

## Customer Service Improvement Status Report (FY 2011-12)

**Bureau:** Bureau of Development Services  
**Staff Contact:** Mark Fetters, Sr. Management Analyst  
**Phone:** (503) 823-1028  
**Date:** January 31, 2011

**Bureau Mission and Goals:** Please attach copies of your bureau's mission, goals, and any workplans or other policy documents that specifically address customer service improvement efforts. Please describe how your strategic plans include customer service, and any plans for improvement.

### Bureau of Development Services (BDS) Mission

The Bureau of Development Services (BDS) promotes safety, livability, and economic vitality through efficient and collaborative application of building, development, and property maintenance codes.

BDS is an integral part of development in Portland and the safety and livability of our citizens and the structures and neighborhoods they inhabit. BDS serves professional developers, consultants, and builders, as well as homeowners, citizens and neighborhood associations.

### Customer Service Culture

Over the last several years BDS has successfully integrated a customer service ethic into the fabric of the organization. The bureau's mission requires being responsive to the development community, neighborhoods and citizens. BDS's vision is to be the best development services agency in the country by deploying development review systems that meet the time-sensitive needs of the development industry and by satisfying neighborhood organizations' and citizens' concerns about the quality of development and the need for access to information.

Service to customers and stakeholders is reflected in several of the bureau's key planning documents, including the Mission, Goals, and Values; Management Principles and Expectations; Customer Service Solutions; Diversity Committee Charter; and the BDS Employee Handbook. Copies of these documents are attached, including chapter three of the Employee Handbook (Customer Service and Communication with the Public).

The bureau remains committed to these goals as it copes with the serious financial challenges facing the development industry and the overall economy. BDS continues to communicate with customers and stakeholders regarding their needs and the bureau's ability to provide services while experiencing financial and staffing constraints. Bureau staff is dedicated to working collaboratively with customers to problem-solve and reach solutions.

### Match Staffing to Workload

BDS cut approximately 150 staff in 2009 due to declining permit revenues and workload. However, a pattern has emerged in which permit revenues have fallen more dramatically than the workload. The economy has halted nearly all construction of large development projects, significantly reducing the bureau's revenues. As a result, BDS cut staff positions to balance the budget and now does not have sufficient staff to meet its current workload. Service levels throughout the bureau have fallen significantly, impacting bureau customers, development projects, and neighborhood livability.

To help remedy this situation, BDS is proposing to add 13 new positions in its FY 2011-12 budget request. These new positions would be funded with bureau revenues (not General Fund monies) and would allow the addition of essential staff to bring key services up to minimally-acceptable levels. Even with these additional positions, not all high-priority bureau services will be restored to acceptable levels; workload projections indicate that 10 *more* positions (beyond the 13) would be needed to fully restore all high-priority services.

If the budget Add Packages are approved, BDS will fill staff positions as revenues recover. Customers will see many improvements in services, including: 85% of combination/residential inspections made within 24 hours of request and 98% of commercial inspections; housing inspections increasing from 2,800 per year to 5,000; and the number of nuisance properties cleaned up increasing from 2,800 per year to 3,360.

BDS Land Use Services (LUS), Neighborhood Inspections, and the Noise Control Program provide a benefit to the public and have historically been supported in part by the City's General Fund. LUS enhances the City's livability through implementation of the Zoning Code. Neighborhood Inspections prevents the deterioration of existing housing and neighborhoods. The Noise Control Program improves neighborhood livability. The benefits of their services go well beyond their fee-paying customers.

All three of these programs have been under-funded and beset by deficits in their reserve funds for several years. Most recently the bureau has reduced services in these areas due to lack of revenues and General Fund support.

In addition, due to reductions in the Sign Enforcement Program, the bureau has ceased most sign enforcement that does not involve life/safety issues, and there have been many signs installed that do not meet the intent of the Sign Code.

To address these needs, BDS's FY 2011-12 Requested Budget includes a request for \$668,934 in one-time General Fund support to add 5.5 positions to these four programs. While adding these positions will not return all services to their previous levels, it will restore some key services that have been significantly reduced. BDS's Financial Plan shows that bureau revenues (fees and charges) would support these positions in future years.

