

City of York Code Operations
Assessment Report

Municipal Resources of Pennsylvania

August 2007

York Table of Contents

	Page
A Profile	4
B Preface	5
C Charge	6
D Summary of Recommendations	7
E Present Organization and Procedures	11
Permits Office	11
Fire Prevention Bureau	13
F Customer Service and Satisfaction	15
Survey	15
Conclusions from Survey	16
Written Comments from Those Surveyed	16
Written Negative Comments by Subject	17
Major Conclusions from Negative Written Comments	18
G Problems and Issues	19
Management	19
Customer Relations	19
Timing	19
Third Party Contractor	20
Technology	20
Divided/Overlapping Responsibility	21
Responsibilities for New Construction/Renovations	21
Responsibilities for Property Maintenance Inspections	22
Training	22
Public Information	23
Lost Permits	23
Recruitment and Selection of Personnel	23
Certifications	23
Philosophical Differences	24
H Recommendations	26
Recommended Changes	26
Proper Management	26
Customer Relations	26
Third Party Contractor/In House Staff	28
Tracking/Timing	29
Information Technology	30

	Dual Inspection Authorities	30
	Recommended Staff	32
	Interdepartmental Cooperation	32
	Human Resources	32
	Preconstruction Meetings	33
	Common Sense	33
I	Alternate Organizations	33
	Ideal Organization	33
	Alternate #1	36
	Alternate #2	37
Appendix 1	Comparables (Harrisburg and Lancaster)	39
Appendix 2	Survey Results	42
Appendix 3	Survey Questionnaire	61
Appendix 4	Code Administration Software	63

A - Profile

York is a third class city located in central Pennsylvania. It operates under a Mayor-Council form of government with the Mayor responsible for the day-to-day operations of the City and Council responsible for legislation and oversight.

York has a total area of 5.3 square miles. The population (2000 census) is 40,862. There are approximately 16,137 households, and 9,246 families residing in the city. The approximate racial makeup of the city is White 60%, African American 25%, Hispanic or Latino 17%. The median age was 31 years. The median income for a household in the city was \$26,475, and the median income for a family was \$30,762. The per capita income for the city was \$13,439.

York has a rich history and has played an important role in the history of the United States. York was founded in 1741 by settlers from the Philadelphia region. It was incorporated as a borough on September 24, 1787, and as a city on January 11, 1887. During the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783), York served as the temporary capital of the Continental Congress. The Articles of Confederation were drafted and ratified in York. The Conway Cabal, a political intrigue against General George Washington, had its origins in the Golden Plough tavern in York.

During the American Civil War (1861–1865), York became the largest Northern town to be occupied by the Confederate army when the division of Major General Jubal Anderson Early spent June 28–30, 1863, in and around the town while the brigade of John B. Gordon marched to the Susquehanna River at Wrightsville and back. The sprawling York U.S. Army General Hospital on Penn Commons served thousands of Union soldiers wounded at the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg. The historic York Fair, which claims to be the country's oldest traces its roots to 1765. It runs every year in September for 10 days, encompassing an entire week and two weekends.

York remained a regional center for local agriculture, but increasingly became an important industrial center, with such industries as steam engines, railroad manufacturing, and papermaking coming to the forefront. Today York is the regional center for manufacturing of barbells and other equipment for weight training and bodybuilding, is the home of the USA Weightlifting Hall of Fame, the home of a large Harley-Davidson motorcycle factory, and hosts other national and international companies such as Voith Siemens Hydro, American Hydro, York International, Bon-Ton, and Starbucks.

Source: Wikipedia

B - Preface

We enjoyed the opportunity of meeting and working with the Mayor and management staff of the City of York.

We give special thanks to Mayor John S. Brenner, Business Administrator Michael O'Rourke, Human Resources Director Randy Helt, Community Development Director C. Kim Bracey, Deputy Director Kendra B. Hunter, Fire Chief John S. Senft, Deputy Chief Steven R. Buffington, Police Chief Mark Whitman, Economic Development Director Matt Jackson, City Council President Cameron Texter, City Council Member Toni Smith, City Council Vice President Joseph R. Musso and other members of the City staff for meeting with us and sharing their thoughts and suggestions. We also give special thanks to Joe Wagman, Rick Merck, John Riedel, Douglas Meshaw, Dennis Fitzkee, Betsy Rosengrant, Steven Buffington, James Williams, Darrell Auterson, Kass Keleta, Loren Kroh, Jack Kay, Brian Fentiman, Seth Noll, Larry Yanover, Lori Gillon, Christopher Navlor, Dave Bruner, Mark Therkildsen, Mark Conrad, Larry Mellot, and others who communicated directly or in writing concerning code issues and their personal experiences with the City of York's code services. Finally, we thank the many contractors and home owners who responded to the survey and provided comments and suggestions about the City of York's code services.

During this study we have listened to many voices regarding the permit and code services that are provided by the City of York. We have considered many ideas and suggestions. We believe we have provided an accurate view of existing code and permit operations. No system is perfect and that is true of York's permit/code system. We were impressed by the dedication of the York employees with whom we worked. They were all very interested in doing what needs to be done to improve the service they are providing.

C - Charge

In January 2007, the City of York engaged Municipal Resources of Pennsylvania(Municipal Resources) to undertake a study to evaluate the code/permit services being provided by the City. The evaluation did not include issues of planning, land development, health, or sanitation. Municipal Resources was asked to review the following:

1. The organizational structure of York's Code/Permit administration and enforcement services, including a description of the existing process.
2. The cost and customer effectiveness of York's code/permit administration and enforcement service.
3. The qualifications and training of code administration and enforcement personnel.
4. Compliance with the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code.

In conducting the review, we did the following:

- Reviewed existing documentation and records,
- Interviewed individuals involved in providing code/permit services,
- Surveyed citizens and contractors who have recently used York's code/permit services to determine their level of satisfaction and to obtain input regarding the services being provided,
- Provide comparative information from similar cities providing code/permit services,
- A review of best practices in code administration and enforcement.

Based on their review of the above, Municipal Resources prepared recommendations for the improvement of the service.

D - Summary of Recommendations

1. Proper Management is Critical for Successful Change

Proper management of the City's code/permit services is critical. The current management of the permit services has failed to do what is necessary to maintain a good code administration/inspection service. The culture of the City's code service will have to change. Applicants should be considered clients providing improvements and an improved tax base needed by the City.

2. Customer Relations

The survey of permit holders and interviews with service users revealed serious problems involving the treatment of permit holders and applicants. The culture of the City's code/permit services must change from one of compliance, enforcement, and penalties to one of information, cooperation, and helpfulness. Clients of the City's code services must be treated with respect. This must begin immediately and all employees must be held responsible for their behavior toward clients. Clients should routinely be asked for their opinion about the code services and this information should be evaluated regularly by management.

3. Third Party Contractor vs. In-House Staff

There are two issues involving the third party contractor system used in York. The first rises out of the fact that the City has few employees that can answer technical questions about the codes and the third party contractor is not required to maintain an office in the City's Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Zoning (Permit Office). The result is that applicants have difficulty getting timely technical code advice. There are three ways to deal with this problem. One way is to contract with the third party contractor presently working for the City. A second way is to develop specifications providing for the contractor to maintain an office in the Permit Office and to provide technical information concerning the code. The contract could then be rebid. A third way is to replace the third party contractor with in-house staff.

The second issue involves third party contractor plan review services. Plans are reviewed and deficiencies are identified. The complaint is that after plans are reviewed, deficiencies are identified and then corrected, plan reviewers develop new lists of deficiencies that existed at the time of the first review. This leads to client frustration, project delay, and added expense. The client pays a fee for every review. There are two ways to deal with this concern. One way to reduce this problem is to reduce the compensation paid to reviewers for deficiencies that should have been identified on the first review. A second way is to replace the third party contractor plan review services with in-house staff.

4. Tracking/Timing

One of the major complaints we received from permit holders was the excessive time involved in the permit process. We also received complaints about applications or permits being lost. These things must change. There should be a procedure in place that tracks each permit application from submission to approval and to issuance of a certificate of occupancy. The tracking system should date each step of the process. This information should be available to both clients and to the code/permit personnel. This information should be computerized as part of the overall program used by the Fire Prevention Bureau and Permit Office but until a proper program is adopted, the information should be recorded on a form that is initiated when the permit application is received. Standards should be adopted establishing time targets for various kinds of permits.

Because we received many complaints that calls were not answered and calls were not returned, we feel it is important that all telephone calls requiring a call back be recorded and followed up in a timely manner.

5. Information Technology

The present computer software being used in the Permit Office is inadequate. A new and more comprehensive program should be used to assist in code administration. Options are suggested in **Appendix 4**.

6. Dual Inspection Authorities

The present arrangement of responsibilities for the permit and code services is somewhat confusing and awkward for clients. The Permit Office does plan review and inspects new construction and renovations. The Fire Prevention Bureau also does plan review and inspects new sprinkler systems and alarm systems. They also conduct inspections on access, fire separation, and commercial hood/ extinguisher systems in new construction. The Permit Office inspectors inspect some of the same things. To correct this, all aspects of new construction plan review and inspection should be made a responsibility of the Permit Office.

7. Recommended Staff

This section recommends the staffing for the Permit Office.

8. Interdepartmental Cooperation

The present system of dual code enforcement authority is a source of confusion and frustration to permit holders. We heard of cases where Guardian inspectors and Fire Prevention Bureau inspectors gave conflicting instructions to the permit holders. All

permit reviews and inspections for new building construction/renovations should be a responsibility of the Permit Office. The property maintenance inspection program for both rental properties and nuisances can remain essentially as they are or can be combined. If they are combined, we believe they should be combined in the Permit Office. This should not happen, however, until the Permit Office has corrected the problems identified in this report.

As long as the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau deal jointly with clients, joint weekly coordinating meetings should be held. Regular joint meetings were previously held but the practice lapsed.

9. Human Resources

The Human Resource Office must be involved in the recruitment, hiring, and training of permit and code personnel. This will help to insure that new employees involved in code/permit services will have good communicative skills and will be qualified to provide the services in a helpful, cooperative manner.

10. Pre-construction or Pre-application Meetings

Pre-construction or pre-application meetings would be helpful for complex construction projects. This should involve the applicant and/or his or her agents (architects, contractors, projects managers, etc.), the plan reviewer, and the inspector(s) responsible for monitoring the project. On major development projects, the permit/code managers should also participate. In addition to meetings for complex projects, such meetings should also be available to anyone requesting them.

11. Common Sense

The use of common sense should be the rule not the exception.

12. Alternate Organizations – “Ideal”

The “ideal” code organization would handle all new construction permitting and inspections and all property maintenance licensing and inspections. The “ideal” organization for code administration and enforcement would allow for unity of command, uncomplicated communications, comprehensive training, career advancement opportunities, and a clear understanding of the organizations mission. In the “ideal” code organization all codes administration and enforcement, including new construction and all property maintenance licensing and enforcement would be conducted by one agency at one location.

13. Alternate Organization - #1

Alternate #1 would transfer all new construction plan review and inspection responsibilities to the Permit Office. Property maintenance licensing and inspection

services and property maintenance nuisance inspection services would remain as they presently exist. As an alternative, the property maintenance service could be combined into one operation. If the property maintenance services are combined they should be a responsibility of the Permit Office.

