



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

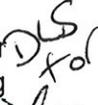
Planning for the Challenges Ahead



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**BOARD MOTION OF JUNE 20, 2011, AGENDA ITEM NO. 4
PERMIT AND LAND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS (PALMS) BRIDGE PROJECT
STATUS UPDATE**

This update is in response to the Board of Supervisors (Board) motion on June 20, 2011, directing the Department of Regional Planning (DRP) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) to provide a status report on progress made with the PALMS Bridge Project and improvements to the County's permitting system. DRP, in collaboration with DPW, Fire, Parks and Recreation, and Public Health–Environmental Health, has made substantial progress moving forward with the Bridge Project during the past 12 months. Some key accomplishments include

- Formed a Land Entitlement Stakeholder Committee to review the County's entitlement process and make recommendations for improvements. The Committee has conducted seven meetings to date and concurs with the major steps as outlined in its final report.
- Completed the Land Entitlement Process Review (PALMS Bridge Task 2.2) and commenced implementation of recommended improvements.
- Reorganized DRP to produce better plans, provide better customer service through alignment into geographic service areas, and improve efficiency.
- Enhanced case processing within DRP through implementation of the one planner/project model to ensure the same planner performs all case processing work for a project, including CEQA review.

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- Improved Field Office services by hiring an additional planner and began training staff to expand services offered in the field
- Submitted application to the Chief Information Office (CIO) for grant funding to continue with the PALMS Bridge technology improvements in videoconferencing, electronic plan submittal, and electronic plan review. Project funding is expected to be in place within the next 30 to 60 days

Each of these improvements is described in further detail within this report. Some improvements have been completed, while the more complex process changes may require a year or more to be implemented

Background

The purpose of the PALMS project is to identify, analyze, and recommend improvements to the business processes and supporting technology that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the County's entitlement, permitting, and land management functions. In June 2010, the County completed the first phase of the PALMS project with the publication of a Final Report. The Final Report made a number of recommendations for proceeding with implementation in the five PALMS departments (DPW, DRP, Fire, Parks and Recreation, and Public Health-Environmental Health). These recommendations focused on issues related to organization, process, and technology. The Final Report also included a proposed set of tasks, referred to as PALMS Bridge to Implementation, which would be necessary for implementation but do not require substantial financial investment in light of the County's fiscal climate. The PALMS Bridge Project centers on identifying organizational and process opportunities that can be pursued immediately. The PALMS Bridge Project incorporates key technology pilot projects which can be undertaken using the ECM infrastructure already installed at DRP. EMC Documentum, the County's ECM standard, is the platform utilized by DRP. The technology pilots include the creation of an electronic case filing application, electronic plan review, and markup of development plans as well as an electronic referral tracking system to ensure timely input on discretionary projects being prepared for hearing. These "proof of concept" pilot projects will be very useful in planning and executing the PALMS long-term technology recommendations.

Also in 2010, your Board approved fee increases for the various land entitlement and permitting services provided by DRP. As a condition for approving these fee increases, DRP was required to report back to the Board of Supervisors with recommendations for improving the land entitlement process. DRP was also charged with convening a committee of stakeholders in the land entitlement process and eliciting their comments and feedback on various organization and process improvements. DRP determined that the best way to meet the Board's directive was to combine the PALMS Bridge task for

Land Development (Task 2.2.2 – one of eleven proposed tasks for improvement) with the formation and participation of a Stakeholders Committee. The project began in July 2010 when DRP formed a Stakeholders Committee consisting of representatives from the building industry as well as the environmental community; participants included the Building Industry Association, Sierra Club, Santa Monica Mountains Resource Conservation District, planning/engineering consultants, Urban Land Institute, and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation. A total of six meetings were conducted between June and November 2010, each of the Stakeholders Committee meetings were supported by County technical staff from County Counsel, DPW, DRP, Fire, Parks and Recreation, and Public Health-Environmental Health. The first phase of this project was completed in December 2010 with the submission of a Final Report to your Board. In that final report, the Stakeholder Committee identified approximately 12 short- and mid-term improvements for the land entitlement process. Included in the list were improvements and technology pilots (such as ECM and videoconferencing) that were recommended by Woolpert in the PALMS Final Report and further elaborated in the PALMS Bridge to Implementation Project Proposal. DRP is making progress with the implementation of these improvements by working collaboratively with DPW, Fire, Parks and Recreation, and Public Health-Environmental Health. Approximate implementation schedules and details about each improvement are identified below. In addition to these initiatives to enhance the discretionary land use permit process, a number of initiatives to enhance the building permit customer service experience have also been undertaken or are planned to be developed over the next 18 months.

