Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

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

On June 25, 2012, the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to report back with what is being done to improve the permitting system in Los Angeles County in light of all the fee increases that have been approved by the Board within the past two years and on the progress that is being made to make the County's permitting process business-friendly. Upon further discussion with Supervisor Antonovich's Office, the Board is seeking an update on the Permitting and Land Management Solutions (PALMS) project, including funding status. The Chief Executive Office and the Departments of Regional Planning (DRP) and Public Works, in collaboration with Fire, Public Health (DPH), and Parks and Recreation (DPR), have developed the following report in response to the Board's directive.

PALMS Project 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 2007, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors authorized the County to proceed with a Feasibility and Requirements Study (FRS) for permitting and land management functions.

In January 2009, after a competitive bidding process, the Board approved the awarding of a contract to Woolpert, Inc. to conduct the FRS. Over the course of 14 months, the PALMS team reviewed the organizations, processes, and technologies supporting the current permitting and land management functions within the County. More than 300 employees participated in more than 400 workshops and planning sessions to define and model 125 separate business processes.

In June 2010, the County completed the first phase of the PALMS project with the publication of the PALMS Final Report. The Final Report made a number of recommendations for proceeding with implementation in the five PALMS departments which include DRP, Public Works, Fire, DPH and DPR. These recommendations focused on issues related to organization, process, and technology.

Current PALMS Approach

The initial focus of the PALMS project was to develop a single system for the entitlement, permitting, and land management functions in Los Angeles County. Based on the recommendations of the PALMS Final Report and the complexity of individual departmental workflows, it has been determined that a system consisting of multiple commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) solutions, with an emphasis on open standards, interoperability, enterprise content management (ECM), and geographic information system (GIS) integration, will provide the County with the largest return on investment and create the greatest number of customer service enhancements.

PALMS Bridge to Implementation Project

The PALMS Bridge to Implementation project focused on identifying organizational and process opportunities, which could be pursued immediately without the requirement for a substantial investment in new technology. The objective of the Bridge project was to identify a set of immediate tasks that could keep the momentum of the PALMS project going while producing immediate opportunities for improvement. This project included five components:

- Stakeholder Committee: The main objective of the Stakeholder Committee was to provide feedback on a number of organizational, processes, and technology improvements identified during a review of the land entitlement process.
- Process Improvements in Enforcement and Inspections: The purpose of this task was to identify best practices in Zoning Enforcement and Inspection processes.
- Process Improvements in Cash Collection and Accounting: The purpose of this task was to identify best practices in Cash Collection and Accounting. This included cash receipts, deposits, daily balancing, refunds, drawdown accounts,

cost recovery, fee calculation, multidepartmental collections and account reconciliation.

- Enterprise Content Management (ECM) Technology Pilot Projects: The purpose of this task was to conduct a series of controlled pilot projects focused on new and promising technologies related to enterprise content management and permit-based workflows. In conjunction with other PALMS departments, DRP identified three activities to explore: electronic submission, document management and workflow, and electronic plan checking and markup.
- Videoconferencing Pilot: The purpose of this task was to create a virtual meeting space for the various PALMS departments and members of the public.

More information about the improvements made during the PALMS Bridge to Implementation Project can be found in the quarterly Land Entitlement Process Review Status Updates sent to the Board from December 2010 to July 2012.

Regional Planning: Current Status

In addition to the work completed in the PALMS Bridge to Implementation project, DRP has continued to collaborate closely with the other PALMS departments to complete other objectives established by the Stakeholder Committee and Land Entitlement Process Review. Notable examples include the geographic alignment of DRP's business units, expansion of One-Stop services, improvements to the subdivision process, streamlined internal documentation, and enhanced distribution of hearing packets and case material. Background information for the above projects can be found in the quarterly Land Entitlement Process Review Status Updates sent to the Board from December 2010 to July 2012.

Customer Service Enhancements

DRP continues to make customer service a priority, focusing on key initiatives and enhancements, including:

- Expansion of One-Stop services for Land Division cases and the introduction of One-Stop services for other permit types, such as Conditional Use Permits (CUP).
- The reduction of the number of paper copies from 30 to 5 for Land Division cases and from 13 to 4 for CUPs and continued to work toward a fully electronic process.
- The synchronization of public counter hours with Public Works at shared facilities. This schedule supports the expansion of services offered at the field offices, including the on-site processing of additional permit types.

- The implementation of several technology pilot projects that focus on technology and workflows that eliminate the need for paper files, including electronic plan review, digital referral management, and enhanced collaboration tools.
- The upcoming ecommerce initiative that enables members of the public to pay for fees and services with credit or debit cards.
- The implementation of the "One Planner, One Project" initiative in which a single planner is assigned to a case from project inception through final decision.
- Improved public meeting/hearing technology and workflows, including webcasted public hearings, the availability of real-time captioning, freely available public meeting electronic transcripts, and digital distribution of meeting/hearing packets.
- Improved video conferencing capabilities in DRP's hearing and meeting rooms. This improvement enables staff to spend more time in the field and access more accurate and detailed information remotely, reduces or eliminates the need to take physical files into the field, and reduces cost to the County through travel avoidance.
- Improved mobile technology options for field staff. This improvement enables field staff to spend more time in the field and reduce travel costs.

