

**CITY OF YORK
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
CODE OPERATIONS
ASSESSMENT RESPONSE
AUGUST 2007**

Identified Problems/Issues

G-1 Management

The responsibility for the inadequacies of the permit operation rests with those in authority.

Recommendation:

- The City must ensure proper management of the code administration and code enforcement is met.
- The City makes the changes that are necessary to make York's code operations one of the most client/customer friendly in the Commonwealth.

RESPONSE

Currently direct oversight for the Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning falls under the responsibility of the Deputy Director for Community Development for the Bureau. This position also serves as the Building Code Official for the City of York, for the state of Pennsylvania. The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning will undergo a restructuring of responsibilities and duties. The daily operations, supervision and management of the Bureau will be the responsibility of the Deputy Director for Community Development for the Bureau. The position of the Building Code Official will be responsible for only the duties and tasks associated with that position and relieved of management responsibilities (see the attached job descriptions and proposed organizational chart).

G-2 Customer Relations

The culture and focus of the York permit/code service must change immediately to one of the information, cooperation, and helpfulness to the client/customer and there should be no tolerance of any other behavior.

Recommendation:

- The Permit Office create a culture that has as its dual purpose the professional and helpful treatment of all of their clients/customers, and the need to ensure compliance among all of their clients/customers.

- Employees, who treat customers unprofessionally or without respect or employees who do not go out of their way to be helpful and responsive should be counseled and if necessary, disciplined. Those employees who do a good job should be rewarded.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendations in their entirety and will implement each recommendation respectively. Mandatory training at the onset of employment with the City of York and regular scheduled intervals of on-going training for employees will be provided to encourage a customer friendly environment. All employees within the Bureau will be subjected to the training. The Bureau recently hired a former retail store manager, who also happens to have back ground knowledge of basic construction, who will serve in the capacity as Office Coordinator. She understands the importance of customer satisfaction and the need to be as helpful as possible.

Further, all employees will demonstrate simple respect towards customer, and exercise the simple practice of “treating others as you would like to be treated”. This will become part of each job description and appropriate rewards and discipline will be in place if not adhered.

The City also implemented a customer satisfaction surveying system that is available for completion at the time service is rendered (see attached). The survey is also available on the City’s website. Completed surveys will be reviewed by the Director of Community Development, the Fire Chief and Mayor monthly to assess the effectiveness of services provided.

G- 3 Timing

Excessive time required between application for a permit and the issuance of the permit should be addressed. Tracking of permit applications due to reports of lost information needs to be considered. The actual production of the document believed to be related to the software should be reviewed. Time lost when either the inspector or the Code Office inspector fails to show up for the scheduled inspection appointment is of concern.

Recommendation:

- Timing goals in the permit process established, including the issuance and inspections.
- A review of available software products to support codes administration and enforcement efficiently.
- A system established to record each telephone call that is received requiring a call-back.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendations in their entirety and will implement each recommendation respectively. Section 403.43 of the Uniform Construction Code, Act 45, provides for a maximum of thirty (30) days for approval of permit application. Ideally, smaller projects should be issued over the counter at the time of application submission, with the goal of immediate turn around.

The Bureau is currently reviewing software programs with the Bureau of Information Services (I.S.), along with procedures that will support codes administration and enforcement as well as support the requirement of a sequential numbering system which should address the tracking and/or lost information concerns.

The Bureau is fully staff and with emphasis placed on the importance of complete customer satisfaction, answering the telephone and returning telephone messages, is a current priority reviewed by the Department Director weekly.

G- 4 Third Party Contractor

The Department of Community Development for the City of York contracts with Guardian Inspection Services for plan review and inspections. Concerns regarding lack of availability in-house from Guardian and/or delayed responses and service provided for plan reviews.

Recommendation:

- The third party contractor maintaining an office within the Permits Office and agree to be a resource for technical code questions that arise.
- Replacing the third party contractor with in-house staff.
- Significantly reducing the level of compensation for the second and subsequent reviews if deficiencies identified were present in the first review.

RESPONSE

The Director of the Department of Community Development met with the President of Guardian Inspection Services, the City's 3rd party contractor, to discuss the firm's ability to provide a better presence to and in the City of York. Subsequently Guardian personnel have established office hours within the City's offices. Upon request, time will be scheduled for a customer to meet with the Guardian representative to discuss their concerns through the administrative staff of the bureau.

Consideration will be given to replacing the third party services with in-house staff. As the assessment suggest, instituting this change may become problematic in itself due to the limited ability to recruit individuals who have the experience and certifications necessary to do the work. The residency requirement and financial constraints placed on available resources to compensate adequately, adds to this difficulty and challenges.

It is also recognized the need to also fill the position with individuals who not only have the proper background and experience, but who also are good communicators. An RFP was developed, and distributed for responses to the services needed currently provided by Guardian. Several firms responded however, this task was placed while the review/assessment of the current process was completed.

G- 5 Technology

The technology available to the Department of Community Development Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning is unsatisfactory.

Recommendation:

- The managers of both the I.S. and Permits, Planning & Zoning bureaus, meet with representatives of companies offering appropriate software and programs.
- All office personnel will be trained in the new program.
- Every effort made to use the updated software and program provided by the current vendor to avoid extra time, complication and expenses usually involved with customizing programs.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendations in their entirety and will implement each recommendation respectively. The Bureau will coordinate efforts with the Bureau of Information Services to obtain the best and most efficient system affordable to meet the bureau's needs. The Bureau is currently reviewing software programs and procedures that will support the requirements needed as well as a systematic process to accomplish all related tasks.

