



City of

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2007 BDS Customer Focus Groups Overview & Follow-Up

Introduction

- On February 20 & 21, 2007, the Bureau of Development Services (BDS) held a series of focus group meetings with a number of bureau customers. The purpose of the meetings was to provide a forum for discussion regarding BDS building plan review, permitting, inspection, and land use review services, and to solicit customer feedback and suggestions for improving BDS services.
- Customers met with BDS staff and a facilitator in three groups:
 - Tenant Improvement Customers
 - Other Commercial Customers
 - Residential Customers
- Participants included contractors, architects, homeowners, developers, and neighborhood association representatives. Three BDS section managers representing Plan Review/Permitting, Land Use, and Inspections also participated, along with Martha Bueche, a facilitator hired by BDS.
- The meetings were held as a follow-up to BDS's annual telephone customer survey, which was conducted in August and September 2006 by NW Research Group from Boise, Idaho.

BDS Customer Survey History & 2006 Results

- BDS has conducted annual surveys of land use, permit and inspection customers since 2002. Survey results are used to guide management decisions regarding programs, services, and budget expenditures. Selected results are published in the City Auditor's annual Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) report.
- For the 2006 survey, NW Research Group, Inc. conducted 671 interviews of permit and land use customers who submitted applications from September 2005 – June 2006.
- Survey results had shown gradual improvements in customer satisfaction from 2002-2004, and significant improvements in almost all categories in 2005.
- In 2006 customer satisfaction decreased in all areas – plan review, permitting, land use, and inspections, with statistically significant decreases in many areas. These results prompted BDS to convene the focus group meetings in an attempt to ascertain potential causes for the dissatisfaction.

Focus Group Results

- Each of the three focus groups met for two hours; about 35 total customers participated in the three groups. Focus group participants were asked to give input regarding:
 - Problems they had experienced with BDS services;
 - Suggestions for changes or improvements; and
 - Services that are working well and should not be changed.

Several general themes emerged from the group discussions:

- **Inconsistent service levels** – Participants reported that service levels throughout the bureau are inconsistent and vary widely from section to section and even from one staff member to another. Participants experienced inconsistencies primarily in the helpfulness of BDS staff and in the staff's level of knowledge or expertise. While participants agreed that consistency could be improved, they also concurred that the quality of BDS's service from BDS is consistently better than that of most other metro building departments.
- **Staff training** – Participants encouraged BDS to put more time and effort into training new staff, especially given the staff turnover BDS will be experiencing over the next several years. Participants also felt that more thorough training of new staff would help address the inconsistent service levels.
- **Resolving issues** – Participants felt that there are too few clearly defined paths for giving feedback or resolving issues with BDS staff. Where those paths exist, participants felt hesitant to voice issues to BDS management for fear of retaliation by BDS staff.
- **Single point of contact** - Participants gave high praise to innovative BDS programs that provide customers with a single point of contact, such as the Facilities Permit Program (FPP), Major Projects Group (MPG), and Field Issuance Remodel Program (FIR). Participants strongly encouraged BDS to apply the single point of contact model to standard bureau programs and services.
- **Coordination of the development process** – Participants felt that more effective coordination of the development review process is needed. Several City bureaus are involved in development review, but no one bureau or office has authority over the entire process. Participants also stated that BDS consistently provides more timely, responsive services than other bureaus involved in the development review process.

Follow-up

- The bureau's senior management team has reviewed both the 2006 customer survey results and the feedback from the customer focus groups.
- A group of BDS staff, including several who attended the focus group meetings, are currently examining the feasibility of implementing the focus groups' recommendations. The staff group will prepare an implementation plan for review by the BDS senior management team, focus group participants, and other interested stakeholders.
- The bureau will report back to the focus group participants and interested stakeholders as changes are being implemented.