Reorganization of DRP

The intent of this improvement is to realign case processing staff into geographic service areas and initiate a focus on single-planner point of contact by moving the environmental review function from Impact Analysis to the case planner within the permitting sections. Benefits of this improvement include more consistent delivery of services, a single point of contact for cases, and consistent case oversight.

In the last 10 months, DRP has implemented a significant number of organizational changes to enhance operations. A geographic emphasis has been established and case processing functions have been realigned so that planners within each geographic area become the single point of contact for projects within that area. Long range planning assets are similarly aligned within each geographic team. DRP has completed the first stage of comprehensive training for all planners to improve effectiveness and service delivery in the new organization. The first training segment completed was a 2-day course covering the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This course was open to staff from a handful of departments who are DRP's counterparts in the CEQA process. Additional training on the Initial Study process is currently being provided by County Counsel.

Co-Location of County Departments

This improvement proposes to co-locate the DPW, DRP, and Fire sections and organizational units that are responsible for overseeing the land division process. The co-location effort would require the co-location team to identify the services to be provided, analyze potential co-location sites, address resource needs, and complete a move. The concept of physical co-location has been fully explored and has been determined to be infeasible at this time. However, DRP continues to explore other methods to improve service delivery, including expanding the suite of services provided in our field offices, which are in fact regionally distributed small-scale co-located offices, and increased use of technology to bring staff together in electronic forums. Both of these improvements can be implemented within a 6-month time frame.

Redefining "One Stop" Services

The land entitlement process can be redefined to provide new "One Stop" services at multiple points in the process. This would provide increased opportunities for collaboration, avoid mistakes and misunderstandings, and ensure better coordination of conditions of approval between departments. DRP has begun discussing the idea of providing more one stop opportunities in the land division process, as well as introducing one stops within the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process, with other departments using the Development Review Committee (DRC) as a forum. This improvement may be accomplished in a 6 to 18 month time frame, with a phased implementation.

Intake Improvements

There is an opportunity to greatly improve the case intake process, including the electronic capture of some submission documents, the creation of an electronic case intake pilot project and a workflow and electronic submission pilot project, development of financial and submission checklists, and elimination of the case processing backlog. Implementation of these items would result in a reduction of paper submissions, faster routing and better tracking of cases, reduced storage requirements, better understanding by applicants of fees and submission requirements, faster action on reviews, and shorter review periods. DRP is working with the CIO to secure funding to implement several pilot projects. Expected project kick-off is anticipated for August/September 2011 time frame with completion in 6 to 9 months. DRP has also identified other improvements that are independent of the pilot project. These improvements include the development of checklists for use in the application process, establishing the ability to accept credit card payments, and reducing the required number of map and site plan copies for land division and CUP cases (further discussed under the Internal Documentation section of this report). The implementation time frame for these improvements ranges from immediate to 18 months.

Application Review Improvements

This improvement would involve conducting a pilot project and formulating a change management plan for electronic plan review and markup. Other jurisdictions are already doing this successfully. The benefits of such an initiative would include testing the viability of electronic plan review and markup for multiple case types, preparing staff for a transition to electronic plan review and markup, and leveraging of the existing investment in ECM technology. Implementation time frame is 9 to 12 months.

Tentative Map Simplification

The Tentative Map Simplification Project would reduce the level of engineering detail required for Tentative Map submissions, develop a process for revising engineering details prior to Final Map approval, and improve the Subdivision Committee process and coordination between departments. This would create a more predictable process, reduce the time and cost required to complete the Tentative Map process, and improve opportunities for making desirable changes in projects. DRP has formed an inter-departmental working group to begin discussing how to proceed with implementation of this improvement and the Substantial Conformance Standards Improvement Project. Both of these projects are complex and will require the County to establish review criteria and decision parameters. These projects may require ordinance changes. Due to the complexity of each project, and the need to ensure that implementation is properly carried out, these measures are expected to take 18 months.

