

## Customer Service Improvement Status Report (FY 2012-13)

**Bureau:** Bureau of Development Services  
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**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).

BDS remains committed to these goals as it continues to recover from the financial challenges experienced by the development industry and the overall economy in the last few years.

### Match Staffing to Workload

As permit revenues began to recover from the recession in 2011, the bureau was able to add back 17 staff positions during the calendar year to address the most critical customer service needs. Based on workload and permit revenue projections for FY 2012-13, BDS has requested to add 16.6 additional FTE, paid for with permit revenues, to address continuing service level issues as the economy rebounds. Declining permit revenues and workload led to staff reductions in 2009 and 2010, such that BDS now has less than half the staff it had three years ago.

BDS consistently communicates with customers and stakeholders regarding their needs and the bureau's ability to provide services, and BDS staff remains committed to working collaboratively with customers to problem-solve and reach solutions.

The bureau's Land Use Services, Neighborhood Inspections, and Noise Control programs 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.

Through one-time General Fund support received in FY 2011-12, BDS was able to add staff positions in these programs that provided these services:

- Implemented the **Enhanced Rental Inspection Program** in East Portland. This program identifies properties that are chronically out of compliance with City housing maintenance codes and whose owners are unwilling to make cited repairs in a timely manner. This innovative rental inspection model focuses resources on additional inspections of rental units with potential violations. The program effectively motivates landlords to provide and maintain safe and healthy rental housing, while offering protection to vulnerable tenants who might fear retaliation by eviction for reporting substandard housing conditions.
- Implemented the **Extremely Distressed Properties Enforcement Program (EDPEP)**. EDPEP focuses on un-maintained properties (often caused by abandonment due to foreclosures) with chronic nuisance and housing conditions that create risks of fire, public health hazards, and encourage criminal activity such as trespass, vandalism, graffiti, drug use and sale, prostitution, and additional serious public safety threats. EDPEP enforces the City's Property Maintenance Regulations and uses the abatement, vacation, and demolition of property as a key tool. EDPEP provides a vital city service to relieve pressure on the Police Bureau and other City agencies. EDPEP also proactively monitors properties to ensure that conditions are maintained and pursues additional abatements to resolve any recurring conditions.
- Allowed the bureau to **respond to all housing complaints** involving exterior maintenance issues on owner-occupied and non-residential properties (to prevent neighborhood deterioration), significantly increase responsiveness to fire/life/safety and health/sanitation issues for occupied residential rentals, and restore case management duties to facilitate more timely compliance for violations impacting the community at large.
- Prepared for the full implementation of the **Citywide Tree Project** by performing critical tasks, including process mapping; development of brochures, application forms, and training materials for internal and external customers; website design and content; development of a code amendment package; public outreach; and coordination with programmers on incorporating tree permitting and code requirements into the existing permit database system.

In its FY 2012-13 Requested Budget, BDS is asking that the one-time General Fund support for all of these positions be continued so the bureau can provide these vital services into the future.

Information Technology Advancement Project (ITAP)

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.

The bureau will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for vendors in early February 2012, with vendor selection taking place by summer 2012. ITAP implementation will likely start in fall 2012, with the project going live by the end of 2014. ITAP will be a 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.

For many years, BDS has made brief written surveys available to customers in the Development Services Center. These surveys provide insight into individual customer experiences.

In addition, 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 did not conduct large customer surveys from 2008-2011 due to budget cuts. However, the bureau has set aside funds for a survey in its FY 2012-13 budget request, and the bureau anticipates conducting a customer telephone survey in the summer/fall of 2012.

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. As the bureau's financial picture has improved, BDS has just recently begun conducting recruitments for open positions again, and the bureau will be placing a renewed emphasis on staff training and development in FY 2012-13 and beyond.

#### Recruitment

For any open position, the bureau develops a recruitment plan. 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.

Approximately 48% of BDS employees will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years. In order to prepare effectively for the future, BDS will focus attention in FY 2012-13 and beyond on developing future leaders; planning for succession to management, leadership, and technical positions; upgrading the skills of current employees; and re-affirming the bureau's commitment to diversity.