspector that differ from the plans approved by the plan reviewer, should be reviewed in no more than 5 days.

As recommended earlier, monthly reports should be developed that show by plans examiner their performance in meeting plan review targets for assigned cases. The report should indicate average number of days to perform plan review (by type), and the percentage of plan reviews conducted within the time target. This detailed report (by individual) is appropriate for use internally for measuring performance. This report should be summarized on a departmental level and shared with the City Administrator, elected officials, and the public.

At the present time, there are no established standards regarding either targeted workloads or targeted processing times by type of plans for the plan reviewers. These

are two common approaches utilized to evaluate staff performance and ensure that staff resource are appropriately allocated against workloads. The Department should track performance (in terms of number of plans reviewed and average time to review various types of plans) for a several month period, to develop some general guidelines that can be utilized for assessing individual staff performance. The Chief Building Plans Examiner should develop workload targets and processing time benchmarks for each plan review function. Obviously, the standards and caseloads will vary based upon the type of plans being reviewed (i.e. caseloads will be greater for those individuals conducting single family plan reviews, and smaller for those conducting trade reviews of high-rise buildings).

Recommendation: Plan review time performance should be measured monthly for each plan reviewer. The Manager should adopt case load targets for each plan reviewer. Managers should address through training, evaluation and other methods, all individuals who are unable to meet established time review targets.

Recommendations: The City should post all plan review targets (by plan type) on the website for applicants to understand routine processing times.

Recommendation: The City should formally adopt the time review standards recommended by the task force with the following changes: resubmittals should be performed in ½ the time of the original time review standard; and resubmittals resulting from internal staff disagreement on code requirements should be conducted within 5 days.

Recommendation: The Chief Building Plans Examiner should develop workload targets for Plans Reviewers that provide guidelines on the average number of applications that are reviewed per day and the average number of hours each plan review should take for completion.

(4) Similar to the Requirement of Cross Training Staff in the Inspections Area, Plans Examiners Should Be Cross Trained.

For the same reasons that building inspectors should be cross trained, the City of West Palm Beach should look to expand the number of staff in-house that are able to

review multiple plan types. The City should implement a similar compensation incentive (5% additional per trade) for those current staff that achieve multiple certifications / licensing. In addition, the City of West Palm Beach, in recruiting for new hires, should seek to first hire individuals with multiple certifications. This will require that the Department would work with the Human Resources Department to develop a suitable classification and compensation solution. While it may not always be possible to hire individuals with multiple certifications, this should be established as the desired approach for future hires.

Recommendation: The City should implement a cross training program for plans reviewers with an appropriate financial compensation. Additionally, all new hires should have multiple certifications when hired – when possible.

(5) The Department Needs to Better Communicate Its Approach to Utilizing “Red-Line Approvals” and “Provisos” for Minor and Administrative Corrections.

While there is a strong feeling internally against the extensive utilization of provisos or red-line approval of plans, the Construction Services Department does utilize these approaches where it feels they are appropriate based upon the outstanding issues on a case by case basis. The project team recommends that the Department better clarify and communicate its approach on this issue. Many other communities utilize these or similar approaches to deal with very minor or administrative corrections that are necessary rather than require a formal resubmittal and plan review phase. While the project team believes that this issue is not as large an issue in West Palm Beach (based upon our review of files and discussion with staff and members of the construction industry) as some individuals have indicated, a clearer communication of the situations when this approach will be utilized will improve the understanding of the

construction industry regarding the Department's practice and further reduce this as a friction point. A better understanding of how the Department approaches this issue should have a positive impact in the relationship between the City and the industry with little downside risk for the Department or city. The City still maintains multiple methods for addressing or stopping projects if the corrections are not made promptly.

Recommendation: The Department should better communicate the conditions under which it will utilize redlined changes and provisos for minor or administrative code compliance issues.

(6) The Construction Services Department Should Provide an Expedited Plan Review Process for Certain Projects.