14. Alternate Organization - #2

Alternate #2 would outsource all new construction plan review and permitting services to a third party like the York County Economic Development Corporation. All property maintenance licensing and inspection would be transferred to the Permit Office.

E - Present Organization and Procedures

1. New Buildings and Renovations, Property Maintenance, Fire Code Enforcement, and Nuisance Abatement

In 2004, the City of York adopted the International Building Code, the Electrical Code, the Plumbing Code, the Mechanical Code, the Fire Code, and the Property Maintenance Code in accord with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Construction Code Act (1999).

There are two agencies involved in plan review and inspections for new buildings and the renovation of buildings, rented/leased property maintenance inspections, commercial fire code enforcement, and nuisance abatement. The Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Zoning (Permit Office) is a division of York's Community Development Department, which is headed by Director C. Kim Bracey. The Fire Prevention Bureau operates as a division of the Department of Fire and Rescue, which is headed by Fire Chief John Sendt.

a) Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Zoning

The Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Zoning (Permit Office), located at 1 Market Way West, is headed by Kendra B. Hunter, Deputy Director of the Department of Community Development and the Building Code Official. The Building Code Official and her staff are responsible to oversee the proper application and enforcement of the Pennsylvania Construction Code Act (Act of 1999) which established the basic requirements for the Uniform Construction Code. The Permit Office responds to zoning and planning requests and provides staff support to the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB). The Permit Office issues the following applications, permits, and licenses related to property construction, renovation and demolition;

- Plan Review Application,
- Residential Building Application/Permit,
- Commercial Building Application/Permit,
- Electrical Application/Permit,
- Plumbing Application/Permit,
- Mechanical Application/Permit,
- Health Code Applications/Permits,
- Application for Certificate of Appropriateness (HARB),
- Application for Appeal,
- Certificate of Use and Occupancy Application,
- Curb and Sidewalk Permit,
- Demolition Agreement/Permit,
- Sign Permit.

Dumpster Permits,
Applications for appeals to the Construction Board of Adjustment,
Curb and Sidewalk Application/Permit,
Sign Application/Permit.

1) Staff

In addition to the Building Code Official, the authorized staff consists of a Planner(vacant), a Zoning Officer (recently hired), a Permit Technician, an Office Coordinator, Property Maintenance Inspectors(4)(1 vacant), a Health/Sanitation Inspector, and a Property Maintenance /Health/Sanitation Inspector.

2) Third Party Contract

All plan reviews for new construction and renovations and all building, electrical, mechanical, plumbing inspections are performed under contract with the City by Guardian Inspection Services. Plan review is provided by one employee on a part-time basis. Inspections are conducted by one residential inspector and one commercial inspector. Guardian is paid 85% of the permit price for their services.

3) The Process for Building, Electrical, Mechanical, Plumbing Permits

First, applications available in the lobby of the CD Department, are completed by the client/citizen and are submitted to the Permit Office at the permit counter. The permit technician at the counter determines what is necessary in the way of plan review and permit fees and informs the client/citizen. If all of the required submissions are provided with the permit and plan and zoning review are not required, the permit can be issued immediately. If zoning setbacks or other zoning information has to be confirmed, the application will be submitted to the Zoning Officer for review and comment. If plan review is required, the application and plans will be submitted to the plan reviewer. If sprinklers or alarms are planned, the plans will be submitted to the Fire Prevention Bureau for inspection. If there are either zoning or plan deficiencies, that information is provided to the client/citizen for correction. Once all deficiencies have been corrected, the permit is issued. As work is performed, the permit holder or contractor is responsible for calling for required inspections. This is normally required for footers, walls, framing, rough and final electrical and plumbing, drywall, etc. The Fire Prevention Bureau conducts plan review and inspections for sprinklers, alarms, party walls, and commercial kitchen hood and suppression systems. Once all work has been completed, a final inspection for a Certificate of Occupancy is scheduled by the Permit Office. Once the final inspection is passed, a Certificate of Occupancy is issued. That requires the signature of the Building Official

4) The Process for Housing Maintenance Complaint Inspections

The City uses a complaint tracking system for property maintenance complaints. When property maintenance complaints are received, the Property Maintenance Inspectors from the Permit office are assigned through the Mayor's Office to inspect the exterior of the buildings and enforce the Property Maintenance Code in correcting the violation(s). The Fire Prevention Bureau is also assigned to investigate Property Maintenance Code violations. The Fire Prevention Bureau does both internal and external inspections. The complaint software allows the Mayor's Office and others to determine the status of the complaints received.

b) Fire Prevention Bureau

The Fire Prevention Bureau operates as part of the Department of Fire and Rescue. The Office is headed by Deputy Fire Chief Steven R. Buffington.

The Fire Prevention Bureau shares responsibility with the Permit Office in assuring proper application and enforcement of several codes. The Mechanical Code of the City of York, as it applies to Type 1 hood suppression systems in commercial kitchens, is enforced by the Fire Prevention Bureau. Additionally, all Certificate of Use and Occupancy inspections are performed by this Department in conjunction with the Permit Office. The Permit Office is the issuing agency for Certificate of Use and Occupancies. CO inspections are performed at the request of existing property owners, as well as a final inspection of new buildings.

The Fire Prevention Bureau also performs plan review and inspections for the installation of new fire suppression and fire alarm systems under the provisions of the International Fire Code/2003.

The Fire Prevention Bureau also licenses and inspects all rental housing units and institutional use group buildings. (These include hospital, schools factories, etc.) The Fire Prevention Bureau conducts interior and exterior property maintenance inspections of residential rental properties.

Rental housing inspections include interior as well as exterior. There are approximately 5000 rental-housing units within the City. At present, rental units are inspected on a cycle. The Fire and Rescue staff would like to perform 2500 inspection per year to ensure that all 5000 units are inspected on a two-year cycle.

1) Staff

In addition to direction by a Deputy Fire Chief, a Fire Lieutenant is assigned as plans reviewer and inspector for fire alarms systems, sprinkler systems, and other fire code issues with new construction/renovations. There are currently five individuals performing rental housing and institutional use group inspections. One individual performs plan review and inspection services for sprinkler and alarm installations. In addition, Fire Prevention Bureau inspectors inspect access, and party walls.

2) The Process for Building Code and Fire Inspections

When new permit applications are received for structures involving alarms, sprinkler systems, or other fire code related issues, the Fire Prevention Bureau is notified by the Permit Office. For inspections, the permit holder notifies the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau when the project is ready for inspection. The Permit Office schedules final inspections for Certificate of Occupancy Permits and notifies the Fire Prevention Bureau. All plan reviews and inspections for buildings having alarm and/or sprinkler are conducted by a Fire Lieutenant.

The Fire Prevention Bureau also inspects all educational and institutional establishments for Fire Code compliance.

3) The Process for Property Maintenance Inspections

The Fire Prevention Bureau licenses and inspects all rental properties. The initial inspection is conducted by Fire Prevention Bureau Property Maintenance Inspectors. Follow-up inspections are conducted by on-duty firefighters using fire-fighting equipment. In case of a fire call, the fire fighters on follow-up inspections respond to the location of the fire call with the fire fighting equipment they are using. The Fire Department property maintenance inspectors respond to fire calls only when a serious incident is reported or a fire is confirmed. In addition to scheduled rental property inspections, the Fire Department is assigned by the Mayor's Office to do property maintenance nuisance inspections.

F - Customer Service and Satisfaction

1. The Survey

In order to evaluate customer satisfaction with the building code process, a questionnaire was developed to elicit comments from permit holders. The Department of Community Development sent the questionnaire to approximately 900 individuals and companies who received building permits in 2006. This represents over 90% of the building permits issued by the Permit Office last year.

A total of 168 or 18% of the questionnaires were completed and returned. A large majority of those returning questionnaires were involved in building construction or renovation.

The results to individual questions are as follows:

Permit Application Process (Q. #2) - Were you treated professionally and was the York Representative helpful?

- Yes = 110
- No = 39 = 26%
- N/A(no answer) = 15

Plan Review Process (Q. #3) - Were you treated professionally and was the York Representative helpful?

- Yes = 96
- No = 15 = 13.5%
- N/A = 32

Plan Review Process (Q. #4)– If you were required to make plan revisions prior to approval, were the required changes explained to your satisfaction?

- Yes = 74
- No = 14 = 16%
- N/A = 15
-

Plan Review Process (Q. #5)– Do you think you were treated fairly?

- Yes = 96
- No = 20 = 17%
- N/A = 31

Plan Review Process (Question #6) – Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the plan review process.

(See **Appendix 2**)

Inspections (Q. #7)– Did the inspector treat you professionally and was he/she helpful?

- Yes = 118
- No = 16 = 12%
- N/A = 22

Inspections –(Q. #10) Do you think you were treated fairly?

- Yes = 98
- No = 10 = 9%
- N/A = 27

Inspections –(Q. #11) Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the inspection process.

(See **Appendix 2**)

(Please note that responders often left questions unanswered so the numbers cited do not add to the total number of questionnaires returned.)

2. Conclusions From The Answers To Survey Questions

The following conclusions can be made based on the answers to the questions posed on the questionnaire:

- a) A high percentage (26%) of the responders were unhappy with the way they were treated when they applied for a permit. This is a source of serious concern.
- b) Seventeen percent (17%) of the respondents felt they were treated unfairly in the plan review process. It should also be noted that 16% of the respondents who were required to make plan revisions felt that the reason for the revisions were not explained to their satisfaction. This appears high and should be reviewed.
- c) Twelve percent (12%) of the respondents felt they were not treated professionally or were not helped by inspectors and 9% indicated that they were not treated fairly. Given the fact that 30% of those responding to this question indicated that they had been notified at least once that their work did not comply with the code these numbers (12%, 9%) do not seem excessive.

3. Written Comments In Response To The Questionnaire

Responders submitted 219 written comments about the permit/code process. We reviewed responses and categorized them as being negative about the process or

employees; positive about the process or employees; or neutral. In some cases, comments were both positive and negative.

Q. #2 - [Permit Application Process] Were you treated professionally and was the York representative helpful?

Responses to Item #2: 33 negative 4 positive 0 neutral

Q. #3 - [Plan Review Process] Were you treated professionally and was the York representative helpful?

Responses to Item #3: 14 negative 3 positive 0 neutral

Q. #4 - [Plan Review Process] If you were required to make plan revisions prior to approval, were the required changes explained to you satisfaction?

Responses to Item #4: 6 negative 0 positive 0 neutral

Q.#5 - [Plan Review Process] Do you think you were treated fairly?

Responses to Item #5: 17 negative 3 positive 0 neutral

Q.#6 - [Plan Review Process] Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the plan review process.

Responses to Item #6: 51 negative 3 positive 2 neutral

Q.#7 - [Inspections] Did the inspector treat you professionally and was he/she helpful?

Responses to Item #7: 14 negative 4 positive 0 neutral

Q.#9 - [Inspections] If you were not in compliance, were you provided a written notice of the violation and the citation of the code section that was violated?

Responses to Item #9: 1 negative 0 positive 0 neutral

Q.#10_ - [Inspections] Do you think you were treated fairly(inspections)?

Responses to Item #10: 8 negative 2 positive 1 neutral

Q.#11 – [Inspections] Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the inspection process.

