

## Memorandum

Memorandum No: 19-116

Date: November 18, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Council

From: Jim Proce, ICMA-CM, City Manager



Re: Development/Building Review: Evaluation and Process Improvements

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Development/Building Review: Evaluation and Process Improvements was identified as an action agenda item as part of Goal 2: Sustainable Anna Community Through Planned, Managed Growth in the City of Anna Strategic Plan. Since the implementation of the City's Strategic Plan in March, Community Services has performed a wide-ranging evaluation of building services. From the evaluation, came twenty-three action items to improve processes and advance building services forward. The action items completed are:

1. **Define the goals, objectives, and performance benchmarks for the Building Department**

There are several areas staff is working on to improve operations in the Building Department. To promote and support Council's Strategic Plan, improve performance, and achieve defined targets, staff has set measurable goals and objectives for the department. These include: consistent ordinance and policy updates, automation of processes, decreased permit times, and increased community and builder outreach efforts.

2. **Initiate master permitting**

The master permitting process has been implemented and will allow builders to submit residential building plans ahead of time for review. The process enables a quicker turnaround time at permitting because builders will only submit plot plans for review, as the building plans have already been approved. Of the builders that have taken advantage of the master permitting process, response has been positive.

3. **Take unnecessary and redundant steps out of procedures and processes**

Staff has spent considerable time refining procedures and processes. Staff has reviewed other city's procedures and processes and have met with Bureau Veritas and builders to determine what works

best for them. As a result, staff took out unnecessary steps in procedures and processes and changed other procedures and processes to be more efficient. This effort has reduced turnaround times for residential building permits from months to weeks. Feedback from the building community has been positive. Our next goal is to further decrease turnaround times from weeks to days.

4. **Update the fee schedule**

Staff performed a market assessment of building fees in other cities. At the June 11, 2019, City Council meeting, Council adopted new building fees. It is staff's intention to evaluate fees on a regular basis.

5. **Update building applications and forms**

Building applications and forms have been updated and put on the City website under the Building Department tab. Information online now includes: revised forms and applications, information on plan and permit submittal requirements, plan review and inspection processes, and the new fee schedule.

6. **Automate processes through new software**

Council approved the SmartGov platform by Dude Solutions for the new building software that will aid the Building Department. Upon Council approval, Dude Solutions will schedule the City of Anna to begin implementation in October. The initial phases of implementation involve building the platform. Staff has been working to upload forms, applications, procedures, processes, and fees to a project drive. Upon completion, Dude Solutions will configure and customize the software for the City of Anna. Upon completion of the configuration, the project will move to testing to ensure the software is working properly, followed by staff training before going live. The "Go Live" date has been set for May 2020. This would include all departments being live by this date: Planning, Building, Code Enforcement, Public Works and Fire.

7. **Move towards a paperless system**

The primary means towards becoming paperless will be when the SmartGov software is deployed. Until the SmartGov project is complete, staff is taking certain steps to reduce the amount of paper records stored in the building. Following the state record schedule, staff has been preparing old records for destruction. Thus far, there are over 50 boxes of records ready for destruction and counting. After all the files have been examined and either destroyed or kept for retention purposes, the remaining paper records will be scanned and put in an electronic system. In the meantime, electronic copies are now required for all new permits.

8. **Update the user's guide on the permit process**

The residential and commercial packets (user's guide) have been revised, updated, and are online.

9. **Provide additional permit information online**

Permit applications, permit checklists, and the steps involved in the permit process have all been put on the City website. In addition, the different permit types and number of inspections required for each is online as well.

10. **Publish activity reports online**

Staff is in the process of reformatting the master permit sheet to put it on the City's website. Once the SmartGov software goes live, the City will have approximately ninety standardized reports to

choose from that can be put online as well.

**11. Hire a certified Building Official**

Joel Huff is the City of Anna's Building Official. He worked in several North Texas cities including Prosper and Celina prior to working in Anna. Joel has many ICC Certifications and State Licenses including Certified Building Official, Texas State Plumbing Inspector, Texas State Master Electrician, and Texas State Code Enforcement Officer.

On Friday, November 15, the City extended an offer to Mike Hecks for the Building Inspector position. Mike will be starting on Monday, November 25. Mike comes to the City with thirty years of experience in the City of Richardson water and building departments. Mike is a TSBPE Licensed Plumbing Inspector, ICC Residential Mechanical Inspector, and ICC Commercial Mechanical Inspector. Mike also holds certifications from TCEQ in water and sewer.

The Building Official has already completed several commercial plan reviews and has been on-site at commercial projects. Bureau Veritas has been notified that the Building Official will be performing commercial, trade, and miscellaneous inspections. Single-family inspections will begin with the Building Inspector's arrival. An email account has been established for builders to request inspections. All inspections will be recorded electronically.

**12. Plan to transition to a full-service Building Department**

With the hiring of the Building Official and Building Inspector, the City will now take on the majority of commercial, trade, and residential building permits. Bureau Veritas will still be needed for plan review since there is not a plan examiner on staff and both the Building Official and Building Inspector will be in the field performing inspections. To be a full-service building department, another position will need to be hired in the future.

**13. Promote professional development and training**

The Building Official recently attended continuing education courses. The Building Inspector is currently pursuing additional certifications. The Permit Technician will become certified.

**14. Provide employees with the tools they need to perform their jobs**

Before the full assessment and process improvement initiative, there was confusion amongst staff on how to calculate and charge permit and impact fees. These issues have been resolved as now employees have been provided with fee sheets and other tools to be able to perform their jobs.

**15. Measure progress through additional reporting mechanisms**

Staff put in additional performance measures for the Building Department from the previous year. Building permit applications and permit spreadsheets are being revised to provide additional data to measure progress; when the SmartGov software comes online, even more data will be available. Reporting mechanisms are important for benchmarking and for the continual improvement of procedures and processes.

**16. Solicit feedback from the development community.**

Prior to implementing several of the changes, individual meetings and one large collective meeting, were held with local builders to solicit feedback. Once the new Building Inspector is on staff, another meeting will be held for the builders to meet the Building Official, Building Inspector, Permit Technician, and Managing Director of Community Services.

There are nine remaining action items that will be the focus of Community Services heading into 2020:

**17. Update codes pertaining to building**

Staff will bring updated codes and associated amendments to Council at the beginning of 2020.

**18. Update ordinances so that new development can go straight to permitting**

Community Services (Building Department) will collaborate with Development Services (Planning and Development) on achieving this item and improvements will be born from the City's new Comprehensive Master Plan. RFQ's have been sent out to professional firms to engage a consultant to work on updating the land use and zoning maps.

**19. Update the permit process flow chart**

This will be completed by the end of the year and put online in 2020.

**20. Create a Standard Operating Manual**

Since several of the procedures and processes within the Building Department have changed over the past several months, a Standard Operating Manual is necessary to document all changes. This project will be completed right after the deployment of the SmartGov software.

**21. Keep more of the City's building revenues for city services**

With the hiring of the Building Official and Building Inspector, the City will realize additional revenues in the General Fund from performing our own inspections. The projected estimate over a one-year timeframe remains at \$365,000.

**22. Reduce fees for miscellaneous permits**

Most of our fees are within market range. However, a few of the miscellaneous fees are high to cover third party costs. These fees can be reassessed when the Building Department is fully operational and performing our own inspections.

**23. Accept Electronic Payments**

When the SmartGov software is deployed, the City will be accepting electronic payments in the Building Department.

*Strategic Goal: Sustainable Anna Community Through Planned, Managed Growth*