There are often situations that arise where applicants – due to conditions or situations beyond their control – need to have plans reviewed in a time period shorter than that provided for under the City's normal processing time goals. While staff may not always be able to accommodate these situations, the Department should develop and implement a procedure for accepting applications under an "expedited" review process. Typically, these expedited review processes require the payment of an additional fee – above and beyond that required for normal plan review. The fee should be set at a level that is designed to cover the actual costs of staff providing the review on overtime. The expedited plan review would be conducted based upon the availability and willingness of staff to work overtime to complete the review. If staff are unable to meet the expedited review (or are unable to work the overtime to conduct the plan review), the fee would not be charged to the applicant and the application would be handled through the normal review process.

In implementing the expedited review, the Department should establish reasonable guidelines and conditions for the types of projects that will be eligible for this

program. The program should be conducted on a pilot basis and reviewed after six months.

Recommendation: The Department should implement an “expedited” plan review process that, for an additional fee (to cover the cost of overtime), provides an expedited review for qualifying applicants.

APPENDIX A

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
1. Inspection requests are responded to by a Building Inspector within one workday of the request.	Inspections are responded to within one workday of the request.	
2. Inspection requests are accepted until 7:00 AM of the day inspections are to be completed.	Inspections are assigned using an automated system up until 7:00 a.m. on the day of the inspection.	
3. An automated voice-activated inspection request system is utilized to receive inspections with linkage to the permit information system.	Inspections can be assigned using both the internet and the voice-activated inspection request system.	
4. Combination inspectors are utilized to respond to inspection requests where appropriate.	Inspections are assigned by trade expertise and broken down into structural, electrical, plumbing and mechanical.	Certification requirements in the State of Florida require extensive experience in each trade (5 years, with 2 years supervisory experience) making multiple certifications rare and difficult to obtain.
5. Inspectors allocate 85% to 90% of their available work hours to conducting building inspections in the field.	Inspectors meet or exceed the 90% productive hours measure through the assignment of laptop computers to receive and log inspection results and assigned vehicles allowing them to respond directly to job sites from their homes at the start of the day.	Due to a recent change in City policy, performance levels will be lowered by 12-15% (1-1.5 hours per day) due to the assigned vehicles being taken away as a cost savings measure. This will require reporting to City Hall at the beginning and end of each shift reducing the number of inspections that can be completed daily.
6. The number of inspection requests for each building permit is managed to avoid over-inspection through the use of re-inspection fees and by educating contractors regarding the timing during a construction process to request an inspection.	The number of inspections and associated detail are prescribed by the Florida Building Code. Re-inspection fees are avoided whenever possible by working with the GC as the project progresses.	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>7. Building inspectors use automated input devices to record inspection results or to display inspection history while in the field.</p>	<p>Inspectors can look up all data concerning the permit via an internet-based, field reporting and data system that provides “real time” data through laptop interconnectivity with the eGov plus database.</p>	
<p>8. An automated permit information system is utilized to (1) accept and issue building permits; (2) assure the status of each plan submittal is visible during the plan check process; (3) manage the processing time for building permit plan checking; (4) provide a database of inspection and plan checking service; (5) enable all of the departments/divisions involved in the building permit plan check process to enter and retrieve data; and (6) facilitate customer service through access to the internet to enable customers to submit building permit and inspection requests.</p>	<p>The eGov plus database provides all of the functionalities listed and also additional services by providing detailed plan review comments. Information availability was reported as an area of strength by the focus groups.</p>	
<p>9. Over-the-counter plan check service is provided five days a week for checking of spas, pools, patio covers, decks, small single family additions or remodels that do not require structural calculations, and other minor permits.</p>	<p>Residential re-roofings, air conditioning units, and water heater changeouts are performed on an over-the-counter basis.</p>	<p>Pools, spas and small additions that are multi-disciplinary in nature will require more than one trade review as well as zoning review.</p>
<p>10. 50% to 75% of the building permits requiring plan checks are checked over-the-counter.</p>		<p>Increased utilization of on-line and expedited permitting for small projects can increase the utilization figures. Ability to meet this issue is impacted by certain submission requirements that require formal plans to be submitted, reviewed, and approved. Additionally, given the current type of development in WPB (higher percentage of commercial versus residential) the ability to meet this target is impacted.</p>