#### Information Technology Advancement Project (ITAP)

The budget and staff reductions at BDS have compelled the bureau to re-engineer some of its processes. In the course of reshaping the organization, it became clear that levels of automation and public access to information were hindering the bureau's effectiveness and ability to be efficient with limited resources. BDS had been proceeding with implementing an 18-month plan to improve its technology tools; however, significant cuts in the budget stalled this plan.

On November 3, 2010, City Council authorized BDS to proceed with plans to purchase an online plan review and permitting system that would provide much greater access to information and services for customers and stakeholders. BDS envisions a system that will include:

- Electronic access to all historic permit and land use records for customers and staff
- Online land use and permit application and plan submittal
- Electronic plan review
- Online fee payment and permit issuance
- Electronic entry of inspection results and real-time access for field staff and customers

Customers and stakeholders will be able to perform much of their land use review, permitting, inspection, and research work online, including submitting applications, retrieving inspection results in real-time, and being notified of issued checksheets electronically. This system will save customers and stakeholders time and money by giving them remote access to information and services, decreasing the need to visit the Development Services Center (DSC) or BDS offices. BDS will experience significant efficiency gains in its land use review, plan review, permitting, and inspection processes as it reduces its reliance on paper plans and records.

BDS is currently working with the Office of Management and Finance and the City Attorney's Office to: negotiate a contract with the system vendor; write an intergovernmental agreement with the State of Oregon; and secure a line of credit to fund the project. ITAP will be key to BDS's ability to provide services effectively and efficiently into the future.

**Customer Service Assessment:** Please attach a copy of your most recent customer service survey and survey results. Please indicate how your bureau assesses timeliness, accuracy, helpfulness, expertise, and available information. If you do not currently survey bureau customers, please explain any future plans.

BDS conducted annual customer telephone surveys from 2002–2008 using contracts with outside vendors. Each year approximately 675 customers were surveyed regarding BDS land use review, plan review and permit issuance, and inspection services. The survey measured customer satisfaction with the timeliness and quality of bureau services, the adequacy and quality of information provided, and the knowledge, helpfulness, fairness, & availability of BDS staff and development review staff from other bureaus. BDS has used survey results and analysis over the years to guide decisions regarding services, programs, staff training, and budget expenditures.

BDS has not conducted a customer survey since 2008 due to budget cuts. If funding becomes available in the future, the bureau will consider conducting additional surveys at that time. A summary analysis of the 2008 survey results is attached; the full 2008 survey report is available from Mark Feters, BDS Sr. Management Analyst, at 503-823-1028 or [mark.feters@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:mark.feters@portlandoregon.gov).

**Workforce Development:** Please describe any efforts you have made to develop customer service competency within your workforce in the areas of recruitment, training, and evaluation. Please share any details you can provide regarding progress in these areas over the past year (training program information, key bureau contacts, recruitment/evaluation material examples, etc.).

Most of the bureau's specific efforts to develop customer service competency in the workforce have focused on recruitment and training. Due to economic conditions, BDS does not anticipate conducting many recruitments in the near future, and the budget for staff training is limited.

### Recruitment

Prior to staff reductions, the bureau's Outreach Committee developed a recruitment plan for each open position in order to better reach underserved populations with employment information. Recruitment plans include methods for reaching diverse populations, such as advertising in ethnic publications or using personal contacts with underserved communities to disseminate recruitment information.

BDS interview panels are provided with guidelines for interviewing and communicating with people from diverse backgrounds. Interview panels are encouraged to include an interview question related to customer service, and this is done in most interviews. Much of the bureau's work involves providing direct services to customers, both over the phone and in person. Because of BDS's commitment to providing outstanding customer service, the bureau places emphasis on candidates with customer service experience, communication and problem-solving skills, and cultural competency.

### Training

In 2003 BDS worked with a consultant to develop and deliver tailored customer service training to all employees, with additional training for supervisors and managers. The training covers internal as well as external customer service, and focuses on the unique customer service challenges in code enforcement work. The attached "Customer Service Solutions" document is a product of the training. All new employees go through this training after hire. A training binder is available upon request.