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OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

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LETTER TO COMMISSION

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TO: Mayor David Dermer and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: November 30, 2005

SUBJECT: BUILDING DEPARTMENT BENCHMARKING AND CUSTOMER SERVICE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this LTC is to provide information regarding the recent benchmarking and customer service analysis conducted for the City's Building Department. Attached is the completed analysis by JRD & Associates, the consultant used for this project. The analysis was comprised of a benchmarking study consisting of gathering and analyzing information from local, state, and national building departments and a customer survey analysis, in which a customer survey questionnaire was developed and deployed to solicit feedback from the City's Building Department customers.

Summary of Findings

Based on the benchmarking figures, as well as the nature and complexity of construction in the City, and the codes used to regulate the construction, it appears that the City's Building Department is consistent in its performance with the benchmarked municipalities. A performance measure that is in need of immediate attention is customer satisfaction. JRD & Associates believes that an overall satisfaction rate of 85%, well above the current 62% (according to JRD's customer survey), is attainable.

The following are the benchmarked performance measures and the current baselines and recommendations for the Miami Beach Building Department from the study:

Performance Measure	Range of Benchmark	Miami Beach Current Baseline	Recommended Target
Percentage of inspections performed within 24 hours of request	90-98%	95%	95%
Plans processing turnaround time			
Residential	7-22 days	17 days	15 days
Commercial	15-30 days	30 days	28 days
Inspections per day per inspector	8.25-20	20	17
Plans reviewed per day per plans examiner	7-21	N/A *	12
Overall customer satisfaction rates	58-97%	62%	85%

* Based on further analysis by the Building Department, it is estimated that the existing plans examiner is reviewing approximately 31 plans per day. Follow up analysis is underway with JRD to understand why the City of Miami Beach is so significantly above the recommended target. If the recommended target is substantiated, additional plan review staff may be required.

- The consultant recommended that the Building Department should track, for monitoring purposes, but not as a performance target, inspection and rejection rates. A target should not be placed on rejection rates because the quality of the construction (resulting in inspections) and plans (resulting in plans review) depend on the customer and not on the Department.
- The consultant also recommended that a performance measure be developed for the time it takes the City (all departments involved in the permitting process, not just Building) to issue a permit.
- One of the most prevalent feedback/concerns received from the customer survey was the inability to contact City personnel via the telephone

In addition, the consultant recommended that the City should consider:

- Implementing a simplified fee schedule;
- Assessing the staffing levels at the front counter;
- Staggering lunch hours of front counter personnel to allow the front counter to remain open longer hours;
- Providing an information counter that allows access the computer system to check and track the status of permits, plans, and inspections, and can be assigned to filter customer service calls;
- Enhancing its education efforts on the permitting process to the public; and
- Determining the validity and addressing some general concerns with the process.

The Department recognizes that customer accessibility to Building Department personnel is a valid concern; however, the nature of the business makes it difficult for all staff to be fully responsive to telephone calls as a main medium of communication. Staff time is typically devoted to serving customers in the field, in-person at the department's permit counter, or at the plans review stations. In order to partially address this concern, the department has added a clerical position to provide dedicated staff to answer the department's general phone line. Once the position is filled the person will respond to general information requests, but calls with specific and technical questions are still required to be routed to the specific disciplines' voice mail boxes. Building Department personnel are provided email addresses and customers are encouraged to contact them via email. The City will further initiate an advisory campaign to guide customers as to the hours for availability of staff to be reached via phone and more effective ways of communication with the staff.

Additional Activities Completed

In addition to the Building Department benchmarking and customer analysis, other activities/projects have been conducted to address performance and customer service issues. These activities include:

- A Building Department workload/workforce analysis was conducted, by the Office of Budget and Performance Improvement (OBPI), to evaluate staffing levels to improve performance and customer service. As a result of the analysis by OBPI, adjustments were made to staffing levels mid-year FY 2004/05 including the addition of 8 positions.
- An analysis was conducted of the City's information technology systems related to the permitting, inspection, and licensing functions of the City. The objective of the analysis was to identify the issues and opportunities for improvement in regards to technology. This has been incorporated into a large industry review that also looks at related software requirements for Code Compliance, Planning, and Fire Inspections.

Additional Activities Underway

With assistance from the Office of Budget and Performance Improvement (OBPI), the Building Department is currently planning a departmental leadership retreat. The objective of the retreat is to continue to transform the culture of the department in accordance with the City's Strategic Plan: making the city more business friendly; improving processes through information technology; expanding hours and service through e-government; and overall, increasing community satisfaction with City services. The retreat was originally scheduled for mid-November, but was postponed until January 2006 due to the recovery efforts resulting from Hurricane Wilma.

In addition to tracking rejection rates which by themselves can sometimes be misleading, the Department and OBPI are working to create a method of tracking the number of new items identified in inspections that were not found in plan reviews as well as the number of new items identified in second or subsequent inspections, but not in the first inspection. However, tracking this data will require computer enhancements.

Conclusion

While the Department has made much progress and is at the high end of some benchmarks, additional improvement is still needed in the area of customer service, rejection rates, and plans reviewed per inspector. The Department is working on these items but some will require time to address.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

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