



Special City Council Work Session re: Permit Reform Update, Monday, May 1, 2017, 6:15 pm - 7:15 pm, Contois Auditorium, City Hall 5/1/2017

BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

CONTOIS AUDITORIUM, CITY HALL

BURLINGTON, VERMONT

MINUTES OF MEETING

May 1, 2017

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jane Knodell (Council President) – Central District

David Hartnett – North District

Joan Shannon – South District

Richard Deane – East District

Sharon Foley Bushor – Ward 1

Max Tracy – Ward 2

Sara Moore - Ward 3

Kurt Wright – Ward 4

William “Chip” Mason – Ward 5

Karen Paul – Ward 6

Tom Ayres – Ward 7

Adam Roof – Ward 8

ADMINISTRATION: Miro Weinberger, Mayor

Bob Rusten, CAO

Eileen Blackwood, City Attorney

Brian Lowe, Mayor’s Office

Katie Vane, Mayor’s Office

Chapin Spencer, DPW

Rob Green, DPW

Marcy Esjberg, CEDO

David White, Planning & Zoning



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Beth Anderson, IT

Bill Ward, Code Enforcement

Patty Wehman, Code Enforcement

OTHERS PRESENT: Ron Ruloff

Sandy Wynne

WORK SESSION ON PERMIT REFORM

Prior to the City Council meeting a joint work session was held on permit reform. Mayor Weinberger explained homeowners and small business owners have found the permitting process in Burlington to be onerous. The system has been lacking. The hope is to make systematic improvements with outcomes and the total experience lining up with the city's standards. Beth Anderson, IT Director, spearheaded the collaborative effort.

Director Anderson reviewed the opportunities for improvement to the permitting process to include:

- Streamline the process and improve service levels.
- Create more of a customer centered focus across departments to make sure work is done with the thought of how the applicant is impacted.
- Improve interdepartmental cooperation.
- Improve technology with a new system that will do GIS mapping, complete inspections from the field, and allow online submissions and permits.
- Do regular review and update of codes and ordinances.
- Provide additional training and education for staff and the public.
- Enhance staffing levels to improve service levels and effectively implement recommendations.
- Co-locate departments and have shared office hours with Planning and Inspection Services.
- Ultimately have all functions within one area of responsibility.
- Streamline duplicate permits.
- Move the Unified Certificate of Occupancy (UCO) application within Planning & Zoning to be automatic at the end of the process once all work is complete.
- Increase the threshold for administrative review.
- Develop a better alternative for NA permits.
- Improve the process for scheduling inspections.
- Adopt the International Residential Code (apply building codes to single family houses for public health and safety).
- Within ISD offer over-the-counter permits for immediate action.
- Add a staff member to work the front counter to handle questions and application requests.
- Provide customer service training for staff.
- Do a customer survey on how the system is working to inform staff and the public on what to expect.
- Have more material available online. Have the material be more usable and educational.
- Notify customers of open permits that need to be closed.
- Consolidate fees. Ensure fee amounts cover costs.





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Director Anderson said estimated cost to implement the recommendations includes additional staffing, new technology, new education materials, and building a "one stop shop" experience. Cost will be offset by savings in staff time and efficiencies with the improvements. The Planning Commission and Public Works Commission are discussing the recommendations. Once accepted the recommendations will be brought to City Council for approval.

Director Anderson noted work is ongoing on improving the process for solar permitting and with BED to develop an implementation plan. Detailed recommendations for solar and historic preservation are forthcoming.

Councilor Bushor asked about the shift to planning staff versus code enforcement for CO inspections. Mayor Weinberger said at this point a shift is not proposed. The proposal is to take an incremental approach to explore having a unified permitting process. Planning Director, David White, explained on the planning side Planning & Zoning and Code Enforcement ensure what is built complies with the zoning permit. The recommendation from the consultant is to have the person reviewing the project and issuing the zoning permit doing the compliance as well. There would be a seamless connection between the two departments. Health and safety inspections would still be done by Inspections Services and Public Works. Councilor Bushor asked the percent of Code time spent on CO functions. Code Enforcement Director, Bill Ward, said one individual spends half their time on CO functions.

Councilor Deane asked if other cities doing similar streamlining were visited. Director White said the consultant, Matrix, offered some comparisons and there were visits and discussions with colleagues from other states to better understand the mechanics of the review process. Councilor Deane asked if the Division of Fire Safety was consulted on using the International Residential Code. Staff noted the IRC is not listed in the Fire Safety Code. There are other places in Vermont that have adopted IRC. Having IRC does not change what is done in Burlington, but is a simpler way to do what is required. Councilor Deane asked if the software will be customized or available commercially. Director Anderson said there are a number of software packages available on the market to provide a choice.

Councilor Hartnett mentioned seeing how surrounding communities do permitting for homeowners. Having one inspection by one inspector would solve lots of issues. "One stop shop" and extended hours are good ideas. One or two independent contractors and homeowners should be involved in the oversight. Director Ward said Burlington's inspection program has long dealt with single family houses, but the state inspection program does not. Many communities only have state inspection. Contractors who have only dealt with the state program are challenged by Burlington's standards. Other communities are developing agreements with the state to do single family house inspections to protect the housing stock Burlington has been protecting all along. South Burlington is following Burlington's path. The oversight committee includes key people in terms of resources for providing level of service. Director White added the Public Works Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council hold staff accountable. Mayor Weinberger said a way to make sure stakeholders are kept informed and have input will be taken under advisement. Councilor Hartnett clarified his suggestion did not imply the oversight committee needs to make sure staff is doing their job.

Councilor Roof asked for further explanation of the offset to the investment into the systematic improvements. Director Anderson said the Permit Tech position will lead to definitive changes to the workload demand on the customer service team at DPW and on the inspectors, and will allow meeting the requirements without additional expense. The scheduling



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software will provide time savings and lead to efficiencies. Current technology takes a lot of staff time due to inefficiencies in the system. The new technology will save time and move a lot of the work online so it will not be necessary to staff the front desk to accept applications and print permits. Savings will be seen over time. Also, when the public better understands what is expected there are fewer questions and more time available for staff to help in other areas. Having mobile solutions and inputting data in the field will save time. There are efficiencies using technology with communicating to the public. Mobile inspections are estimated to save three hours of time each week. Director White stressed the focus is not just on reducing costs, but on creating efficiencies and improving the level of customer service to give people what they need.

Council President Knodell asked how the multiple steps of requirements to simply install a fence will be addressed with the improvements. Director Ward said the technology and having the information and documents online will provide better communication and a simpler process. Each department has a different focus, but all are trying to streamline the process and communicate to the public what is needed in an uncomplicated way.

Councilor Shannon asked if Preservation Burlington and the State Historic Preservation Office were consulted on changes to the historic preservation standards. Director White said both offices were engaged in a general way.

Council President Knodell stated the goal is to clearly explain and simplify the process. City Council is involved in the ordinance portion.

There were no further comments. The work session ended at 7:22 PM.