Responses to Item #11: 44 negative 9 positive 8 neutral

General Comments - 5 negative 1 positive 0 neutral

4. Written Negative Comments By Subject

Poor employee behavior - 73

Employees are not informed or knowledgeable - 43

The permit process is too slow - 41

More staff needed - 10

Guardian Inspection Service questioned - 8

The cost of permits is too high - 7

City should be tougher on rentals - 7

Others - 4

(Please note that some written comments included complaints about more than one subject.)

5. Major Conclusions From The Negative Written Comments

a. There is a serious problem with the attitudes demonstrated by employees to clients.

b. Employees are not properly trained or informed.

c. The permit process is too slow.

d. More staff is needed.

(See **Appendix 2**)

G - Problems/Issues

1. Management

It is clear that the present management of the City of York code administration and enforcement services have largely failed to provide a user-friendly code service. Although there are some mitigating circumstances, the responsibility for the inadequacies of the permit operation rests with those in authority.

It is now the responsibility of those in authority to take the necessary steps to correct the problems identified. This will require a rapid turn-around in philosophy, culture, and operations. We believe that those presently engaged in providing code/permit services have the ability to make the necessary changes.

2. Customer Relations

In the process of reviewing survey responses and interviewing individuals who have used the services provided by the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau, we have encountered a significant number of complaints about the attitude of employees involved in the process. Arrogance, rudeness, inflexibility, lack of concern for the customer or client are all things that have been said repeatedly. This is a situation that results from the lack of a customer-oriented culture in the operations of both the Permit and Fire Prevention Bureaus. This is the fault of the management and cannot be allowed to continue.

3. Timing

One of the major complaints we received involved excessive time required between application for a permit and the receipt of the permit. We were told of cases of months passing between the submission of the permit application and the receipt of the permit. Excessive time required for the issuance a permit due to inaction by the code agency is unacceptable. Simple permits requiring no plan review should be issued immediately. More complex permits requiring plan review or zoning decisions should be provided as soon as possible and should not exceed the thirty (30) day limit provided in the state regulations.

There are also other issues involving excessive time. The long time that it takes to actually print a permit while the customers waits is unacceptable. This is a product of the software being used by the Permit Office. The time lost when either the Guardian inspector or the Fire Prevention Bureau inspector fails to show up for inspection appointment is unacceptable. Days or weeks lost in providing a customer the answer to a technical code question or plan review question is unacceptable. The time lost in calling

for information to either the Permit Office or the Fire Prevention Bureau, not being able to speak to anyone, and waiting for days, weeks for a return call is unacceptable. The time lost in waiting for return calls that are not returned and the time spent by the customer having to call a second time and, in some cases, a third time to get a response is unacceptable. All of this time loss has caused significant problems for customers and must be addressed.

4. Third Party Contractor

The Permit Office contracts with Guardian Inspection Services for plan review and inspections. We received complaints about the plan review services of Guardian but relatively few complaints about Guardians inspection services.

There are two major issues with the present third party contractor system in York. The first issue is reflected in the customer satisfaction survey results. There is very often no person available in the Permit Office who can answer technical code questions posed by applicants. Because the City has contracted with Guardian Inspection Services for plan review and inspections and Guardian does not maintain offices in the Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Health, often, there is no way a permit holder can get a technical code question answered in a timely manner. At best, the question can be passed to the Guardian inspector or plan reviewer and answered the next day, but far too often, telephone calls and messages from the permit holders are not answered in a timely way. It is also more difficult to arrange pre or post submission meetings with the Guardian plans reviewer, the inspector, and Permit Office and Fire Prevention Bureau personnel when the plan reviewer(s) and inspector(s) have offices elsewhere.

A second source of client/customer unhappiness involves plan review. The complaints received were that plans are reviewed and a list of outstanding items is generated requiring the contractor, citizen, or architect to make the corrections and return the plan for another review. Rather than just insuring that the outstanding items are corrected, the plan reviewer then produced another set of deficiencies that should have been identified in the first review. In some cases, we were told of plans being rejected a number of times for items that could have been identified in the first review. In each case, the client paid \$65 for each review and the project was delayed.

5. Technology

There are major technology problems in the Permit Office. The Hanson software used to process and print building permits is unacceptably slow. For example, it may take five minutes or more to print a simple building permit. This is a cause of frustration for both the employees and the persons waiting for permits. In addition, the Hanson software is not a good vehicle for tracking permits and inspections. The lack of reasonable software to support codes administration and enforcement is very inefficient.

6. Divided/Overlapping Responsibility for Permit and Inspection Services

a) Responsibilities for New Construction/Renovations

The Bureau of Permits, Planning & Zoning (Permit Office), 1 Market Way West, issues applications and permits related to property construction, renovation and demolition. They are also responsible for plan review and building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing inspections. These services are provided under contract by Guardian Inspection Services. The Bureau is also responsible for scheduling the final inspection prior to issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy.

The Department of Fire and Rescue Fire Prevention Bureau (Fire Prevention Bureau) is located at 43 S. Duke Street. Plans for the construction of multiple housing, commercial, industrial, and institutional structures are also reviewed by the Fire Department Fire Prevention Bureau. The Fire Prevention Bureau reviews such things as access, fire alarms, sprinkler system, standpipes, fire assembly ratings. Plans are submitted to 1 Market Way West and forwarded to 43 S. Duke Street. When the final inspection is scheduled for approval of a certificate of occupancy, both the Bureau of Fire Prevention inspector(s) and the Guardian inspectors attend.

Fees for all permits related to new construction or renovation are collected in the Permit Office.

Having two separate agencies with plan review and inspection jurisdiction places a major burden on permit holders. We received complaints from permit holders of final inspections that could not be completed due to the failure of one or the other inspector to show up. We also received complaints that the two inspection agencies have provided conflicting requirements to permit holders. We received input from permit holders that unnecessary confusion and frustration is caused by having two agencies inspect the same things.

At best, this division of responsibilities requires the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office to closely communicate, coordinate, and cooperate. At one time, Fire Prevention Bureau personnel and Permit Office personnel met once a week to review plans and coordinate work. At the time of our review, this practice was no longer taking place. A major problem with the organization of the City's code/permit service is that no single individual exercises control over the process. Even with close cooperation and good communications between the two agencies, such a system would present challenges. Unfortunately, we do not believe that close cooperation and good communications between the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office is the norm. At the present time, no one person has the responsibility for the success or failure of the City's code/permit services. There is no unity of command or management.

b) Responsibility for Property Maintenance Inspections

The Fire Prevention Bureau licenses all rental properties and conducts interior and exterior property maintenance inspections of the approximately 5000 registered residential rental properties. Ideally, these inspections are conducted on a two-year cycle although this is not currently the case.

Both the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau inspect property based on nuisance complaints. Property maintenance nuisance complaints are electronically logged into the City's complaint system. These are reviewed by the Mayor's Office and are assigned to either the Permit Office or the Fire Prevention Bureau. Most, if not all, of these complaints are for problems that exist on the exterior of buildings. Once the complaint has been assigned, inspectors visit the property and take appropriate action. The action taken by the inspector is recorded on the electronic record and provided to the Mayor's Office. If no remedial action is recorded, the Mayor's Office contacts the office to which it was assigned and inquires why action has not been taken.

We received complaints about the Fire Prevention Bureau inspectors not properly recording action taken on nuisance complaints, or not taking action in a timely manner, or not taking action at all until they received follow-up calls by the Mayor's Office. Lack of proper follow-up to citizen property maintenance complaints undermines the City's effort to deal effectively with problem properties. Failure to properly deal with citizen complaints results in a lack of trust and confidence in the City's ability and/or commitment to work to insure decent living conditions and decent neighborhoods.

We have also received complaints that the rental property licensing and property maintenance inspections by the Fire Prevention Bureau is not adequately impacting run-down, deteriorating housing in the City.

7. Training

There is a serious lack of training of personnel in the Permit Office and to a lesser extent, in the Fire Prevention Bureau. This is evidenced by the results of the survey that was made of 2006 permit holders and interviews with individuals who have used the permitting services. As mentioned above, both the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau need to train employees that the code services are in place, not only to insure building and fire safety, but also to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

All code administration and enforcement employees need to understand that the code administration and enforcement function in the City of York must be conducted in a friendly, helpful manner not in a punitive manner. Good economic development is a high priority for the City of York. The code administration and enforcement functions should enhance such development and not be a road block to it.

One of the most serious problems in the Permit Office is the lack of available individuals who are trained and certified to answer both technical and non-technical code questions that inevitably arise.

A second area of training should be undertaken by the City is supervisory training. This should be required of all supervisors regardless of level - from first line supervisors to department heads.

8. Public Information

A number of respondents to the survey of permit holders referred to the need for written information regarding the permitting process. We believe that these comments came primarily from homeowners involved in smaller renovation projects. Such information should be provided. There are a number of examples of this from other communities that could be used.

9. Lost Permits

We received several complaints that applications for permits were lost by the Permit Office. This required the applicant to reapply, sometimes weeks after the first application was submitted. This should not occur and can be rectified with a tracking system.

10. Recruitment and Selection of Personnel

The recruitment of qualified personnel to provide code/permit services is difficult. First, the City's requirement that all employees (with the exception of police) reside in the City, limits the pool of qualified candidates. This is especially true for positions that are not entry-level positions or that require special experience, licensing, or certifications. Wage rates also limit the number of qualified candidates, especially in view of the residency requirement.

Except for entry-level positions requiring little or no education or experience and the highest paid positions such as department directors, it is difficult to attract middle level candidates meeting educational and experience requirements with low to moderate wage offerings and a residency requirement.

11. Certifications

All of the inspectors and plan reviewers presently engaged in York's code administration and enforcement operations must have the proper certifications. Both the Permit Office and the Department of Fire and Rescue provided documentation of certifications for both York employees and Guardian staff. All the certifications appeared to be appropriate for the work being conducted.

The Mayor should require periodic submission of copies of certifications for all third party employees and York employees engaged in code inspections and plan reviews. Individuals without the proper certifications should not be permitted to conduct inspections or perform plan reviews.

12. Philosophical Differences

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

a) Department of Fire and Rescue - The Fire Prevention Bureau operations appear to be exclusively focused on fire safety and fire prevention. The Fire Chief stressed this a number of times during our discussion with him. Although this may be appropriate for a fire department inspection program, there seems little consideration for the economic development needs of the City. We received complaints that the Fire Department opts for the most restrictive interpretation of the code when requiring compliance for new buildings. A recent example involved a major economic development initiative in the City. As reported, when the plans were reviewed a question was raised about sprinklers in an open area of the project. The Fire Prevention Bureau determined that sprinklers were not necessary. After the project was nearing completion, the Fire Prevention Bureau reversed its decision and required sprinklers. Although this did not stop the project, it was a source of additional frustration and expense to the developer. We also received a number of comments and complaints that the rental housing licensing and inspection was not producing adequate results in areas with deteriorating and poorly maintained housing stock.

b) Department of Police - The Police Department is focusing on controlling and cleaning up problem neighborhoods and problem properties in neighborhoods. The Police Commissioner feels that a strong coordinated and continuing police and code enforcement presence in a problem neighborhood can result in a permanent improvement. The Clean Sweep program initiated by the City does coordinate police and codes enforcement to impact negative influences and conditions in targeted neighborhoods but the resulting changes are not always permanent. The Commissioner would like to establish a property maintenance/crime enforcement presence in troubled neighborhoods to proactively work to permanently reduce nuisance and crime problems. This work would be accomplished by a combined effort of the Community Development Department, the Fire and Rescue Department, and the Police Department. The Commissioner's proposal reflects the reality faced by the Police Department and the City and should be given serious consideration.

c) Department of Community Development - The focus of the Community Development Department and the Permits Office is on the safety of new construction through the enforcement of the International Building Codes and on neighborhood and nuisance problems through enforcement of the Property Maintenance Code and other city codes designed to control nuisances and blight. The Community Development Department appears to have a balanced view of fire and building safety, economic

development, and the need for neighborhood revitalization through strict property maintenance code enforcement. Unfortunately, because of their generally poor performance in the provision of code services for new construction, they have been viewed as a negative rather than a positive force.