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>11. Building permit plan checking is accomplished concurrently by all of the departments / divisions involved in the process. Plans are distributed simultaneously to all of the departments/divisions for plan checking.</p>	<p>Two sets of plans are required to be provided and an intake process is conducted to ascertain which trades will need to review plans. Two trades can be reviewing plans simultaneously and plans are returned to the review rack when individual trade or structural plans examiners have concluded their reviews.</p> <p>The City of WPB has evaluated several electronic plan review systems and is ready to proceed with a preferred solution once funding is available.</p>	<p>Technological innovation now allows for electronic plans reviews should the City acquire and implement the software. Consideration on the number of plans submitted may enable increased concurrent checking aside from the proposed electronic plan review.</p>

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>12. The Construction Services Department utilizes a case management system to manage the length of calendar time required for building permit plan checks. The system includes (1) cycle time objectives have been set for the length of time for completion of plan checking; (2) collection of actual processing time using the automated permitting system to enable a comparison to these targets, and (3) the exercise of authority by the Chief Plan Reviewer with the other departments / divisions to resolve delays in completion of plan checks.</p>	<p>Plan review times are monitored through an automated interface between eGov Plus and an Excel database. The database is used to evaluate lapsed time and those projects exceeding performance targets are questioned by management. The Department has control over Fire, Zoning and Engineering located with Construction Services but not Planning.</p>	<p>The Department does not have a specific process to intervene and assist the applicant when target processing times are not achievable.</p>
<p>13. Building permit plan check checklists have been developed for the various types of submittals to enable the plans examiners to focus their attention on the relevant aspects of building permit plan checking and assure uniformity among staff.</p>	<p>Plan reviewers utilize ICC checklists for each trade during their review of plans.</p>	<p>Checklists are not used during intake to ascertain the completeness of submissions due to the nuances and requirements of the Florida Building Code.</p>
<p>14. The plan checklist becomes part of the permanent record of the project address.</p>		<p>Checklists used for review are not part of the permanent record. With implementation of electronic file review, this should be conducted.</p>
<p>15. The Division maintains detailed records of plan review activity.</p>	<p>Plan review detailed comments and approval needs and requirements are entered into the comments section of the eGov Plus permitting system.</p>	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>16. Building permit plan applications are checked at the counter upon submittal for initial completeness and rejected if missing basic items.</p>	<p>Plans undergo an intake process to ascertain completeness.</p>	<p>It is not known whether critical items are missing until it goes to the plan reviewer who has the technical knowledge to understand all items that must be in the package. The City desires to enhance service through a triage review system staffed by an experienced Chief Plans Examiner.</p>
<p>17. A one-stop shop exists for submittal of building permit plan applications; applicants do not have to “walk” their submittal from department-to-department.</p>	<p>The “one stop shop” concept has been implemented and this includes co-location of zoning, fire, and engineering staff</p>	
<p>18. The number of departments/divisions that are routed building permit plans has been streamlined to that necessary.</p>	<p>This is accomplished through the intake process so that only the required trades are notified of a review requirement.</p>	
<p>19. The Construction Services Department provides zoning clearance for simple building permit plan checks.</p>	<p>Zoning staff is located in Construction Services and provide immediate reviews.</p>	
