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, this is the fourth quarterly report.

DRP and DPW have continued to collaborate closely with 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:

- DRP has nearly completed work on developing pilot project applications for electronic project submittals, consulting agency referral management, electronic plan review and a performance management dashboard. Programming is complete; the proofs of concept are undergoing quality control and will be ready for deployment in July 2012.

- Conducted numerous internal meetings with DRP and DPW staff to discuss enhanced One-Stop services, Conceptual Plan Review, and Substantial Conformance.

- Conducted two meetings with the Development Advisory Group to discuss the County's subdivision process in comparison to other jurisdictions, particularly in relation to substantial conformance.

- Completed draft report containing best practice recommendations for Zoning Enforcement, Inspections, cash collection, and accounting.

- Began testing phase of pilot videoconferencing project at DRP headquarters.

- DRP continued permit tracking system research and conducted meetings with multiple vendors; evaluating solutions for possible pilot project evaluation.

- 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. We have also developed a customer survey to assess the success of the pilot program and to gauge the development communities' interest in continuing the pilot.

- DPW continued to implement the 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. The pilot program will be expanded to include electronic plan check of other types of improvement plans.

- 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 and 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 and Safety Office and will soon be made available on the Internet via the BSD website and the Building Permit Viewer.

- DPW's Building and Safety staff dedicated to the digital records project is in the process of scanning the permit documents located at the San Gabriel Valley Office. To accelerate this process, DPW has increased the use of contract staff and is expecting to complete the San Gabriel office paper permit digitization sometime in

2014. In addition to this, DPW is acquiring specialized equipment to allow the scanning of records previously placed on aperture cards and roll microfilm.

- DPW's Building and 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 implemented the first phase of the Plan Check and Inspection Tracking System on June 19, 2012. This system replaces four previous systems used for this purpose. It is actively linked to the Development and Permit Tracking System (DAPTS) with a two-way communication link that allows immediate update of data in DAPTS. The system is designed to provide e-mail notification of plan check completion. Following this, staff will begin working on phase two which will be an inspection tracking system.

- 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 program has been in operation for two months and is showing increasing popularity with the development and construction community. The Building and Safety Division is expecting to increase the program to the San Gabriel Valley Office by the fourth quarter of 2012.

- At the request of DRP, DPW is developing an FTP site that will allow DRP to scan their Conditions of Approval documents and upload those documents to the DPW Building Permit Viewer site. This will allow the documents to be tied to the particular parcel(s) and reviewed via the Internet.

- 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 proofs of concept for electronic submission, electronic plan review, and referral tracking will be fully deployed and project testing will begin. Additional testing with the videoconferencing pilot will also occur.

The following sections provide a summary of the PALMS Project history and further information regarding each implementation project as recommended by the Stakeholder 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 mark-up 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, with testing scheduled to begin in July 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, DPW, and the other departments have begun discussing how to provide more one-stop opportunities in the land division process, as well as introducing One-Stops within the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process. Since 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. The redefined "One-Stop" improvement may be accomplished immediately to a 12-month timeframe, with a phased implementation. Expanded one-stop services for certain ministerial cases were implemented in the Antelope Valley, East Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, and San Gabriel field offices in January 2012.

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 that is scheduled to begin testing with project data in July 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. This work is incorporated into the electronic submission pilot project and is scheduled to begin testing with project data in July 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, best practices relating to DRP's cash management procedures at its headquarters and field office locations are identified in the PALMS Bridge Report scheduled for release in July 2012 and will be further detailed in the next quarterly report.

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 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 work is incorporated into the electronic submission pilot project and is scheduled to begin testing with project data in July 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 Development Review Committee (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; work on the pilot will be completed by June 2012 and live project testing will commence immediately thereafter.

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 was completed in June 2012.

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

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