The recommendation that a new program be purchased and used without modification to save time and expense we believe to be inaccurate. To modify the internal policies and procedure, and the training thereof, to match the application would require time and expense, and may not match other best practice implemented through the report.

While new business applications may very well be required, they should be of such a nature as to match the specific needs and procedures that the bureau follows. Together the bureaus will also review the software programs recommended and determine the best program to supports the needs of the City of York.

G- 6 Divided Responsibility for Permit and Inspection Services

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning and the Bureau of Fire Prevention located separately, operating as two separate agencies with plan review and inspection jurisdiction places a major burden on permit holders.

Recommendation:

- All the new building approvals and inspections should be accomplished by the Permit Office.
- The Property Maintenance Inspection program for both rental properties and for nuisances either remain as they are presently or if combined, combine operations from the Permit Office upon other problems corrected.
- The following staff for the operation of the Permit Office*:
Deputy Director of Permits, Planning & Zoning (1)
Senior Commercial Building Code and Mechanical/Electrical/Plumbing Inspector (1)
Plans examiner/building code inspector (1)
Residential building code inspector (1)
Fire code inspector/plans examiner (1 p/t)
Permit Technician (1)
Office Coordinator or Clerk (1)
Administrative aide to the Deputy Director (1)

*If certain individuals are certified in multiple disciplines, some of these positions could be combined.

RESPONSE

The Department of Community Development will review the employee complement and structure of the Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning in its present condition with the Department of Business Administration, and Human Resources to determine all factors related to the need for additional personnel. It is also recognized that an immediate restructuring of the Bureau and said duties of personnel must occur which will be discussed fully with Human Resources and the administration.

A transition plan of duties and staff will be developed to not affect the needed services provided. By virtue of the undetermined plan the City of York undergoes for the inspection services and plan reviews tasks, additional services may be required to limit the disruption to the customers.

G- 7 Training

There is a serious lack of training of the personnel in the Permit Office. All employees need to understand the role in the code administration and enforcement function in the City of York.

Recommendation:

- All code administration and enforcement employees need to understand that the code administration and enforcement function must be conducted in a friendly, helpful manner not in a punitive manner.
- Both the Permit Office and Code Office need to train employees that the code services are in place to improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- Supervisory training should be undertaken by the City of York. This should be required of all supervisors regardless of level.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendations in their entirety and have begun the process the implementing each recommendation. Training plans for each employee have been developed, to include a monthly review with the respective supervisor and a representative from Human Resources.

It is a goal of the City of York to have the best, most qualified, personnel a part of the employee complement. Training funds have also been identified and secured to assist with providing the employees with the necessary tools to carry out their duties of the operation. Training will regularly include customer service best practices and a review of our processes.

G- 8 Public Information

There were a number of respondents to the survey that referred to the need for written information regarding the permitting process.

Recommendation:

- Provided such information to the customer.
- Review examples in place from other communities that could be used.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendations in their entirety and along with the Solicitor Office will review the process currently in place in an effort to be able to provide necessary information to the customer.

G- 9 Lost Permits

There were a number of respondents that referenced lost applications for a permit by the Permit Office. This should not occur.

Recommendation:

- Utilization of a tracking system for all application would rectify this problem.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendation in its entirety and has begun implementing processes to eliminate this problem from occurring. Also as previously mentioned, the Bureau will coordinate efforts with the Bureau of Information Services to obtain the best and most efficient system affordable to meet the bureau's needs including a tracking system. The Bureau is currently reviewing software programs and procedures that will support the requirements needed as well as a systematic process to accomplish all related tasks. Together the bureaus will also review the software programs recommended and implement.

G- 10 Recruitment and Selection of Personnel

The recruitment of qualified personnel to provide code/permit services is difficult. The City's requirement that all employees reside in the City, limits the pool of qualified candidates and the wage rates also limit the number of qualified candidates.

Recommendation:

- Utilize the assistance of the Human Resources Office in recruitment, selection, evaluation, and training of all personnel immediately.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendation in its entirety and has begun implementing processes to address this problem. The City of York recognizes the need to have individuals who have the ability to understand technical code information and have the ability to communicate successfully with the public as critical. The Human Resources office will assist with all employee selections and training plans for employees. The City also recognizes the challenges faced due to limited resources to compensate and the residency requirement and will take both under advisement.

G- 11 Certification

All of the City inspectors and plan reviewers engaged in the City of York's code administration and enforcement operations must have proper certifications. Individuals without the proper certification should not be permitted to conduct inspections or perform plan reviews.

Recommendation:

- The City of York should require and maintain submission of copies of certifications for all inspectors and plan reviewers.

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning accepts the recommendation in its entirety and will adhere for compliance. Information for each inspector will be maintained by the Human Resources Offices for all personnel involved in the code administration and enforcement operations. The Bureau will maintain the same for all personnel provided services through the 3rd party service provider.

G- 12 Philosophical Differences

There appears to be philosophical differences between the York departments concerned with building and housing code permitting and inspections

RESPONSE

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning recognizes the differences among the departments. While recommendations were not made regarding this perceived organizational quandary, the Department of Community Development will continue to strive to promote excellence from within. We will encourage on-going dialogue among the departments to address any concerns on a regular basis.

The City will also review the reinstatement of weekly joint plan reviews with the Fire and Community Development Departments, as well as the bi-monthly codes enforcement meetings facilitated by the Solicitor's Office. It is recognized regular communication and the willingness by all to improve the current system and operation is paramount for success. The City is committed to doing what it can to make the necessary improvements.