



# INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning and Community Development Committee

FROM: Nora Gierloff, DCD Director

CC: Mayor Ekberg

DATE: April 27, 2021

SUBJECT: Development Permit Volumes, Review Status and Recommendations

**ISSUE**

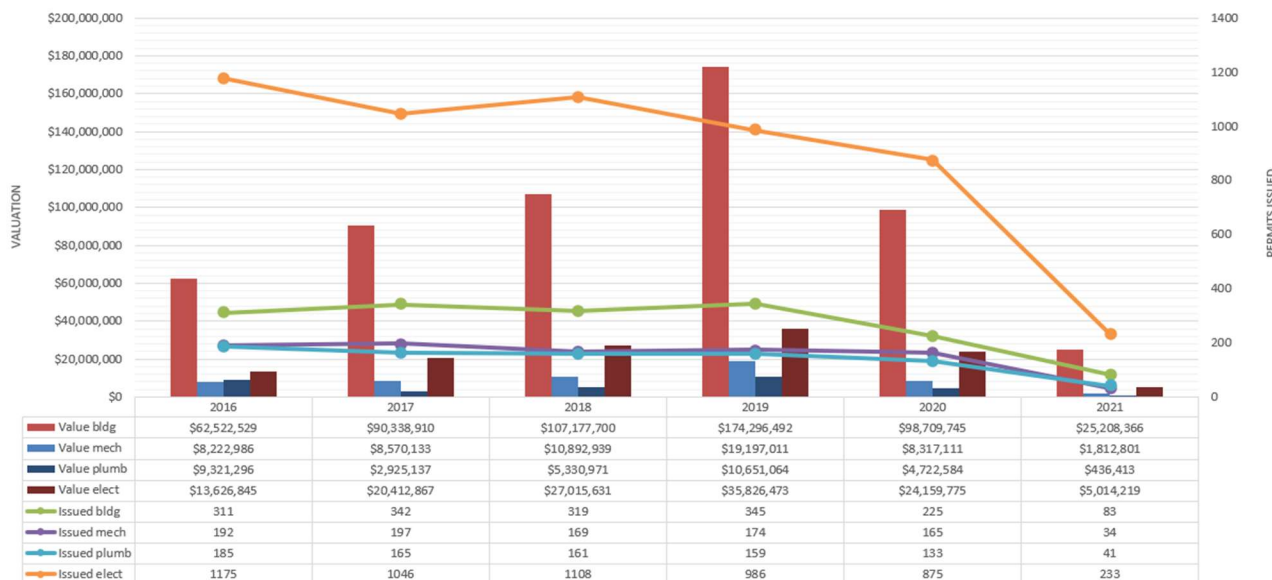
Timelines for review and issuance of both construction and land use permits have increased over the past year.

**BACKGROUND**

Permits related to construction include development (building), mechanical, plumbing, electrical, land altering, public works, and fire permits and are the focus of this memo. The Planning Division also processes land use permits, which include conditional use, design review, SEPA environmental review, special permission, and critical areas approvals which are facing many of the same processing challenges as described in this memo.

The graphic below shows that the number of mechanical and plumbing permits applied for was quite stable from 2016 through 2020. Building and electrical permit applications were fairly consistent, but then dipped in 2020. Building permit valuation showed a strong increasing trend through 2019 before dropping back to 2017-18 levels in 2020. This volatility is often driven by the timing of one or more large projects such as the Dermody Oxbow and Prologis warehouse developments.

Permit Trend by Permit Type  
2016 - 2021



The number of permits issued from January through April 2021 is similar to the pre-pandemic numbers for that period in 2019 and 2020.

**2019-2021 COMPARISON**

**JANUARY 1 – APRIL 20**

2021 ISSUED PERMITS - LAST UPDATED 4/20/2021							Select Date Range:	1/1/2021 - 4/20/2021	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 94	EL: 287	M: 49	PG: 49			
<b>621</b>	42.3 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$44,297,962	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 37	PWF: 16	F: 67	S: 19			
	30.7 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$1,006,141	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

2020 ISSUED PERMITS							Select Date Range:	1/1/2020 - 4/20/2020	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 68	EL: 262	M: 35	PG: 40			
<b>548</b>	28.7 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$39,590,743	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 33	PWF: 47	F: 45	S: 17			
	21.5 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$1,233,263	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

2019 ISSUED PERMITS							Select Date Range:	1/1/2019 - 4/20/2019	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 107	EL: 332	M: 54	PG: 51			
<b>659</b>	29.6 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$80,560,819	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 42	PWF: 46	F: 0	S: 25			
	16.6 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$2,140,329	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

The 2019 permit valuation and revenue numbers were outliers from Tukwila’s trends. 2021 numbers are on track to be near the average levels seen in prior years.