Substantial Conformance Standards

This improvement would define and document "Substantial Conformance" standards, provide both the applicant and the community an understanding of the rules, identify key measures of substantial conformance, and define "tolerance" values for substantial conformance determination. If implemented, this would reduce project "rework," reduce the number of hearings, reduce the time and cost to get projects to construction, provide continued conformance with good project standards and planning practices, and ensure better adherence to Conditions of Approval. This improvement is linked to the Tentative Map Simplification Project and shares the same project description and implementation time frame.

Fee Management

There are significant opportunities for improvement in DRP's fee management process. The time collection process for drawdown accounts can be enhanced through more detailed task tracking and implementation of daily or weekly time recording practices. DRP's fixed fee permits must also provide improved activity tracking and ongoing fee management practices must be developed. The implementation of these enhancements would provide more accurate accounting for direct costs and better reporting for drawdown accounts, forecasts for supplemental drawdown deposits, and fee increase

rationale. DRP has worked with the Auditor-Controller to identify time collection and recording improvements that can be implemented within eCAPS. These measures have been implemented. Further, DRP is in the process of identifying best practices relating to cash management procedures at its headquarters and field office locations. The implementation time frame for this component is 6 to 9 months.

Park Fee Calculation

A replacement for the current Park Fee Calculation Program used for land division cases must be developed by creating a new application using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. The primary benefit would be the ease of use and avoiding a pending system failure. DRP and Parks and Recreation have set up a project team to review the potential of using GIS to replace Parks and Recreation's existing database. The DRP GIS team has reviewed the existing database and process and is now working to develop a plan for implementation. The implementation schedule is 4 to 6 months.

Forms and Instructions

DRP needs to develop customer-oriented process documentation for all customer-facing processes, create a Web portal for forms and instructions, and develop customer entry versions with an online forms library (such as Adobe forms or ECM web forms). If implemented, this would result in less customer confusion and fewer questions, more complete and accurate submissions, less data entry, and an easier transition to full electronic submission. DRP's proposed technology project would pilot certain application forms as fully integrated e-forms, allowing application data to be entered by a user on DRP's external website and captured directly by a database. This has an implementation time frame of 6 to 16 months.

Internal Documentation

Cross department documentation of all processes needs to be developed and such documentation should focus on cross departmental activities. There is also a need to develop standards for service quality and responsiveness. A quality improvement and problem resolution group should also be formed. This would create a continuous improvement process and a more consistent service. DRP has been using the DRC as a forum to work with other departments to identify potential areas for improvement. Departments have already agreed to reduce required copies for Land Division cases from 30 to 5 and for CUP cases from 13 to 4. The departments are working toward fully electronic copies over time. The implementation for all improvements ranges from immediate to 16 months.

Referrals

There is a need to develop documentation of all referral requirements, establish standards for referral issuance and replies, and create memorandum of understandings (MOU) with referral agencies and a referral tracking mechanism with follow up. The benefits will include more consistent referral responses, improved turnaround time for referrals, and fewer last-minute referral processing. DRP has been using the DRC as a forum to discuss a MOU between departments to ensure that case materials referred out to each department will be returned to DRP, with comments, within the agreed-upon time frames. DRP and DRC are also working on Initial Study referral and preparation. DRP's proposed technology project would create a pilot system for referral management. The implementation time line for this improvement is expected to be 9 to 12 months.

Hearings

Standards must be created for electronic hearing packets. DRP will then begin production of electronic hearing packet materials by conducting a pilot project with one or more Regional Planning Commissioners. This would prepare for migration to full electronic hearing packet review and increased utilization of the new hearing room. DRP has created a project team that has been working to develop electronic hearing packets. An internal DRP website has been created for Planning Commissioner access. Implementation time frame for this improvement is immediate.

Performance Metrics and Measurement

There is a significant need to develop Performance Measurement standards for case processing. The primary benefit is the preparation for implementation of new systems and better performance monitoring. DRP has created a project team to develop draft performance standards and metrics. In addition, DRP's proposed technology project will include funding for the development of dashboards and other tools that will assist with performance measurement. The implementation time frame for all improvements is expected to be 6 to 12 months.