<p>20. Cycle time objectives for completion of the first plan check meet the following targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single family remodels and additions with no structural calculations: 1/2 week • Single family remodels and additions with structural calculations: 2 weeks • Tenant improvements: 2 weeks 	<p>The target objective for all single-family construction activities, both new and remodels, is 2 weeks.</p> <p>See prior item.</p> <p>The target objective for all commercial tenant buildouts that are less than 5,000 square feet is 2 weeks.</p>	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single and multiple family residential (< 20 DU), office/commercial less than 10,000 sq. ft.: 4 weeks • Single and multiple family residential (> 20 DU), office/commercial more than 10,000 sq. ft.: 6 weeks 	<p>Each single family home is treated as a unit and is reviewed within 2 weeks. The target objective for all new commercial structures of any type that are greater than 5,000 square feet is 30 days.</p> <p>The City's target is shorter and is described in the prior item.</p>	
<p>21. Comprehensive reviews of plans are performed even if they are prepared and sealed by a registered design professional certified in the appropriate field of work.</p>	<p>Comprehensive plan reviews are conducted regardless of who has prepared the plans.</p>	<p>Utilization of plan review audits for certain types of submissions (i.e. – private providers) may provide a streamlined process.</p>
<p>22. A monthly report is generated for the City Manager reporting actual vs. planned performance against these cycle time objectives.</p>	<p>This is tracked using the “Dashboard” monthly reporting system and is distributed to the City Manager. Reports are analyzed and performance monitored by CSD management.</p>	
<p>23. The Construction Services Department utilizes the most current version of the Florida Building Code</p>	<p>CSD utilizes up-to-date codes in every trade area.</p>	
<p>24. Building permit plan checks are complete and thorough. Additional problems do not surface during the second plan check that should have been caught during the first check.</p>	<p>Comprehensive plan reviews are conducted during the first check. Limited examples were noted where new items were noted during the resubmittal process that should have been addressed during the initial review.</p>	
<p>25. Building permit fees are easily and simply calculated.</p>	<p>Fees are calculated automatically using the eGov Plus permitting system. Rate schedules are also available to the public on the internet.</p>	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>26. The Construction Services Department recovers its costs including the cost of overhead and the costs of plan checking incurred by other departments/divisions involved in the plan check process.</p>	<p>The fees in the City of West Palm Beach are in the bottom tier according to fee comparisons they have conducted. There have been efforts by the Building Official to proactive adjust fees during the boom years that were not acted upon.</p>	<p>The Department has not recently calculated or enacted a fee that provides full revenue recovery given the changes in construction submittals over the past number of years. Current revenues and expenses are not in balance.</p>
<p>27. The Construction Services Department has an adequate reserve to cover 10 to 15% of annual operating expenses appropriately adjusted to account for multi-year workloads generated by large projects.</p>	<p>Reserve policy provides that accumulated reserves shall not exceed 100% of operating expenses and also provides an additional 20% allowance for a capital reserve.</p>	<p>The permit fees do not currently allow for full cost recovery and the City is currently operating at a loss.</p>
<p>28. The level of staffing for plan checking and inspection is commensurate with workload. The productivity of the staff is reflected in a number of indicators including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits issued per Plans Examiner; • Average number of inspections made per Building Inspector • Average number of plans checked per Plans Examiner. 	<p>Building inspectors daily productivity is monitored by supervisors and exceeds the 10 - 15 inspections per day threshold. Inspection performance is reflected in the ISO BC effectiveness rating score of 2, along with IAS accreditation.</p>	<p>No performance measure is currently in place.</p> <p>No performance measure is currently in place.</p>
<p>29. A positive approach to customer service is utilized through such approaches as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk-level counters with chairs for both staff and the customer; 	<p>The intake area is customer friendly.</p>	<p>Signage related to those eligible to go directly to the cashier to pay rather than taking an intake number could be improved.</p>