-

H - Recommendations

1. - Recommended Changes

The following are recommended changes in the operation of the code/permit services offered by the City of York. These recommended changes assume that code services will continue to be provided in-house through the Permit Office and Fire Prevention Bureau. The recommendations are listed in order of priority with the highest priority first.

a) Proper Management is Critical for Successful Change

The need for proper management of the code administration and code enforcement cannot be over stressed. It is clear that management has failed to do what is necessary to maintain a good code enforcement operation. Throughout this study and in this report, we have assumed that the managers in place have the ability to change the culture of the code administration and enforcement operation(s) from one of compliance, enforcement, and penalties to one of information, cooperation, and helpfulness. We have assumed that the managers in place have the ability to change the current operations to provide timely service. We have assumed that the managers in place have the ability to provide for the proper training and mentoring of the employees for whom they are responsible. If our assumptions regarding the abilities of the managers in place are not correct and the necessary changes are not made, then managers should be changed. It is the responsibility of the Mayor's Office to evaluate progress or the lack of progress in improving York's code operations and the cooperation between the agencies of the York City Government. Having dealt with all of the individuals involved directly or in support of York's code administration/enforcement services, we believe that they are capable of making the changes that are necessary to make York's code operations one of the most client/customer friendly in the Commonwealth. York needs to encourage good development and good homeowner stewardship and that can only happen with the cultural change we are recommending.

b) Customer Relations

The survey of permit holders and discussions with persons who use the system revealed serious problems involving the treatment of permit applicants. Among the complaints about poor client/customer relations that permit holders expressed in the survey, we found the following problems repeated over and over:

- **When clients/customers present themselves at the Permit Office counter they are often ignored. A common complaint was that office personnel were talking among themselves and nobody moved to the counter to service the client/customer until the employees had concluded their personal conversations.**

- **When clients/customers call for information their calls are often not answered. Worse, the client/customer leaves messages and the calls are either never returned or returned days later.**
- **A number of complaints were received about the rudeness of employees answering the telephone or dealing with a client/customer at the counter.**
- **A number of complaints were received about the lack of helpfulness that the client/customer found when asking for information or assistance.**
- **Fire Prevention Bureau inspectors inspecting new commercial construction seem to operate on a random basis, continually coming up with new items without regard to the fact that the plans have already been reviewed approved and without regard to the stage of construction or the additional cost to the client.**

Problems involving the poor treatment of customers must be addressed immediately. Both the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau need to create a culture that has as its dual purpose – the professional and helpful treatment of all of their clients/customers and the safety and health of all of their clients/customers. **This means that rather than a culture of compliance, enforcement, and penalties, the culture should be one of information, cooperation, and helpfulness.** This must begin with department heads and flow to every employee. Every employee should know what their responsibility is to the client/customer – information, cooperation, and helpfulness. **Everyone from the department heads to the line employees must be held responsible for their treatment of clients/customers.** This is not a difficult concept to understand. It is as simple as “treat others as you would like to be treated.” This does not require an expensive training program or the employment of a consultant. This is simple respect and it must be shown to every client/customer at all times. Employees, from the Department Directors to the entry level positions, 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. If such behavior continues, the employee should be replaced. The culture and focus of the York permit/code service must change immediately to one of information, cooperation, and helpfulness to the client/customer and there should be no tolerance of any other behavior. To accomplish this cultural change, the Mayor should meet with the Department Heads (Community Development and Fire and Rescue) together with all managers and supervisors involved in code and permit administration and enforcement and must make a very clear and strong policy statement regarding the treatment of clients/customers. Employee performance reviews must include the evaluation of the employee’s treatment of clients/customers. Those employees who do a good job should be rewarded, those who do not should be counseled, disciplined, and, if necessary, replaced.

Client/customer feedback must be solicited and used in managing the City’s code services. A stamped, self-addressed form should be given to each client at the time a

permit application is submitted or at the time a property maintenance inspection is conducted. The form should be simple and self-explanatory and should allow the client to indicate his/her satisfaction with each step of the permit approval and inspection process. This information should be jointly evaluated by management from both the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau on a bi-weekly basis. The Mayor's Office should review the completed forms monthly.

c) Third Party Contractor vs. In-House Staff

There are two issues involving the third party contractor system in York. Both have been identified because of complaints made in the client survey or client interviews. The first issue is that there is often no person available in the Permit Office who can answer client's technical code questions on a timely basis. The second issue involves the plan review process.

(1) Lack of Technical Expertise In-house - This issue arises because the City has contracted with a Guardian Inspection Services for plan review and inspections and there is no requirement that Guardian maintain offices in the Bureau of Permits, Planning, and Health. This issue can be dealt with in several ways.

First, the third party contractor can agree to maintain an office within the Permits Office and agree to be a resource for technical code questions that arise. If the present contractor will not agree to this, new specifications can be written to provide for it and the work can be re-bid.

Second, this can be dealt with by replacing the third party contractor with in-house staff. This worked successfully under the previous Building Official who had extensive experience in the codes. One of the problems of instituting the change to in-house staff is recruitment. Because of the residency requirement and because of financial constraints, it may be difficult to find individuals who have the experience and certifications necessary to do the work. It is critical that these positions be filled with individuals who not only have the proper background and experience but who also are good communicators. Pay levels for these positions will have to be competitive with pay levels offered by the inspection contractors operating in the State. At the present time, Guardian Inspection Services is paid 85% of the permit cost and \$52 each time a plan is reviewed. In 2006, Guardian was paid more than \$350,000. We believe that this amount will do much to offset the costs of providing in-house staff. If it is decided to recruit in-house staff, the first position recruited should be an in-house plan reviewer. The second positions should be inspectors. If this change to in-house staff is made, consideration should be given to retaining Guardian Inspection Services for some overlap period to permit a seamless transition.

(2) Plan Review Services - The purpose of plan review is to insure that the presented plans comply with the codes. When deficiencies are noted, the plans are returned to the permit holder for corrections. Once the corrections are made, the permit is issued. The complaints that we heard were that after plans are reviewed, deficiencies

noted, and changes made, the plan reviewer presents a new list of deficiencies that were part of the plans from the beginning and should have been identified in the first plan review. This causes permit applicants frustration, delay, and added expense. Plan deficiencies present in the first plan review should be identified in the first review, not subsequent reviews. The third party contractor is paid for each plan review. One way to discourage this would be to significantly reduce the level of compensation for the second and subsequent reviews if deficiencies identified were present in the first review. Such a change would require the agreement of the present provider or would require new specifications be developed and new bids taken. Another way to deal with this problem is to do plan reviews in-house rather than through a third party contractor.

d) Tracking/Timing

One of the major complaints we received from permit holders was the excessive time it can take between the submission of the permit application and the receipt of the application. We also received complaints about applications or permits being lost. These things should change. York's present system does not permit comprehensive tracking of permits from application, through all inspections, to approval. There should be a procedure in place that tracks each permit application from submission to permit approval to job completion. The tracking system should date each step of the process. This information should be available to both clients and to the code/permit personnel. Each permit application for both the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office should be recorded with time and date. Each action taken regarding that permit should be recorded by time and date. There should be a place to record comments and inspection details. This information should be recorded in the program used for the Code and Permit Offices (discussed in H-A-5) but until a proper program is acquired, the information should be recorded on a form that is initiated when the permit application is received.

Timing goals in the permit process should be established. The following are suggested permit issuance goals that can be adopted as the standard for the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau. Fire Prevention Bureau and Permit Office performance should be reviewed weekly against the standards that are adopted.

- **Section 403.43 of the Uniform Construction Code, Act 45, provides for a permit maximum of thirty (30) days for Code Officials to approve a application.**
- **Ideally, smaller projects, such as residential decks, electrical service installations, re-roofing, etc., should be issued over-the-counter at the time of application submission.**
- **Moderate residential projects, such as basement finishes, a kitchen or bathroom renovation, etc., may take as long as five (5) business days for approval.**

- **Projects of a larger scope, such as housing additions, new garages, minor commercial renovations may take as long as ten (10) to fifteen (15) business days.**
- **Large commercial and multi-family projects may take as long as thirty (30) business days.**

A tracking system will also help to eliminate lost permit submissions.

In addition to tracking each permit application and each step of the process, a system needs to be established to **record each telephone call** that is received requiring a call-back. If a new electronic program is acquired by the City (see H-A-e) it may be possible to acquire a telephone call record/tracking system as part of the program. If an electronic system is not available, a paper system should be employed to record all calls to insure that telephone calls are followed-up in a timely manner. There are a number of inexpensive and simple systems available. All or most calls should be answered. If, on a rare occasion, everyone is busy, the calls can be recorded on the telephone answering system. Recorded voice mail messages should be answered within one hour. When calls are answered and the caller makes an inquiry that requires a call-back, calls should be recorded and answered in the same day. Calls and call backs should be monitored by managers. This problem should be dealt with immediately.

e) Information Technology

The technology available to the Permit Office is unsatisfactory. The old software presently in use is very slow printing building permits. In addition, it does not allow for the detailed tracking of permits. We have investigated several package programs available on the market today (see **Appendix 4**). We have also provided a contact number, an estimate of cost, and some comments on the benefits and disadvantages of each program. We believe that the managers of the Permit and Fire Prevention Bureaus and the manager of the office providing information technology should meet with representatives of each of the companies offering the programs listed. They should have a demonstration of the capability of the program and they should speak with at least three municipalities using the program. Based on this information and the price, a new program should be purchased and installed. All office personnel should be trained in the new program. Every effort should be made to use the program provided by the vendor without significant amendment. This is recommended because of the extra time, complication, and expense usually involved with customizing packaged programs. Permit software should be able to handle and track both new construction, commercial and residential, and property maintenance inspections.

f) Dual Inspection Authorities

At the present time, there are dual permit/inspection services. The Fire Prevention Bureau inspects all rental properties for compliance with the Property Maintenance Code. The Fire Prevention Bureau is also assigned by the Mayor's Office

to do property maintenance inspection based on complaints. The Permit Office is also assigned by the Mayor's Office to do exterior property maintenance inspections based on complaints.

For new buildings, the Fire Prevention Bureau Lieutenant conducts plan reviews and inspection for alarm systems and sprinkler systems. The Fire Prevention Bureau also inspects new commercial establishments for such things as access, standpipes, fire assembly ratings, commercial cooking exhaust hoods. The Permit Office also conducts inspections of new construction. At times, both agencies inspect the same things. At times, inspectors from each office has given clients different instructions for code compliance.