Current Building Permit Customer Initiatives

DPW continues to search for methods to facilitate the building permit process. Our efforts are focused on educating the public on the benefits of obtaining permits, reducing the time to process permit applications, and improving the coordination of agency submittals and approvals.

A website (dpw.lacounty.gov/bsd) has been created to provide the public with information on the latest building codes and requirements for plan submittal and permit issuance. The website also provides design professionals with a variety of forms and

publications including interpretative policies, agency referrals, plan correction sheets, and other pertinent information. This website is periodically updated with information and links related to the latest building trends such as green building systems.

To streamline permit processing we have developed the One Stop building permit center concept. The One Stop Centers are staffed with personnel from each of the key County permitting agencies (DPW, DRP, Fire, and Public Health-Environmental Health) to provide customers with a single location to ask questions, receive information, submit plans, obtain approvals, and receive permits. Currently, we have such facilities in Calabasas, East Los Angeles, Southwest, and now the Antelope Valley. We are planning on providing additional centers in the La Puente and San Gabriel Valley areas.

Technology solutions have also been developed to improve coordination between County agencies. We have deployed staff greeters in our One Stop locations to help answer questions and quickly direct customers to the appropriate agency. These greeters are equipped with the Queue-Man computer application to make sure customers are directed to multiple agencies in a pre-determined sequence and that the customers are assured of their appropriate place in line. The Queue-Man application also provides an effective means to share customer information and project requirements with each County agency to eliminate redundancy and save customer time. For County staff we have developed the Building Permit Viewer (BPV). The BPV is an interactive Google Map that displays a consolidated view of the Building Permit, Building and Safety/Regional Planning Code Enforcement system, Assessor's system, and DPW's Document Management system. Staff can assist customers with basic property and permit information quickly and easily. The BPV is undergoing enhancements to provide plan check status information so that staff can track the permit submittal through the entire plan check process.

For the public we have developed the online Property Locator application which allows a customer to enter an address and verify the property is in the unincorporated County and then receive a functional list of the names and addresses of appropriate County agencies. We are also in the process of electronically archiving all of the paper permits in Building and Safety. We currently have completed the scanning for two of our eleven offices. The goal is to be able to provide customers 24/7 access to existing building permit information without having to travel to our offices.

Planned Building Permit Customer Initiatives

The Development and Permit Tracking System (DAPTS) is the current computer-based permit application system used by DPW for managing building permits. Until an enterprise-wide PALMS project is implemented, DPW plans on developing a number of

system modernization enhancements to DAPTS. These enhancements are broken into two phases as follows:

Short-term 6 to 9 months

1. Collaborate with Internal Services Department to allow new computer applications to communicate with existing DAPTS mainframe system. This is the first step in linking the new customer service applications listed below with our existing permitting software.
2. Develop a pilot public internet version of the Building Permit Viewer application.
3. Collaborate with the Auditor-Controller to implement a pilot program for the acceptance of credit card payments in the East Los Angeles One Stop Center.

Medium-term 9 to 18 months

1. Create a pilot internet-based simple permit that will allow online permitting system for the application, payment, and issuance of simple permits for items such as water heaters.
2. Develop a pilot system to allow the public to view the status of various plan checking activities.
3. Develop a system linked to DAPTS for the tracking and viewing of inspection results.

Stakeholder Committee Update

A meeting of the Stakeholder Committee was held in early June. The meeting was used to update the Committee members on the progress of the various Implementation Projects and obtain feedback on some of the measures proposed. The meeting was very successful and provided a tremendous opportunity for valuable feedback. Another meeting of the Committee will be scheduled for later in the year.

PALMS Bridge Proposal

In its project proposal with the CIO, DRP has included a request to fund additional work that was recommended in the PALMS Final Report. The work that the Stakeholder Committee completed in 2010 addressed a major task relating to the land development process. However, several significant tasks remain, including the identification of

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customer service and process improvements for permitting, enforcement and inspections, cash management, and accounting. This work will be performed simultaneous to and in conjunction with the various pilot projects summarized earlier in this report.

Please let us know if you would like additional information. We would be happy to brief you in greater detail on any aspect of this process.

RJB DLS

c: Chief Executive Officer
Chief Information Office
County Counsel
Department of Parks and Recreation
Department of Public Health
Executive Officer
Fire Department