**2019-2021 COMPARISON**

**JANUARY 1 – DECEMBER 31 (\*2021 UPDATED TO APRIL 20, 2021)**

2021 ISSUED PERMITS - LAST UPDATED 4/20/2021							Select Date Range:	1/1/2021 - 4/20/2021	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 94	EL: 287	M: 49	PG: 49			
<b>621</b>	42.3 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$44,297,962	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 37	PWF: 16	F: 67	S: 19			
	30.7 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$1,006,141	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

2020 ISSUED PERMITS							Select Date Range:	1/1/2020 - 12/31/2020	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 257	EL: 861	M: 164	PG: 129			
<b>1,916</b>	41.6 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$258,764,984	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 117	PWF: 133	F: 205	S: 42			
	32.2 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$4,208,085	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

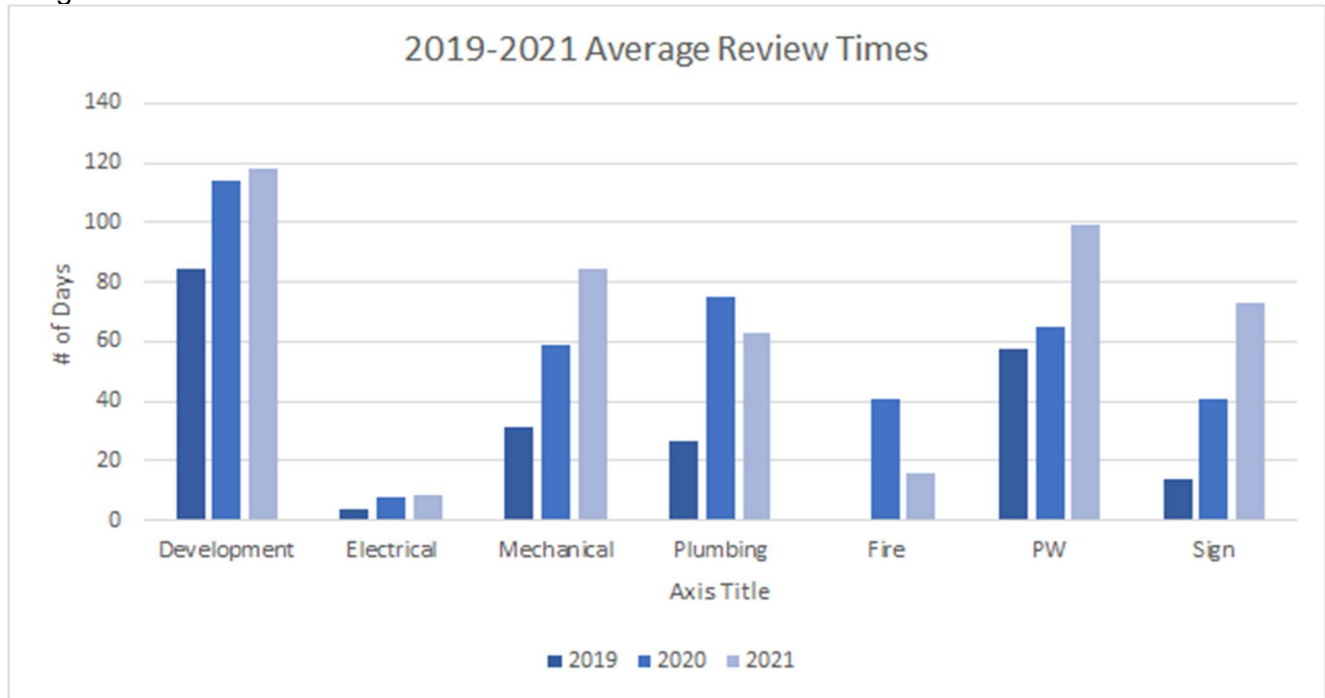
2019 ISSUED PERMITS							Select Date Range:	1/1/2019 - 12/31/2019	☰
PERMITS ISSUED	AVG DAYS TO ISSUE	PERMIT JOB VALUE	D: 372	EL: 1,030	M: 192	PG: 175			
<b>2,155</b>	29.3 DAYS TO ISSUE	\$217,446,717	DEVELOPMENT PERMITS	ELECTRICAL PERMITS	MECHANICAL PERMITS	PLUMBING PERMITS			
	AVG DAYS TO APPROVE	PERMIT FEES PAID	PW: 153	PWF: 148	F: 1	S: 80			
	17.9 DAYS TO APPROVE	\$7,380,632	PUBLIC WORKS PERMITS	FRANCHISE PERMITS	FIRE PERMITS	SIGN PERMITS			