Coordination between the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office is required when permits are requested for new commercial buildings having sprinkler systems or fire alarm systems. Plans have to be shared, information on inspections has to be shared, and final inspections for occupancy permits have to be coordinated. This does not always work well and is a source of some confusion for clients.

We believe that all the new building approvals and inspections should be accomplished by the Permit Office. This will require a transition from the present arrangement. Plan reviews and inspections of alarm systems and sprinkler systems and all code compliance should be accomplished through the Permit Office. This change can be accomplished in one of several ways.

- The Permit Office third party contractor can be asked to provide this service.
- An individual could be hired on a part-time basis with the proper certifications.
- The individual in the Fire Prevention Bureau presently conducting the plan reviews and inspections could continue to do the reviews and inspections but, (1) should be scheduled by the Permit Office; (2) should report the results of his review and inspections to the Permit Office; (3) should be responsible to the Permit office for timely plan reviews and inspections; (4) should participate in pre-permit, pre-construction, and periodic construction meetings with owners, contractors, architects when scheduled by the Permit Office.

We believe that the Property Maintenance Inspection program for both rental properties and for nuisances can either remain as they are presently constituted or can be combined. If they are combined, we believe they should be combined in the Permit Office but not until the Permit Office has corrected the problems identified in this report. In any case, we believe that all of the property maintenance inspectors (those conducting rental license enforcement and nuisance inspections) should be trained and certified as property maintenance inspectors. New employees hired to conduct property maintenance inspection in the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office should be required to be

certified as property maintenance inspectors within six months of employment to be eligible for continued employment.

g) Recommended Staff

The following staff is recommended for the operation of the Permit Office. This assumes that inspections and plan reviews will be conducted in-house.

Deputy Director of Bureau of Permits, Planning, and 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(1p/t)
Permit technician(1)
Office Coordinator or Clerk (1) – Optional depending on the need
Administrative aide to the Deputy Director(1)

If certain individuals are certified in multiple disciplines, some of these positions could be combined depending on the volume of work.

h) Interdepartmental Cooperation

As long as the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau deal jointly with clients, regular coordinating meetings should be held. We suggest that weekly meetings between the management of the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau should be scheduled. These meetings should be for the purpose of improving relations, for discussing problem areas between the agencies, for discussing all issues of coordination and scheduling for example for reviewing the computer program to be used for York's permit operations, discussing major building inspection requirements and schedules, etc. Prior to instituting these meetings, the Mayor should meet with the two department directors to discuss the importance of good cooperation between the departments and the need to take the steps described in this report to change the culture of client/customer relations. The weekly meetings should be attended by the Deputy Fire Chief in charge of the Fire Prevention Bureau, the Deputy Director of the Permit Office, and the individuals responsible for plan review and inspection. If discussions at the meetings involve other operating areas of the York local government (police, information technology, health, etc.) representatives from those operating areas should also be invited. We understand that such coordination meetings were previously held on a regular basis.

i) Human Resources

In order to assure the recruitment and selection of the best available candidates for positions in the City's code service, it is very important that the Human Resources Office is involved in the recruitment and selection of all personnel. The selection of individuals who have the ability to understand technical code information and the ability to

communicate successfully with the public is critical. York's residency requirement along with its modest salaries/wages makes it difficult to recruit personnel with specialized training in a competitive market. (A recent Executive Order by the Mayor requires Human Resource Office involvement in all non-civil service recruitment and selection.)

j) Preconstruction Meetings

On complex or large projects it is recommended that a preconstruction meeting be held to include the plan reviewer, the inspector(s), the contractor, the architect and other persons important to the project to discuss issues involving the plans, the code, phasing, etc. It should be the goal of the York Permit Office and Fire Prevention Bureau personnel to advance the project with a minimum of delay.

k) Common Sense

Common sense should be the rule in the issuance of permits and the enforcement of York's various codes. Building and housing codes are in place to insure building safety, fire safety, and health. In many cases, building and fire safety can be achieved in a variety of ways. York code enforcement personnel should view their role as representatives of the City who value new development and renovations and who are there to not only ensure compliance with the codes but also to be helpful to owners and contractors in their efforts to comply. Timeliness is also very important. When appointments are made they should be kept. Communications should be open. Owners and builders should be treated like clients and customers, not the enemy. Common sense should be the rule not the exception. Complaints were received that the Permit Office was requiring applicants to go to the HARB, just to be told that the HARB has no jurisdiction. Such delays are not only expensive for the contractor and/or owner they make York's permit process look inept.

2. - Alternate Organizations

a) Ideal Organization

Although it is unlikely that the City of York can reconstitute its code administration and enforcement organization to reflect our "ideal" organization, we felt it would be of interest to provide our idea of an "ideal" organization for code administration and enforcement. The ideal organization for code administration and enforcement would allow for unity of command, uncomplicated communications, comprehensive training, career advancement opportunities, and clear responsibility for the success or failure of the service.

In the "ideal" organization, the Director of Community Development would continue to oversee the following bureaus:

- Bureau of Permits, Planning and Zoning

- Bureau of Housing Services
- Bureau of Health

A Deputy Director for each of the Bureaus would be assigned and responsible to the Director of Community Development.

The Deputy Director of the Bureau of Permits, Planning and Zoning would be the designated Building Code Official, in accordance with the requirements of the Uniform Construction Code. That individual holding the position should demonstrate a high level of building and fire code knowledge. The following certifications through the International Code Council (ICC) should be required;

Deputy Director - Certified Building Official. This certification requires successful completion of the Residential Combination Inspector certification; The Commercial Combination Inspector certification; Combination Plans Examiner certification; Commercial Energy Inspector certification; Accessibility Inspector/Plans Examiner certification; Electrical Inspector/Plans Examiner certification; Plumbing Inspector/Plans Examiner certification; Mechanical Inspector/ Plans Examiner certification.

The Permits components would be divided into two divisions, new construction and property maintenance. The new construction division would be responsible for the enforcement of the Uniform Construction Code, Act 45. It would include the review of construction documents, all building inspections, and issuance of building permits and certificate of occupancies for all alterations, additions, renovations and new construction projects.

Staffing requirements for the Division of New Construction division would be as follows(all plans examiners/inspectors would hold the appropriate certifications):

- (1) Senior commercial building code inspector
- (1) Commercial plans examiner/building code inspector
- (1) Commercial mechanical/electrical/plumbing (MEP) code inspector
- (1) Residential building code inspector
- (1) Fire code inspector/plans examiner
- (1) Permit technician
- (1) Office coordinator or clerk - Optional depending on the need
- (1) administrative aide to the Director

If certain individuals are certified in multiple disciplines, some of these positions could be combined depending on the volume of work.

The property maintenance division would be responsible for the enforcement of the International Property Maintenance Code and the International Fire Code, as it relates to existing structures. This would include interior and exterior inspections of all rental properties on a regular basis, complaint follow-ups on all existing structures within the

city, periodic commercial fire code inspections of any non-residential buildings, certificate of occupancy inspections and grease trap inspections of food establishments.

Staffing requirements for the Division of Property Maintenance would be as follows:

- (1) Senior property maintenance code inspector
- (5) Property maintenance code inspectors (rental property licensing inspections)
- (5) Ordinance compliance officers (complaint-based exterior inspections)
- (1) Fire code inspector for existing structures
- (1) Administrative aide

The current code enforcement duties performed by the Department of Fire Rescue Services (alarm, sprinkler, hood suppression systems, other fire code inspections, property maintenance licensing and inspections and certificate of occupancy inspections would be transferred to the Bureau of Permits, Planning and Zoning. These duties would be performed in one location in an effort to enhance customer service.

Each division is headed by a Senior Inspector. This individual reports to the Deputy Director of Permits, Planning and Zoning. The Senior Inspector would be responsible for oversight of inspection and plan review staff and administrative staff.

In addition to the aforementioned duties and responsibilities, the Senior Commercial Building Code Inspector would also be expected to perform plan review and inspection services on an as needed basis.

The Commercial Plans Reviewer/Building Code Inspector would be responsible to the Senior Commercial Building Code Inspector. This individual's primary duties would be reviewing plans of commercial projects for code compliance. On occasion, this individual may be asked to perform field inspections, as required.

The Commercial Mechanical/Electrical/Plumbing Inspector duties would include the plan review and field inspection of all commercial MEP projects, as required through Act 45. This individual may also be responsible for grease trap inspection in food establishments.

The Residential Building Code Inspector would be responsible for the plan review and inspections of all one and two family dwellings (duplexes). This would include newly constructed homes, as well as alterations, renovations and additions of existing homes

The Fire Code Inspector/Plan Review would be responsible for the review of fire alarm and sprinkler plans, as well as inspections of those systems.

The Permit Technician would be certified by the International Code Council. Responsibilities would include "over-the-counter" plan review of minor scope projects

such as decks, roof replacement, fence, temporary electrical service, etc. This would help expedite the plan review process by freeing up staff time.

The Office Coordinator or Clerk would assist in answering phone calls, filing, and other duties as needed. This position would be optional and would be filled if there is a need.

The Administrative Aide would be responsible for answering phone calls, scheduling inspections and performing other clerical duties as required.

The Senior Property Maintenance Code Inspector would report to the Deputy Director of Permits, Planning and Zoning. Additional responsibilities would include oversight of existing structures staff, scheduling periodic inspections, and performing inspections as required.

The Property Maintenance Code Inspectors would continue those duties currently performed by the existing PMI staff, i.e. periodic interior and exterior inspections of rental housing properties.

The Ordinance Compliance Officers would continue those functions currently performed by the Permit Office staff that includes complaint-based exterior inspections of any/all properties within the City of York.

The Fire Code Inspector would be responsible for the inspection of the International Fire Code as it relates to existing structures to ensure compliance. These duties are currently performed by the Fire Prevention Bureau.

Specific plan review and inspection services currently provided by Guardian Inspection would be discontinued as the City develops the capability of providing the same services.

A comprehensive software system, which tracks enforcement issues from citizen request to case resolution, i.e. permit applications, building permits, scheduling of inspections, certificates of occupancy, complaints, fire inspections, etc. would be in place.

b) Alternate #1

This alternate locates all new construction/renovation services in the Permit Office. This would mean that all fire inspections including sprinkler and alarm systems, hood suppression systems would be conducted under the direction of the Permit Office. This would require the Permit Office to acquire someone with the appropriate certifications. This could be done one of several ways. The services could be contracted through a third party contractor; or an individual could be hired on a part-time basis; or the individual presently providing these services could be moved to the Permit Office; or some other arrangement satisfactory to the Permit Office could be developed.

Under this alternative, the Permit Office would have the following staff (same as H-1-g above);

Deputy Director of Bureau of Permits, Planning, and 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 (1p/t)
Permit technician (1)
Office Coordinator or Clerk (1) – Optional depending on the need
Administrative aide to the Deputy Director (1)

If certain individuals are certified in multiple disciplines, some of these positions could be combined depending on the volume of work.

Rental property inspections could continue to be conducted by the Fire Prevention Bureau. Complaint based property maintenance inspections could continue to be conducted by both the Permit Office and the Fire Prevention Bureau (see H-1-f for more detail).

