Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

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PERMIT AND LAND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS (PALMS) BRIDGE PROJECT STATUS UPDATE

This update is in response to your Board's 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, with quarterly reports thereafter A full report was provided to your Board on July 5, 2011, and an update on October 5, 2011, this is the second quarterly report.

DRP has continued to collaborate closely with DPW, Fire, Public Health (PH), and Parks and Recreation (Parks) to move forward with the Bridge Project and with implementing the recommendations of the Land Entitlement Process Stakeholders Committee (Stakeholders Committee) Some of the key accomplishments during the most recent quarter include.

- Formally commenced the next phase of the PALMS Bridge Project using $436,760 in funding from the Chief Information Office's Information Technology Fund

- Conducted a meeting with the Stakeholders Committee on November 30, 2011, to provide status updates on PALMS Bridge work and to have further discussion on expanded One-Stop Services, Conceptual Plan Review/Substantial Conformance, and Performance Measures.

- Conducted over 25 internal meetings with DRP staff and consultant team; conducted two meetings with consulting departments, including DPW, Fire, PH, and Parks.

- Completed the business modeling for land division and conditional use permit proof of concepts; the models include the entire process and interfacing with each of the consulting departments.

- Conducted several meetings with Internal Services Department to define and scope the PALMS videoconferencing pilot project.

- DRP announced that it has eliminated its zoning permit case backlog.

- DPW began providing an on-site engineer from its Land Development Division, one day per week, at the DRP headquarters office to facilitate enhanced collaboration, be available for inter-departmental meetings, and assist with counseling at the Land Development Coordinating Center.

- DPW has begun a pilot program to electronically plan check (ePlanCheck) storm drain and hydrology plans. This included the procurement of dual screen monitors, software, and upgraded desktop computers. This pilot has been well received by the consulting/engineering community processing submittals through Land Development Division.

- DPW has established an FTP link on its website to facilitate the transfer of large electronic files between the Land Development Division plan checker and the applicant as part of the ePlanCheck pilot program.

- DPW is continuing its efforts to make information readily available to the public and to provide the public more opportunities to communicate information regarding building code enforcement and property rehabilitation. These efforts were recognized with awards from the Quality and Productivity Commission and the National Association of Counties. In October, Building & Safety Division (BSD) completed the digitization of approximately 1 million pages of historic building permits. These documents are available for the public to view on-line at the Southwest District Building & Safety Office and will soon be made available on the Internet via the BSD website and the Building Permit Viewer.

- DPW's Building & Safety staff dedicated to the digital records project is in the process of scanning the permit documents located at the San Gabriel Valley Office.

- DPW's Building & Safety staff is collaborating with DRP staff to make their digital records and information currently contained in electronic Development and Permit Tracking System (eDAPTS) available to both staff and the public via the Building Permit Viewer application.

- DPW launched an enhancement to "The Works" iPhone application that allows the public to report code enforcement and property rehabilitation violations via their iPhone.

- DPW collaborated with Internal Services Department to allow new computer applications to communicate with the existing Development and Permit Tracking System (DAPTS) mainframe system database. This was the first step in linking new customer service applications with our existing permitting software.

- The following new customer service pilot applications are currently in various stages of testing and development: Building Plan Check Tracking; Plumbing, Electrical, and Mechanical Plan Check Tracking; and Permit Inspection Tracking. Once completed, these web-based applications will allow our customers to monitor the status of their projects through Internet access.

- DPW collaborated with the Auditor-Controller to implement a pilot program for the acceptance of credit card payments in the East Los Angeles One-Stop Center. The Treasurer and Tax Collector is expected to provide the credit card terminals by the end of this March 2012.

- DRP announced it will be providing expanded One-Stop Services in the Antelope Valley, Calabasas, East Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, and San Gabriel Valley field offices; the new services will be for ministerial projects only (at this time) and there will be no fee required.

- Continued development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) based solution to replace the existing park fee calculation methodology.

During the next quarter, the Bridge Project will conduct further business process reviews and identify best practice recommendations for permits, inspections, cash collection, and accounting. The proofs of concept for electronic submission, electronic plan review, and referral tracking will be completed and preparations made to roll out as pilot projects. Finally, videoconferencing pilot will be designed and preparations made for installation.