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of easy-to-understand and attractive guides to the building permit and inspection process; • The use of a periodic e-mail newsletters to keep the building industry apprised of changes to the building code, staff, etc; and • The use of customer surveys to assess the satisfaction of customers. • Procedures are in place to bring extra help to the counter when customer backlogs develop. • Applications for building permits may be filed on-line. 	<p>There are many guides and forms located in the customer service area.</p> <p>There is currently no e-mail newsletter</p> <p>Customer surveys have been used in the past but not recently.</p> <p>Supervisory support staff and, on rare occasions, plan reviewers will assist in the intake area when necessary.</p> <p>Software is capable to file permits on-line, but it is not currently active,</p>	<p>A comprehensive and informative “Process and Information Packet” document that provides processes, procedures, flowchart diagrams, etc. is currently in production as a method to improve communications with the industry.</p> <p>See prior item.</p> <p>An on-going customer satisfaction survey should be implemented that solicits customer feedback.</p> <p>The CSD has developed the process and procedures for acceptance of small, simple permits on the internet but has not been able to implement due to funding shortfalls.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specially trained main switchboard personnel who can answer simple questions posed by the public regarding permit processing and scheduled inspections 	<p>Switchboard staffing has been fulfilled by a temporary staffing agency.</p>	<p>The use of temporary staffing has not afforded the CSD the opportunity to provide more in-depth training that would be helpful to customers’ questions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a formal complaint tracking and follow-up system to identify recurring problems and take corrective actions to prevent future reoccurrences 	<p>The citywide MRT system (Mayor’s Response Team) provides for the recording, tracking, and assignment of complaints via the “CommunityPlus” software system, which tracks all complaints as action, items requiring a 24-hour response.</p>	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
30. The filing system is easy to use for employees and records are easy to retrieve.	There is a state of the art plan and permit scanning, filing and imaging system that includes an indexing software database for easy location and retrieval.	
31. A formal ongoing training program is provided based upon a needs assessment.	Florida requirements for plan reviewers and inspectors necessitate a certain amount of continuing education units to maintain certifications and the CSD complies.	Internal training should be reviewed to provide consistency between staff (inspectors and plan reviewers) in the same position and to ensure consistency between divisions (plan reviewers and inspectors).
32. Policy and ordinance interpretations are memorialized in an up-to-date, easy to use document.	<p>The local modifications to the Florida Building Code, known as Chapter 1 amendments, are contained in a spiral bound book and on-line. For difficult or frequent code interpretation issues, the Building Official has published "Implementation Standards" for permit processes such as hurricane shutters and reroof requirements in a FAQ format.</p> <p>Links are provided on the City's website to the Florida State mandated product approval system and the State's website that contains this information.</p>	
33. A standing interdepartmental joint review committee is utilized to provide feedback regarding conditions of approval.	The Plans and Plats Review Committee (PPRC) meets once a month to provide feedback on major projects.	

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
34. Design review guidelines have been developed to assure the quality of the development product and to provide guidance to the applicant and to staff.	Urban design issues are specific to CRA (Community Redevelopment Areas) and would undergo consistency reviews in the urban design or CRA offices prior to commencing with plan review permitting. This review is not related to building code but is more appearance in nature so it is not performed in CSD.	
35. Checklists are used to inform customers on the permit requirements for more simple residential and commercial construction matters	Checklists are available on the Department's website that show required documents (by permit type).	
36. Simple construction matters, such as: re-roofs, shutters, fences, A/C changeouts, residential irrigation systems, sheds, generators, minor single-family home modifications, can be processed at scheduled time periods so issuance can occur in person in one visit.	Reroofs, A/C changeouts, water heaters and shutters can be approved on a walk-in basis. Items that are multi-trade in nature cannot be reviewed and approved on a walk-in basis.	Single or even multi-trade reviews that are less complex in nature could be accomplished if the CSD set aside a specific time period for such reviews to occur.
37. Checklists and/or special efforts have been undertaken to educate future commercial tenants and building owners regarding permit requirements for the build out of commercial space within multi-occupant commercial buildings	There are documents used to educate the construction community, such as the common plan review comments' and failures document which provides common errors;	A comprehensive and informative "Process and Information Packet" document that provides processes, procedures, flowchart diagrams and an appendix including a document matrix for all permit types is in development.
38. The percentage of permits issued over the internet approximates 10%.		This is not yet being accomplished.