All personnel would have the appropriate certifications to perform the functions assigned.

c) Alternate #2

Under this alternative, the entire new construction permit administration and enforcement function would be outsourced. This would mean that all of the services presently provided for new construction and/or renovations, both residential and commercial would be removed from the Fire Prevention Bureau and the Permit Office to a third party. Such an arrangement might be explored with an organization such as the York County Economic Development Corporation. In order for this to work,

- The City must have confidence in the ability of the third party agency to organize and operate a highly professional code service for the City.
- The City and the agency would have to work out a detailed agreement with performance standards.
- A cost/benefit study would have to be conducted by the agency to insure that the operation of the code administration and enforcement service on behalf of the City would be financially feasible.
- The City would also have to determine the financial implications of such an arrangement.
- Finally, some consideration would have to be given to City employees affected by the change.

If such an arrangement were made and the administration and enforcement of new construction were outsourced to a third party, we would recommend that all property maintenance licensing and inspection be transferred to the Permit Office.

Appendix 1

Comparables: City of Harrisburg and City of Lancaster

City of Harrisburg

The Department of Building and Housing Development is supervised by a Director, who is accountable for all CDBG Programs. The department has two Deputy Directors. The first deputy serves as the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Planning and is primarily responsible promoting orderly development throughout the City. The second deputy administers the day-to-day activities of the Bureau of Inspections and Code Enforcement. This bureau initiates all zoning and building inspection efforts of the City. Additional management staff include an Assistant Codes Administrator and a Health Officer.

The Bureau of Fire, headed by a Fire Chief and two deputy Fire Chiefs, maintains four fire houses and a large complement of fire fighting apparatus with full-time personnel to support these facilities. Other personnel are uniformed firefighters, some of whom are assigned to specific details such as fire safety and fire inspection. The Fire Marshal conducts fire sprinkler and alarm inspections.

In addition to the Director, Deputy Director, and the Asst. Codes Administrator positions, the Bureau of Inspections and Code Enforcement is also staffed with one electrical Inspector, seven Code Enforcement Officers, one Plumbing Inspector, two Administrative Assistants, and one Clerk Typist.

In 2006, there were 22 permits issued for new construction projects and 1,650 permits issued for alterations and additions of existing structures. Additionally, during that same time period, there were 1,175 electrical permits issued and 375 plumbing permits issued. The Bureau of Fire conducted 450 fire prevention inspections in 2006.

The City of Harrisburg, through the cooperation of the Department of Building and Housing Development and the Bureau of Inspections and Code Enforcement have continued the In-House Demolition Program. This program was designed to create safer neighborhoods through aggressive codes enforcement in irresponsible and non-responsive property owners and to foster programs that allow citizen participation in creating change and improvements in their neighborhoods and community.

The In-House Demolition Program has resulted in creating more positive aesthetics in many of the City's neighborhoods. It has also served as a catalyst for development and overall neighborhood improvement. Active promotion of neighborhood involvement in legal proceedings has also increased awareness at the District Justice and County levels and has also proved valuable in achieving an increase in the Bureau's conviction rate of property code violators. Neighborhood involvement has also resulted in an increase in efficiency at addressing citizen complaints.

Measures and Indicators for 2006:

Population	47,472
Area	11.5 Sq. Miles
Density	6035/Sq. Mile
Number of employees in Codes	12
Building Permits Issued	1,672
Housing Inspections Performed	2,840
Vacant abandoned buildings sealed	20
Exterior lot clean-up projects	60
Citations filed	50
Building condemnation orders issued	145

City of Lancaster

The Department of Economic Development and Neighborhood Revitalization includes the Neighborhood Revitalization Division, the Bureau of Zoning and Inspections, the Bureau of Structural Inspections, the Bureau of Planning and the resource Development Division.

The Bureau of Zoning and Inspections provides for the safety, health and welfare of the general public who live, work and seek recreation in the City of Lancaster. The Bureau conducts inspections to assure compliance with applicable codes and ordinances adopted by the City of Lancaster through three operating units: Zoning, Housing Inspection Unit and Health. The Housing Inspection Unit performs inspections, as provided by the International Property Maintenance Code, to ensure the City's housing stock is suitable for habitation.

The Bureau of Zoning and Inspections is staffed with one director and sixteen zoning, housing, and health inspectors.

The Housing Inspection Unit works with the Bureau of Structural Inspections, Bureau of Planning, Bureau of Fire, Bureau of Police, Department of Public Works, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, as well as Appeals Board, Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), Historical Commission, and the Vacant Property Reinvestment Board.

The Bureau of Structural Inspections reviews construction plans and conducts inspections to ensure compliance with the State Uniform Construction Code and applicable local ordinances. The Bureau reviews and evaluates structural, electrical, plumbing and heating plans for new construction as well as for renovation or remodeling of existing buildings.

The Bureau of Structural Inspections employs one Director, six building code inspectors/plan reviewers.

The Bureau of Planning provides technical assistance to property owners, contractors and developers regarding land development, use of buildings, property improvements, rehabilitation of historic structures, and the requirements of City land use and development regulations.

There are two planners employed by the Bureau of Planning.

In addition to the department of Economic Development and Neighborhood Revitalization's responsibilities regarding code enforcement, the Department of Public Safety's Bureau of Fire also provides code-related services.

The Fire Marshal Division is responsible for fire code enforcement, building plan review, arson investigation, and public fire investigation. The Fire Marshal Division responds to complaints of Fire Code violations. Each complaint requires an initial inspection and a follow-up inspection to ensure code compliance. This Division also performs joint inspections with housing and building inspectors to deal with problem properties in the City.

Measures and Indicators for 2006:

Population	56,348
Area	7.5 Sq. Miles
Density	7616/Sq. Mile
Number of employees in Codes	15
Building Permits Issued	936
Housing Inspections Performed	7,500

Appendix # 2

Questionnaire Results

Total Number of Questionnaires Counted = 168

- a) **Type of Permit** - What type of permit did you hold?
- Building Construction/Renovation = 88
 - Electrical Service = 26
 - Housing Maintenance = 35
 - Fire = 6
 - Other = 24
 - N/A(no answer) = 13
- b) **Permit Application Process** - Were you treated professionally and was the York Representative helpful?
- Yes = 110
 - No = 39 = 26%
 - N/A = 15
- c) **Plan Review Process** - Were you treated professionally and was the York Representative helpful?
- Yes = 96
 - No = 15 = 13.5%
 - N/A
- d) **Plan Review Process** – If you were required to make plan revisions prior to approval, were the required changes explained to your satisfaction?
- Yes = 74
 - No = 14 = 16%
 - N/A = 15
- e) **Plan Review Process** – Do you think you were treated fairly?
- Yes = 96
 - No = 20 = 17%
 - N/A = 31
- f) **Plan Review Process** - Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the plan review process.
- N/A = 113
- g) **Inspections** – Did the inspector treat you professionally and was he/she helpful?
- Yes = 118
 - No = 16 = 12%
 - N/A = 22

- h) **Inspections** – Were you ever notified by an inspector that you were not in compliance with the code?
- Yes = 40
 - No = 92
 - N/A = 24
- i) **Inspections** - If you were not in compliance, were you provided a written notice of the violation and the citation of the code section that was violated?
- Yes = 39
 - No = 12 = 23.5%
 - N/A = 57
- j) **Inspections** – Do you think you were treated fairly?
- Yes = 98
 - No = 10 = 9%
 - N/A = 27
- k) **Inspections** – Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the inspection process.
- N/A = 102

Comments to Question No. 2:

- 1) Every time I called the permit office, I got a recording. My telephone messages were not returned.
- 2) There was not sufficient staff available and the waiting period was excessive.
- 3) Staff doesn't know all qualified info.
- 4) We were treated professionally but when we ask questions, the person never has the answers.
- 5) Waited, waited, waited. Felt like second class citizen. Very stressful. Never put inspection on schedule.
- 6) Process was extremely slow. Service was very good or very bad, and personnel would take lunch and close the office despite hours stating the contrary. Going down to the office when it closed and should be open frustrates people. Also rude and non-responsive.
- 7) Very short, very slow. Personal conversations took priority over customer service.

posted
is
supervisors are

was
in

- 8) Rep. seemed over-worked and not sure of what she was doing.
Took almost an hour to get questions answered. Supervisor
out of office. I had to take off work to spend my afternoon
permit office.

- 9) No one had time for us. The lady was rather rude.

- 10) Office is disorganized. No one explained how this process works.

needed a
frustrating.

- 11) I asked in advance of application if I needed anything else and was
told no, but then found out I made a trip in that I first
“DR” number from the utility. This was very

in
stopped
asked
clerk
friend.

- 12) I waited 10-15 minutes before clerk even looked up to recognize
me. After process began (2 weeks after I applied) I stopped
person to pick up permit. The process wasn’t started. Clerk
work to chat about evening plans with a male friend. Friend
for bathroom key. When friend returned from bathroom,
stopped working, chatted another five minutes with his
Process took over an hour.

without a

- 13) No one knows what to do and they usually have a bad attitude.
You normally get either a shrug or a smirk and leave
permit.

- 14) The process was not timely. The building of my deck was held up
due to the long process of approval.

- 15) They haven’t a clue.

- 16) Your office gave me an incorrect address/times of service/office
hours. This was thoroughly unprofessional and aggravating
experience.

minutes? Their
continuously gossiping
control my frustration and
1/10th of this. There is no sense
permit office.

- 17) The people issuing permits are pathetically slow and incompetent.
One hour to type a simple permit that should take 5
attitude and lack of ability to focus and
makes being there a real challenge to
anger. No business would tolerate
of urgency in anybody at the

- 18) Rude/uneducated phone reception.

- 19) Everything went well when we applied for our roof and siding permit, but when we applied for our patio permit we went through a horrible several months. We never had our phone calls returned, were held up for 3 months until we finally got a call returned by a very nice man who said he would try to get our permit for us. They were apparently short of help.
- 20) First time I was there they were helpful, professional and kindly. By the second time I was there, I think employees changed or other reasons because they were not helpful to me any more.
- 21) They were slow in issuing the permit. I purchased a rental property(1055 Pershing) and went to the Fire Department on October 6 to inquire about obtaining a permit. I was told no more inspections were to be performed until next year. I paid a \$120 fee for inspection on January 26, 2007. Today is March 16, 2007 and no inspection has been scheduled.
- 22) Individuals spent more time talking to each other than us as customers.
- 23) I was treated with arrogance and disdain. The representative was in no way helpful.
- 24) My permit application was lost twice. They confused my property with someone else.
- 25) The person was rude, unhelpful. If you were not known or a common contractor your application was a waste of their time. Office politics or lunch was more important – even though us taxpaying city residents are paying parking meters and losing time at work to get these processes taken care of.
- 26) Person was unable to answer various questions, such as how long the permit lasts, how long the review process takes, etc.
- 27) Very helpful throughout the entire process.
- 28) Constant change of process, constant change of personnel, invisible 3rd party reviewers, no contact, no returning phone calls.
- 29) Representatives provided incorrect information. Messages took 3 days to return. Representatives did not want to listen. Finally I called city council and received help from a nice

lady there. Then
permit.

my contractor had no problems with the

30) Kendra did not return phone calls. She could not answer questions. Charlie always tried to be helpful.

31) I was treated professionally but staff was not responsive or solutions oriented.

32) Permit staff was difficult in person and over the phone. I did not receive the return phone call to schedule an inspection as promised. Once scheduled, we were called shortly before the inspection for a reschedule that was several weeks later. On inspection day the inspector was a “no show”.