**DISCUSSION**

On February 29, 2020, Washington Governor Inslee declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 23, 2020, Governor Inslee issued a statewide “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order which resulted in the closure of City Hall to the public and temporarily paused many construction projects.

One of the ways that the permitting departments (DCD, Fire and Public Works) responded to the crisis was by accelerating the transition to online permit submittal and review so that we could accept and issue permits remotely. While this was a long planned for improvement to customer service, implementing it on an abbreviated timeline in the midst of the other disruptions of the pandemic was a major effort that pulled staff away from permit processing. As shown in the data above, permit volumes did not slow down significantly in 2020 and therefore this transition contributed to a backlog of permits waiting for review.

Freezing the vacant Associate Planner position, staff furloughs, and letting go the extra labor planning intern were some of the measures taken in 2020 to reduce DCD’s budgetary expenditures in response to the financial impacts of the pandemic. While these measures were prudent in light of the uncertainty around the financial impact of the pandemic, they have also contributed to the permit backlog and significantly impacted permit review times as anticipated in the 2021-2022 DCD budget narrative.



These numbers show the overall time from permit application to issuance. For permits that require revisions in order to meet code requirements, some of that time is dependent on the applicant’s response time to the City’s correction letter(s). Architects, developers, and contractors have faced their own pandemic disruptions which in some cases has led to poor quality submittals or longer turnaround times.

Another unexpected event was the departure of three of the five members of the DCD leadership team during the early months of 2021, with a fourth now out on extended medical leave. We have appointed two staff into acting roles as an interim measure but that leaves them trying to fulfill two roles at once. Reduced staffing levels have resulted in a reduction of services due to the team’s reduced capacity.

Proposed Solutions to Improve Customer Service

- Allow DCD to rehire the frozen Associate Planner position
- Retitle the Planning Supervisor position as Development Supervisor to reflect the transfer of PW Development Review Engineers to the DCD permit team
- Recruit and hire for the vacant Deputy Director and Development Supervisor positions
- Send some development permits out for building code review by a consultant when review times for that division exceed targets
- Begin recruiting when notified of an impending vacancy rather than waiting to hire until the end of the vacation/sick leave cash out period, especially when we are “one deep” in that role
- Continue to cross train staff and document procedures to improve resiliency to unexpected events
- Continue to pursue agreements with neighboring cities for inspection back up to handle vacations and illnesses
- Continue working with TIS to improve the online permit submittal experience
- Improve the permit handouts and website to provide better direction to applicants
- Rehire the extra labor Planning Intern position if/when the frozen planner position is refilled
- Continue efforts to fill the vacant Building Division Plans Examiner and Inspector positions

If we are successful in recruiting appropriate candidates in this challenging hiring environment we could have positions filled in approximately three months. Onboarding and training would take another two to three months before new staff would reach full productivity. We could expect a reduction in the permit backlog and an improvement in processing times within 5 to 6 months, assuming no additional vacancies.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The proposed unfreezing of the vacant Associate Planner position would require applicable salary and employee related expenses to be added back to the DCD budget. Most of the other changes could be accomplished within the existing 2021 budget.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Information only. The Finance and Governance Committee held a discussion of service restoration priorities on April 26, 2021.