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
39. A listing of the top ten corrections/comments noted during plan reviews is compiled and made available for use by customers on the City's website.	This document is published on the internet.	
40. Plan reviewers able to perform the more complex plan reviews receive assistance from those who are less technically skilled to improve their capability to review complex commercial plans	Plans Reviewers II will receive assistance and help train those Plan Reviewer I's who desire to get more involved in complex commercial plan reviews.	There is no formal process to improve the skill sets of those performing simple, commercial plan reviews to alleviate the overload of complex plans.
41. Plan reviewers have the ability to provide conditional approvals, where appropriate, via redlining plans so that permits may be issued for plans requiring minor, non-life safety plan changes that can later be field-verified through the inspection process	Plan Reviewers are allowed to and will often use conditional approvals but this is limited so that project construction will maintain consistency with plan requirements. Redlining of plans for future items not currently under construction will be allowed so construction can move forward as a convenience to the GC.	
42. Private provider plan submittals are reviewed for quality and consideration given to the level of quality to ascertain future time saving opportunities based on past quality and completeness	The City performs an audit process and timelines are set for the audit. If issues of non-compliance with code are found, audits must be more thorough.	Review of "critical" items initially may identify those plans that can be reviewed through a more simple process rather than a full plan review.
43. An expired permit report is generated monthly, the status is reviewed, action taken and the status is updated in the system as applicable to minimize permits being open indefinitely and to ensure accurate public records	The CSD has just implemented an automated system that tracks permit age and automatically generates notice letters so that permits will be closed in a timely manner or remain active.	
44. Technology provides for electronic plan submittal to increase efficiency of reviews		The City desires to implement and has already identified several software solutions but is currently fiscally constrained.

Best Management Practice	Strengths	Opportunities For Improvement
<p>45. Permit and plan records are digitized and electronically stored into an efficient records management system providing an indexed records database that can be searched to ease records retrieval duties</p>	<p>The City utilizes technology to digital store and index all plan and permit documents.</p>	<p>The City desires to maintain this functionality but is currently fiscally constrained and must meet statutory requirements for plan reviews and inspections.</p>
<p>46. Product approval lists are made available to contractors to avoid the use of materials requiring a more lengthy product approval process</p>	<p>Product approvals are provided on a state-wide system and the Department's website provides a link to the state website.</p>	

APPENDIX B

EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESPONSE

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
Analysis of Construction Services Department

Results of Employee Survey

DEPARTMENT

Current Assignment:

Administration	<u>21%</u>
Plan Review	<u>44%</u>
Inspections	<u>24%</u>
Other	<u>12%</u>

Please evaluate each of the statements below. If you have no opinion, check "No Opinion."

		No Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In general, the plan review and permitting processes are fair and responsive for all applicants.		19	8	2	4	1	1
Average:	4.2	56%	29%		12%	3%	
2. The plan review and permitting processes are timely and efficient.		0	7	14	6	3	3
Average:	3.6	0%	64%		18%	18%	
3. My division prides itself on providing fast, high quality service to all applicants in the plan review process.		0	12	13	5	1	1
Average:	4.1	0%	78%		16%	6%	
4. In my division, at present, staffing is adequate and workloads are reasonable.		0	4	10	2	15	2
Average:	3.0	0%	42%		6%	52%	
5. My division is effectively managed and operates efficiently.		0	8	12	5	3	4
Average:	3.5	0%	63%		16%	22%	
6. The organization of my division is well suited to its responsibilities in the plan review processes.		0	11	16	5	1	0
Average:	4.1	0%	82%		15%	3%	
7. My division has established clear performance standards for processing applications and routinely monitors performance with regard to the plan review/permitting processes.		0	10	10	9	3	0
Average:	3.8	0%	63%		28%	9%	

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
Analysis of Construction Services Department