33) I called several times to determine an update 45 days after the application was submitted. Representatives could not find the application but they would call back. I never got a return phone call within a week. Representative said they must have lost the application they suggested we submit another one.

Comments to Question No. 3:

34) I was told that the simple application would take 10 days to review.

35) The representative was rude and condescending. I had to call repeatedly to get my plan reviewed.

36) We were treated professionally but when we ask questions, the person never has the answers.

37) We had to wait over a month and every time we went in, we never got any answers and all they needed to approve it was some dimensions and no one could tell us that until we called PA state commissions and finally talked to the inspector. He just happened to be there this time or we might still be waiting.

38) Live in WY. No one in borough office knew how to explain what to do.

39) They lost my plans and no one was manning the store for months.

40) Way too long.

- 41) No review process.
- 42) We had approval for our permit and the review was not right. It took a long time to get our permit even though it was approved.
- 43) The person was very helpful.
- 44) They were not helpful.
- 45) It was ok once my plans were finally being reviewed, 3 months later.
- 46) Lots of phone messages left. Hard to get hold of.
- 47) Highly unprofessional on every level, the worst I've seen.
- 48) Plan review – confusing depending on who you spoke to about the issue. Never the same answer.

Comments to Question No. 4

- 49) In my opinion, there seems to be a lack of consistency. Moving targets are hard to hit.
- 50) The representative was rude.
- 51) I had to get clarification on why they were rejected. Some of the things were rejected because it was reviewed as commercial, when my application was for residential
- 52) I was told to go to the wrong permit location the first time.
- 53) My permit was denied. I did not know what they wanted.
- 54) Ambiguous and flatly wrong. These people don't know the code and they always come down on the heavy side of the question.

Comments to Question No. 5:

- 55) Sometimes there is a lack of consistency in plan review.
- 56) Except for rudeness.
- 57) It takes you more than 15 days to review plans and I was told it would take 15 days.

- 58) Process was extremely slow. Service was very good or very bad, and personnel would take lunch and close the office despite posted hours stating the contrary. Going down to the office when it is closed and should be open frustrates people. Also supervisors are rude and non-responsive.
- 59) I think everyone has problems with this office. This was not my first experience nor will it be my last. I thought the reps were rude.
- 60) No one really seemed to care. All I wanted to do was put up a fence so my 2 year old could play outside safely and it was such a chore for them to help us. I just wonder if the inspector had not been there when we went in 5 weeks later if would I still be waiting for a permit.
- 61) I did not agree with paying fees to the City. We are W.Y. taxpayers.
- 62) The process to obtain a permit was the antithesis of professionalism.
- 63) Neither yes or no. I was treated in the same inept way everyone else I have talked to was treated. Not really fair.
- 64) I was livid that we were charged \$208 for a permit to replace a roof on a double garage. I feel as though we were raped by the city just for up keeping our property. No wonder no one wants to live in the city. The taxes we have to pay then we're charged that kind of money for upkeep is absurd.
- 65) I was given a permit when none was needed. There was no inspection – I was told it was not needed.
- 66) Kendra Hunter was very helpful.
- 67) All customers at the counter appeared to have to wait until employees were done speaking to each other.
- 68) Treated fairly only by zoning officer.
- 69) The process could be expedited. The office was very slow in responding to my questions and needs.
- 70) You should enforce the law to every rental.

- 71) This year Mary Roberts made things easy. In the past I have had very bad experiences with doing property improvements on commercial properties I own in the city.
- 72) Faster turn around with answers to questions.
- 73) They did their job according to the ordinances set.
- 74) Whenever we address the questions on the review sheet then they come up with more. We typically go around three or four times. Do they just want more review fee?

Responses to Question No. 6:

- 75) Hire (as a City employee) someone very knowledgeable in construction, who also has a good grasp of building codes and can apply common sense at the same time.
- 76) Attitude adjustment, training, improved morale, and get rid of inspection service (Guardian). You need your own people. Guardian will not talk directly with permit applicants. Absurd.
- 77) The overall timeframe for the review process need to improve. Hire more people or cut out all the paperwork. People should not have to wait longer than 2 weeks to get approved. The Historical Review Board needs to meet more often or meet during normal business hours (9-5).
- 78) Hold employees accountable for their time.
- 79) Your response time is taking too long. I am losing business because of lack of service.
- 80) Instructions should be more clearly written. Representatives should be polite, accessible, and helpful.
- 81) Please do not take that long to review. My plan review is not done yet and I do not have any suggestions.
- 82) The process takes too long for approval, plus no one called us to let us know that the permit was approved. Once again, no one knows what is going on when you call in to find out any information. The prices keep going up but the quality of the services is a joke.

- 83) I heard from (the) contractor that because of modifications (the) representative was only available once a week, so it delayed the project.
- 84) Allow more freedom in the HARB District to use modern material.
- 85) Process was extremely slow, service was either very good or very bad, and personnel would take lunch and close the office despite posted hours stating the contrary. Going down to the office when it is closed and (it) should be open upsets people. Also, supervisors are rude and non-responsive.
- 86) More communication between representative and management division between homeowner getting permits and builder getting permits. More organization, more knowledgeable reps. Give them some customer service training. We're all overworked. More hours so people who have jobs can do this before or after work.
- 87) Be on time and have a friendlier staff that understands customer's frustrations and try to help them instead of saying there is nothing they can do, you'll just have to wait, even after 4 weeks.
- 88) I asked in advance of application if I needed anything else and was told no, but then found out I made a trip in that I first needed a "DR" number from the utility. This was very frustrating.
- 89) Teach employees that issuing permits is their purpose and that they are responsible for making the applicant a happy customer. The City of York has been immeasurably harmed by the rudeness and ineptitude of this department. Many will never try to build again.
- 90) The process for the inspector to give approval took several days. The entire process took too long.
- 91) Later hours, at least one evening. Otherwise pleasant dealing with City.
- 92) Easier access for times available.
- 93) Make all rentals come up to the City codes.

- 94) To be able to do on computer.
- 95) Send these surveys to the contractor.
- 96) Could be a bit of an easier process. Explain and help a bit more.
- 97) Actually, the contractor took care of most of permit requirements, but since my father is handicapped, arrangements were made quickly. The process to me was very efficient and trouble free. Thank you.
- 98) Time lapse is often way too long.
- 99) The ladies that I dealt with were very pleasant. The process was another thing. I applied for a building and electrical permit on the same day and received a permit. It wasn't until the electrical work was done when I found out that I didn't receive a permit for the electric. I had to re-submit for another permit. I came back the next day to find out that the office had shut down for a meeting. I came back the next day and it still wasn't done. Also, you should have separate forms for each permit.
- 100) Get together with a person to review it in person.
- 101) I have never had any problems with this group or the group under Mayor Althouse. However, under Robertson's leadership, it was horrible like your present people in the permit office.
- 102) Stick to one uniform guideline.
- 103) No more third party absentee reviewers. Meet face to face before submission to get on track. Hire a pro.
- 104) Someone should be very familiar with city requirements. It seems that you get different requirements from different employees. There seems to be little organization or responsibility. Phone calls should be returned in 24 hours. There should be more professionalism in this office.
- 105) I kept getting the run-around from them. They told me I would get approval shortly and it took much longer from the original time frame.

- 106) The permit office is understaffed. Apparently only one person
can answer certain questions and if that person is out
or on vacation you're out of luck.
- 107) More staff is needed.
- 108) More staff is needed.
- 109) Need more help in the department. Process needs streamlined.
Too long between submission of plans and approval.
- 110) Make rentals come up to the same rules that are on the book.
Get strict. Bad renters hurt everyone.
- 111) Each time there is a personnel change in the office, there seems
to be a change in what is required for review.
- 112) Not everyone hires an engineer or architect or has the money to.
Individuals doing repairs should not be put through
all the red tape that big contractors should have to do.
- 113) How long it takes once the permit is applied for and when I call
on my permit status – no one knows where it was or
status for almost 2 ½ months. Kept on getting the run-
around and no returned calls. Being a taxpayer I felt like my
project was not important enough for their time of day
and that is wrong.
- 114) Hold periodical public workshops, planned seasonally at various
locations with various improvement suppliers(Home
Depot, Lowes) giving tips, etc.
- 115) I waited almost a week until I had my permit – and a day to get it
notarized because the girl was not in her office.
- 116) Make sure of the location and the zoning area.
- 117) I thought the cost of the permit was high.
- 118) There seems to be some confusion within the department due to
zoning officer vacancy. I assume it to be resolved
now.
- 119) Provide prompt courteous service at the counter.
- 120) Staff needs more training and more availability.

121) Recognize clients. Work with a focus and diligence and do not have personal chats with acquaintances while customers wait.

122) I feel there needs to be more cross training of personnel with printing the permits. The processing of the actual permit needs to be expedited. A new printer and/or form would be helpful to the staff. As it stands, they manually load the multi-colored paper. Just this little bit of time over the number of permits adds up and will help the process.

123) When you call to let a contractor know the plan review is ready to pick-up, let the person know the status of the permit so both can be picked up at the same time is the permit is approved.

124) I never got the permit.

125) You should have internet pages and be more helpful with a novice.

126) You need a department that understands that they are there to help the taxpayers and not give them a run-around. Treat them like you would want to be treated.

127) Knowing addresses better so paper work isn't held up.

128) There was only one person working and she was very busy.

Comments to Question No. 7:

129) He came back 3 times finding something different every time.

130) ½ and ½.(half bad half good).

131) They were to come out two separate times and my contractor was there both days waiting for him. I was upset that I made him lose time from other work he could have been doing.

132) Never inspected.

133) Inspector arrived an hour late holding up the roofers then told roofers all they needed was to show them a Polaroid. I feel there was no added value here. City should just tax me \$50.

- 134) They were only able to part of the work and didn't have the correct inspector to do so.
- 135) Somewhat rude.
- 136) Missed the appointment because it wasn't scheduled. Did agree to meet later after I called office. Almost wasted a vacation day.
- 137) Inspector did not know all the proper info to inspect.
- 138) Everyone said that he knew that the electrician did good work and they approved it. Note: Current electrician found several earlier code violations that had been previously approved. Who can you trust?
- 139) All compliance issues with International Building Code were not disclosed at the initial code enforcement inspection.
- 140) If you are talking fire code, then the answer is yes.
- 141) Inspector was the only professional person I met through this whole process. He did very well. The sad part about this is he isn't employed by the city.
- 142) Treated professionally but not solution oriented. Ask for building changes when users change but not use type.

Comments to Question No. 9:

- 143) More detail would be helpful in an attempt to remedy the deficiency.

Comments to Question No. 10:

- 144) Again, there is a lack of consistency, which maybe the result of different people reviewing drawings and their level of experience.
- 145) Inspectors are trained to fail purposely.
- 146) Very polite and respectful.
- 147) Inspector was great.

- 148) Fire alarm system was reason we got a violation, yet once fire alarms were fixed, the inspectors refused to allow us to open until all minor problems were fixed as well.
- 149) If a person pays the city to ensure the contractor is performing the job correctly and ensuring the occupants safety.
- 150) Make all rentals meet codes.
- 151) They wasted my contractors time (2 days) and he had to drive from Red Lion.
- 152) Permit process was not completed in a timely manner.
- 153) A permit fee is enough – not a percentage of the cost to maintain your home. Elderly people are on fixed incomes. The city should be happy that we maintain our homes. A percentage to the city is ridiculous.
- 154) Preexisting conditions are not recognized. The existing building code is neglected and sections in the code that are “may” become “shall”.