The following sections provide a summary of the PALMS Project history and further information regarding each implementation project as recommended by the Stakeholders Committee.

Background

In June 2010, the County completed the first phase of the PALMS project with the publication of a report by Woolpert, the firm retained by the County to conduct the study. 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. The Final Report made a number of recommendations for proceeding with implementation in the five PALMS departments (DRP, DPW, Fire, PH,

and Parks). 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 that can be undertaken using the Enterprise Content Management (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 your Board 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 your Board's directive was to combine the PALMS Bridge task for Land Development (Task 2.2.2 — one of 11 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 DRP, DPW, PH-Environmental Health, Parks, County Counsel, and Fire. 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 Stakeholders Committee identified approximately 12 short- and mid-term improvements for the land entitlement process. Included in this list are 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 implementation of these improvements by working collaboratively with DPW, Fire, Parks, and PH-Environmental Health. Approximate implementation schedules and details about each improvement are identified below.

Reorganization of DRP

This improvement realigned case processing staff into geographic service areas and initiated 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. 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.

Co-Location of County Departments

This improvement proposes to co-locate the DRP, DPW, 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 has explored other methods to improve service delivery; these methods include 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 will be implemented by June 2012 – the expanded field office services will commence at the beginning of 2012 and the videoconferencing project will be in place by June 2012.

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. Additionally, as this may involve additional fees the suggested approach would be to make it an optional process at the applicant's discretion, thereby paying a little more for additional services. This improvement may be accomplished in a 6 to 12 month timeframe, with a phased implementation.

Intake Improvements

There is an opportunity to greatly improve the case intake process, including electronic capture of some submission documents, the creation of an electronic case intake pilot project, the creation of 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 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. The implementation timeframe for these improvements ranges from immediate to 12 months. The case processing backlog has been eliminated and the PALMS Bridge Project includes a proof of concept for an electronic case intake process; this pilot will be in place before June 2012.

Application Review Improvements

This improvement includes another proof of concept project that would formulate a change management plan for electronic plan review and markup. Other jurisdictions are already doing this successfully. The benefits of the application review improvements initiative 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 timeframe is now 6 months as this will be in place by June 2012.

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 up to 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 timeframe.

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. Implementation of this would provide more accurate accounting for direct costs, better reporting for drawdown accounts, better forecasts for supplemental drawdown deposits, and better fee increase rationale. DRP has worked with the Auditor-Controller to identify time collection and recording improvements that can be implemented within the electronic Countywide Accounting and Purchasing System (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 timeframe for this component is 6 months; best practices and potential solutions will be identified as part of the current phase of PALMS Bridge, to be completed by June 30, 2012.

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 of this would be ease of use and avoiding a pending system failure. DRP and Parks have set up a project team to review the potential for using GIS to replace the existing database used by Parks. The DRP GIS team has reviewed the existing database and process; it 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 on-line forms library (such as Adobe forms or ECM web forms). If implemented, this would result in less customer confusion, fewer questions, better and more complete and accurate submissions, less data entry, and an easier transition to

full electronic submission. The PALMS Bridge Project includes a technology component that will 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 timeframe of 6 to 16 months; a majority of this work will be accomplished by June 30, 2012.

Internal Documentation

Cross-department documentation of all processes needs to be developed; 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 better and more consistent services. 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 12 months.

Referrals

There is a need to develop documentation of all referral requirements, establish standards for referral issuance and replies, create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with referral agencies, and to create a referral tracking mechanism with follow up. The benefits of this include more consistent referral responses, improved turnaround time for referrals, and fewer last-minute processing of referrals. 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 timeframes. DRP and DRC are also working on Initial Study referral and preparation. The PALMS Bridge Project includes a technology component that will create a pilot system for referral management by June 2012.

Hearings

Standards must be created for electronic hearing packets; DRP may 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. This improvement has been fully implemented.

Performance Metrics and Measurement

There is a significant need to develop Performance Metrics and 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. The PALMS Bridge Project includes a technology component that will include development of dashboards and other tools that will assist with performance measurement; this work will be completed by June 2012.

The next quarterly report regarding the status of the PALMS Bridge Project will be provided by April 5, 2012.

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

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