



INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning and Community Development Committee

FROM: Nora Gierloff, DCD Director

CC: Mayor Ekberg

DATE: July 26, 2021

SUBJECT: Community Development Update

ISSUE

Update on Department of Community Development (DCD) reorganization and progress in hiring.

BACKGROUND

The unknown effects of the COVID pandemic and concerns about reduced revenues were the backdrop to the development of the 2021-2022 City budget. Due to shifting priorities the job titles in the published budget and financial model in Eden vary, though they both show 28 funded full time equivalents (FTEs) for DCD and three frozen positions. Based on improving financial projections, in May the Council granted approval to unfreeze 2 positions (Associate Planner and Plans Examiner) and fill the Development Review Engineer early to cover an expected retirement. Originally streamlined sales tax funding was targeted to cover this increase, but currently Tukwila's American Rescue Plan Act funds are planned to be used.

The reorganization and hiring that I am proposing would result in 30 FTEs by hiring:

- 1 Code Enforcement Officer (offer accepted),
- 2 Associate Planners (1 unfrozen and 1 backfilling for Max Baker),
- 1 Plans Examiner (offer accepted),
- 1 Combination Inspector (still recruiting), and
- 1 Development Review Engineer (started 7/22).

We were not successful in hiring a Deputy Director and at this point I am not seeking to fill that position.

DISCUSSION

Technically DCD still has one frozen position, which would bring the Department's FTE total to 31. I would like to focus on filling the current set of positions, onboarding, and training that group before deciding where an additional staff person would make the most difference. It would be helpful if the Council could grant DCD that flexibility moving forward.

We have hired Kerry Murdock as our newest Development Review Engineer with a start date of July 22nd. He comes to us from a similar role in Federal Way and has previous experience with Seattle Public Utilities. We have brought him on prior to Joanna Spencer's anticipated retirement in September to allow for training and to try to capture some of the institutional knowledge we will lose with Joanna.

A prior employee, KC Ellis, will be returning as a Senior Plans Examiner after a few years with the Port of Seattle. We have made offers to an Associate Planner and Code Enforcement Officer and they are in the background check process. I'll follow up with more information when we have start

dates. We are currently interviewing for the second Associate Planner position and continuing to recruit for a Combination Inspector.

In addition to hiring I have done some reorganization in DCD, see attached organization chart. Max Baker has taken on the role of Development Supervisor (formerly Planning Supervisor) and current planners, development review engineers, and our urban environmentalist will all report to him. Nancy Eklund has filled the newly created Long Range Planning Manager role and will supervise the Transportation Demand Management program, recycling grants, and long range planners. The two of them will work in close collaboration to effectively oversee the Planning Division workload.

The department budget is approximately on track for this point in the year, though that has been hard to project forward due to the substantial cash outs for retiring employees, hiring for different positions than shown in the budget, the need to bring staff in above the midpoint of the salary range, and use of consultant contracts to cover vacancies in plan review and inspection services. However, we will track expenditures and report on this as we move through the rest of the year.

Onboarding and training the new staff will take another two to three months before they reach full productivity. We could expect a reduction in the permit backlog and an improvement in processing times within 4 to 5 months, assuming no additional vacancies.

Actions Taken to Improve Customer Service

- Opened the permit counter to walk in customers from 8:30-12 Monday through Thursday
- Resumed offering rental housing inspections
- Began offering online and in-person appointments to assist applicants with the permit system or general questions which applicants can self-schedule through the website
- Added a link to a customer feedback poll on our permit acceptance and issuance emails to applicants
- Updating the permit handouts and website to provide better direction to applicants
- Continue to cross train staff and document procedures to improve resiliency to unexpected events
- Continue to pursue an agreement with SeaTac for inspection back up to handle vacations and illnesses
- Continue working with TIS to improve the online permit submittal experience

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Two unfrozen positions are proposed to be funded through Tukwila's American Rescue Plan Act funds. Permit revenue continues to be strong at \$1,250,000 year to date.

RECOMMENDATION

Information only.