Responses to Question No. 11:

- 155) A phone number to help advise me of who to contact regarding various other pending work; such as foundation and plumbing.
- 156) I have never had any problems with my inspections.
- 157) Hire an in-house person with a construction background to review plans. Try and maintain a level of consistency.
- 158) The entire permit process was handled by our electrical contractor.
- 159) Hire more inspectors. Utilize the internet-Log in to see status of all permits/compliance issues/e-mail inspectors.
- 160) Hold employees accountable for their time.
- 161) I didn't think you needed a smoke alarm in every room in the house.

- 162) Train your inspectors better.
- 163) Everything was handled just fine. No problems. Everyone was very nice. Very helpful.
- 164) The inspector was fresh out of college and didn't know what he was doing. Couldn't conceive that the domestic hot water wasn't generated from the boiler but the hot water tank that was adjacent to it. I paid an inspection fee for him. Just another money grab.
- 165) Work closer with contractors doing work because if you don't they will either not work in City or will do work without permits so homeowner doesn't get shoddy work. Inspections are vital.
- 166) Make the permits office more accessible to contractors with trucks.
- 167) Permit office needs to answer their phones, return calls and get up from their chair when speaking to someone at the counter.
- 168) Inspections aren't the problem. It is the paperwork, where you go and how much, etc.
- 169) I asked in advance of application if I needed anything else and was told no, but then found out I made a trip in that I first needed a "DR" number from the utility. This was very frustrating.
- 170) I purchased a house through habitat. I have a end house which has a through-way alley. I put up a fence because I have children playing in my back yard because of the fast cars using the alley way. I had to have my fence removed before I could go to my closing. I felt that since I didn't know I had to have a permit, I could have just paid the fee and left my fence up.
- 171) Let the inspection department issue permits online and close down the permit office.
- 172) The process for the inspector to give approval took several days. The entire process took too long.
- 173) Time it takes to get permits.

174) Having permits sent out in a timely fashion. This year my permit was received in 3-4 weeks. The one prior took 3 months.

175) I suggest the inspector stay longer (more than one minute) and at least get on the roof. What is City inspector getting paid for? If you're charging \$50 per min. I hope he is getting compensated.

176) Enforce city rental code to all rental units.

177) Do over the internet. It saves a lot of time for me.

178) We don't believe on-site roof inspections should be required. Should be allowed to send in pictures. There is always a chance it could rain with a person's roof not on because they are waiting to inspection.

179) Not charging a percentage of the cost for maintenance work. Making sure your inspectors show up when they're supposed to. People outside of the city I talked to were shocked at the charges for a permit.

180) Crack down on slum landlords or leave office Mr. mayor. Take a drive through your own city. Make people/business fix up their property or find somewhere else not to do your job.

181) Could be a bit of an easier process. Explain and help a bit more.

182) The inspector was both professional and courteous.

183) Promptness.

184) That everything should be inspected on first visit.

185) The inspector was excellent. He responded to my requests quickly and was fair in all my doings.

186) All building improvements necessary for tenants/owners to get a CO need to be disclosed at initial codes enforcement inspection.

187) Recognize that any certified building official can perform plan reviews and inspections. Clarify that inspections are not required within changing users unless the use type changes or renovations are proposed. If minor renovations are proposed the

entire space
compliance.

should not be required to come into full code

resources
to arrive

- 188) Remove redundancy of the building office and the fire department on inspections. It is not an efficient use of and slows the process due to waiting for the other & "excess" conversations.

York
potential
so that we can

- 189) Better scheduling process. More available times to schedule. An understanding that lease transactions are pending and the inspections must be completed in a timely manner. A representative should take the time to explain what the tenants/buyers need to get up and running in York explain to clients more effectively.

- 190) Get someone reliable to schedule appointments. Get someone answering the phone at Codes. Inspectors showing up for scheduled appointments.

- 191) Transfer the people in the permit office to another non-public area.

- 192) More staff needed.

- 193) Too much time between inspection and approval.

- 194) Need more personnel.

don't

- 195) Charlie seems to be very anxious to help. Others in the department are not as customer service oriented. They seem to want to help.

bad
gone.

- 196) In the past, I wanted to build a new building(bigger and nicer) but due to too much red tape I just did minor repairs in turn keeping property value down. Most of the problem was due to a zoning officer(Lilah Haxton). Thanks goodness she is

- 197) The permit office does not return phone calls.

- 198) It is hard for individuals to clean up this city because of all the road blocks and permits needed overall.

- 199) Have someone answer the phone who will return your call to setup an inspection. In my situation it was easier to call the inspector on his cell because the office didn't answer or return calls.

Then
job.

again, the office was too busy with other things than their

200) Expand the department with more personnel.

201) Inspector Grove was very professional.

202) I do not think you should be charged a percentage of the cost of
repair maintenance or what ever. Why not have a flat cost
for permit. Very unfair especially when on fixed income.
Why should the city have a percentage of the bill – not at all fair.

203) I think the person at the front desk needs to be better trained and
could therefore be more responsive to questions.
Telephone calls were often not returned.

204) We have come in contact with many city employees. They are
rude, arrogant, and need a lesson in manners. When did the
tax paying public become the enemy.

205) Staff needs to be more informed and more knowledgeable.

206) We had no compliance issues. We were able to complete the
form, pay the fee and walkout of the office with the
permits. This is the way it should be. Larger jobs where we have
questions on how tasks should be completed need to be
answered quickly and accurately. It seems to take a long time to
get answers. We hate re-work. We like to do it right the first
time. However, if we can't get answers from the authority that is
not the way we like to do things.

207) Everything flowed. Thank you.

208) I suggest you figure out a way to disseminate the regulations and
requirements to people who move into the city or move
about the city. There are citizens who do not speak the
language and don't purchase newspapers because they don't
read the language. Then the "do it yourselves" who ignore
requirements-?

209) Phone is unanswered most times I call to schedule an inspection
with the Fire Department. Call back is usually several
days. Phone courtesy is lacking.

210) Allow someone to ask questions before a plan is sent in for review.
A few minutes on the front end of a permit can save all involved
hours and days later.

211) The process needs to be helpful to a novice.

212) Everything was great except it took a few months to get the CO
after all the work was done.

213) Hire people with skills to work with people. Understand the
timelines when people try to improve their property in the
city.

General Comments:

214) I am concerned that downtown properties are shabby and that
proper regulations are not in place or not enforced.

215) For a simple permit it is not good to have to make two trips to
pick up the permit.

216) Instructions of the process should be given when application is
given. At least, the applicant should be notified of
particular step and the order of steps.

217) I know that technically a permit is required due to replacement
of fascia board, but needing a permit to replace 24 ft of
spouting seems excessive to me. I followed the rules but I
wonder how many people do not.

218) Customers coming to this department are there because they
are improving a structure within the city. This
department should be happy to see their customers and want
to speed the process.

219) Charlie returns calls and does a great job setting up
inspections.

Appendix # 3

Permit Service Questionnaire

The City of York is very interested in improving its code administration and enforcement services. To do this we are seeking information from persons holding permits in 2006.

We will appreciate your evaluation and opinion of these services based on your experience(s). Please answer the following questions. Your answers can be anonymous. We thank you for helping us improve the permit/inspection services provided by the City of York. (If you need additional space to write, please continue on another sheet of paper.)

Type of Permit

- (1) What type of permit did you hold?
- ' Building Construction/Renovation
 - ' Housing Maintenance
 - ' Fire
 - ' Other

Permit Application Process

- (2) Were you treated professionally and was the York representative helpful?
- ' Yes
 - ' No

Plan Review Process

- (3) Were you treated professionally and was the York representative helpful?
- ' Yes
 - ' No
- (4) If you were you required to make plan revisions prior to approval, were the required changes explained to your satisfaction?
- ' Yes
 - ' No
- (5) Do you think you were treated fairly?
- ' Yes
 - ' No

- (6) Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the plan review process.

Inspections

- (7) Did the inspector treat you professionally and was he/she helpful?
- ' Yes
 - ' No
- (8) Were you ever notified by an inspector that you were not in compliance with the code?
- ' Yes
 - ' No
- (9) If you were not in compliance were you provided a written notice of the violation and the citation of the code section that was violated?
- ' Yes
 - ' No
- (10) Do you think you were treated fairly?
- ' Yes

‘ No

(11) Please suggest changes that you believe will improve the inspection process.

Thank you for your assistance. We will appreciate any ideas you have for improving the Code Services of the City of York. (If you need more space to write please use a separate sheet.)

Name of person completing this questionnaire (optional) _____

Telephone number (optional) _____

Appendix #4

Code Operations Software

We obtained general information on three software packages which provided all necessary applications for operations management including permit application and issuance, permit tracking, and issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy. The prices varied according to amount of product customization required, license fees and upgrades.

The three companies considered were CityView, a Division of Municipal Software, National Geomatica, and Hansen Information Technologies.

● **CityView a Division of Municipal Software**

Contact: Steve Favalaro

E-Mail: SFavalaro@MunicipalSoftware.com

Benefits:

- Comprehensive system which include pre-built applications for most of Permit, Planning and Zoning requirements.
- Provides in-house staff training and software installation.
- Product can be customized to user's specifications

Disadvantages:

- Costs-price ranges from \$100,000 for basic pre-built package to over \$250,000 for customized, multi-user licenses.
- Company headquarters are located in Vancouver and travel expenses can be costly.

● **National Geomatica**

Contact: Barry Coleridge

E-Mail: bcoleridge@nationalgeomatica.com

Benefits:

- Cost-Since this is a web-based system, there are no “up-front” costs associated. There are licensing fees, but no software packages are purchased. Costs may vary between \$25,000 to \$75,000.
- Provides a vast array of services including code enforcement, health, zoning, planning, public works, etc.

Disadvantages:

- Not as advanced and comprehensive as other products.
- Cannot be customized as easily as more sophisticated enterprise systems.

● **Hansen Information Technologies**

Contact: Daryl M. Ruder

E-Mail: daryl.ruder@ismart.com

Benefits:

- The City of York currently uses an older version of Hansen software. This may decrease some up-front costs.

- Hansen Technologies is a sophisticated enterprise software system which can be designed to handle most of the current permitting and licensing needs.
- Provide in-house set up and training

Disadvantages:

- Upgrades and special customization may become costly. Costs could range from \$80,000 to \$150,000.

● **Black Bear Systems**

Contact: Serenity Lombard

Phone: 360.379.9750

Benefits:

- Relatively low cost - \$10,000 plus \$2500 per year.
- Company specializes in Code Enforcement technology
- Product uses hand-held devices to assist in inspections.

Disadvantages:

- Does not include Zoning and Planning modules.
- Limited customer support provided

It is recommended that each of these providers be asked to provide an in-house demonstration of the capabilities of their software. Based on the demonstrations, contacts with other municipal governments using the programs, and price, a program should be selected and installed. The Permit Office, the Fire Prevention Bureau, and the IT Office and the Mayor's Office should be involved in the selection of the software.