8.	My division has clear, well-documented policies and procedures to guide my involvement in the plan review process.	0	9	13	7	2	1
	Average: 3.8	0%	69%	22%	9%		
9.	My division has established a definite timeline for completing work in processing applications.	0	11	10	9	3	0
	Average: 3.9	0%	64%	27%	9%		
10.	My division has an effective plan for responding to periods of high demand in the plan review/permitting processes without compromising quality or timeliness.	0	1	9	16	4	3
	Average: 3.0	0%	30%	48%	21%		
		No Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11.	My division has the information technology it needs to accomplish its functions efficiently and effectively.	0	16	9	4	4	1
	Average: 4.0	0%	74%	12%	15%		
12.	Coordination between my division and others involved in plan review and permitting processes is effective.	0	8	16	7	0	3
	Average: 3.8	0%	71%	21%	9%		
13.	The City of West Palm Beach makes it easy for applicants or the general public to obtain complete, accurate information about all aspects of the plan and permitting processes.	0	17	10	4	1	2
	Average: 4.1	0%	79%	12%	9%		
14.	Customer complains are handled quickly and courteously in my division.	0	16	13	4	1	1
	Average: 4.2	0%	83%	11%	6%		
15.	My division uses processes that allow different types of projects to be processed differently according to their complexity and the number of approvals required (such as the use of over-the-counter permits, the issuance of permits on-line, etc.)	0	8	16	5	4	1
	Average: 3.8	0%	71%	15%	15%		
16.	My division is clear and consistent in its interpretation of regulations and permit or development standards.	0	14	13	4	2	2
	Average: 4.0	0%	77%	11%	11%		
17.	The City of West Palm Beach's permit processes ensures that applicants are advised of all application requirements and permit standards early in the process.	0	10	17	3	3	1
	Average: 3.9	0%	79%	9%	12%		
18.	It is rare that staff adds new requirements after the applicant submits the project and the application is deemed complete.	0	11	8	8	3	4

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
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		Average: 3.6	0%	56%	24%	21%		
19.	Managers in my division are receptive to new ideas and employee suggestions for improvements in the building permit and land entitlement processes.		0	10	13	5	4	3
	Average:	3.7	0%	66%	14%	20%		
20.	Managers in my division delegate responsibility for processing of plan review / permit applications to an appropriate level, while taking steps to ensure good quality control.		0	11	11	9	1	2
	Average:	3.8	0%	65%	26%	9%		
21.	The City of West Palm Beach delegates authority to staff for approval of minor permits to speed and simplify the permit approval process.		0	13	9	7	1	2
	Average:	3.9	0%	69%	22%	9%		
22.	The City of West Palm Beach has developed clear and understandable codes, regulations and development standards for staff and the public (such as design review guidelines, zoning ordinance, standard specifications, building codes, etc.).		0	10	12	4	4	1
	Average:	3.8	0%	71%	13%	16%		
			No Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
23.	Applicants have easy access to staff to obtain information about permit application and approval requirements.		0	16	10	3	3	0
	Average:	4.2	0%	81%	9%	9%		
24.	My division provides a high level of service to the City of West Palm Beach.		0	23	7	3	0	0
	Average:	4.6	0%	91%	9%	0%		
25.	The plan review process overall results in a high level of service to the City of West Palm Beach.		0	20	7	4	1	0
	Average:	4.4	0%	84%	13%	3%		
26.	I am encouraged to take the initiative in resolving problems faced by applicants in the plan review and permitting processes.		0	15	8	6	1	3
	Average:	3.9	0%	70%	18%	12%		
27.	I receive sufficient ongoing training to maintain and improve my skills and fulfill my responsibilities.		0	19	4	4	4	2
	Average:	4.0	0%	70%	12%	18%		
28.	Most of the time, the information submitted by permit applicants is complete and adequate to allow prompt action on an application.		0	0	3	10	6	13
	Average:	2.1	0%	9%	31%	59%		

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA
Analysis of Construction Services Department

29. The City of West Palm Beach's codes, regulations, and development standards do not present unreasonable or unnecessary obstacles to development.	0	14	5	8	4	1
Average: 3.8	0%	59%	25%	16%		
30. The primary goal of my division is assisting applicants in reaching project approval.	0	18	4	5	3	0
Average: 4.2	0%	73%	17%	10%		