Regional Planning: Future Outlook

The lessons learned from the PALMS Bridge to Implementation project as well as other improvements identified by the Stakeholder Committee and Land Entitlement Process Review created a roadmap for the development of a new land development permitting and inspection tracking system (Kiva replacement system). The Kiva replacement system will be comprised of a COTS system that adheres to the best practices established by the PALMS Final Report and Current PALMS Approach section of this report. Additionally, the Kiva replacement system will enhance existing workflows and procedures by providing County staff with tools that streamline the land development permit and inspection processes. Key features of the Kiva replacement system include:

- Electronic submission of applications, maps and plans, and other supplemental documentation.
- Enhanced accounting and fee management, including detailed activity reports.
- Improved workflow and task management, including referral management and interagency collaboration tools.
- Electronic plan checking and review tools.
- Detailed reporting tools, including the ability to view real-time project or case statistics.

Projected Cost
The Kiva replacement system will be split into three manageable phases, spread across two fiscal years. The total cost for implementation is expected to be $2,000,000, which represents the Department's total comprehensive solution cost.

Funding Status
DRP is currently exploring multiple funding sources for the implementation of the proposed Kiva replacement system. DRP anticipates initiating the request for proposal (RFP) process once funding is identified.

Public Works: Current Status

Public Works has implemented certain enhancements in our permitting and plan check process in line with the PALMS Bridge to Implementation project. Land and building information from several systems, such as the Development and Permit Tracking System (DAPTS), Document Management System, Code Enforcement and Property Rehabilitation, and DRP's case data from the Electronic Development and Permit Tracking System, and suspected violations from the Report-A-Violation website can now be accessed and viewed from one site via the Building Permit Viewer.

Customer Service Enhancements
The following enhancements have been implemented to improve both staff efficiency and customer service. These enhancements have been done within current budgets.

- The placement of an onsite engineer from Public Works' Land Development Division, one day per week, at DRP's Headquarters office to facilitate enhanced collaboration, be available for interdepartmental meetings and assist with counseling at the Land Development Coordinating Center. We also developed a customer survey to assess the success of the pilot program and to gauge the development communities' interest in continuing the pilot.
- The implementation of the pilot program to electronically plan check (ePlanCheck) storm drain and hydrology plans. This included the procurement of duel 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.
- The creation of an FTP link on Land Development Division's website to facilitate the transfer of large electronic files between the Land Development Division's plan checkers and applicants as part of the ePlanCheck pilot program.
- Simple permits, such as applications for utility cut permits, have been made available online using our SPATS system.

- Continued expansion of readily accessible 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. Public Works' Building and Safety Division has completed the digitization of approximately 1.3 million pages of historic building permits. Currently, these documents are available for the public to review online at Building and Safety Division's Southwest District Regional office and the Lomita office. This information is also available on the Internet via the Building and Safety-Building Permit Viewer website.
- Building and Safety Division is currently expanding the digital records to include the San Gabriel Valley Region office. We expect to make the San Gabriel Valley Region office's paper permits available online by February 2013. Public Works has also acquired specialized equipment to allow the scanning of records previously placed on aperture cards and roll microfilm.
- Building and Safety staff has collaborated with DRP staff to make their digital information currently contained in the eDAPTS available to both staff and the public via the Building Permit Viewer application.
- Implementation of Building and Safety's Plan Check Tracking System. This system consolidates four previous systems used for plan check tracking into one single system. It is actively linked to the DAPTS with a two-way communication link that allows immediate update of data in DAPTS. To further enhance customer service, the system is designed to provide e-mail notification to customers of plan check completion.
- Building and Safety collaborated with the Auditor-Controller to implement a pilot program for the acceptance of credit card payments for permits in the unincorporated County only in the East Los Angeles One-Stop Center. The program has shown increasing popularity with the development and construction communities and a reduction in the number of nonsufficient funds checks received. Building and Safety has expanded this program to the San Gabriel Valley office. This program will be expanded to include the La Puente office by the first quarter of 2013.
- Building and Safety also completed the remodeling of the Antelope Valley Regional office into a One-Stop Center where customers can see representatives from Building and Safety and DRP, Fire, and Public Health. This adds another One-Stop Center to our existing centers at East Los Angeles, Southwest Region, and Santa Clarita.
- Building and Safety also developed a Report-and-Document Service web page that allows staff to post reports from DAPTS to a web page that is accessible to our client cities and other stakeholder agencies for download.

Public Works: Future Outlook

Public Works continues to develop and implement enhanced services for our customers and stakeholders. Some of these enhancements will include:

- Continued work on preparing the paper permit records for scanning to include the La Puente and South Whittier District offices.
- Expanding the acceptance of Visa and MasterCard to all remaining County Building and Safety offices over the next 12 months.
- Investigation of the feasibility of remodeling the current facility to allow for the implementation of a One-Stop Center at the San Gabriel Valley Regional office (Arcadia).
- Creation of an inspection tracking system, which allows real-time communications with our customers.
- Enhancing our Building Permit Viewer to allow DRP to post documents to the system. This will allow the public to view key documents associated with their projects.
- Enhancing the Building Permit Viewer to include a tab where reports, commonly requested by the public, will be accessible for downloading and printing at no charge.
- Implementation of electronic plan checking for all subdivision improvement plans.

These enhancements represent the future outlook for the next 12 to18 months. There will be additional customer service and IT initiatives developed (scope undetermined at this time) to build on the success of these incremental components, all of which are intended to address the intended outcome of the PALMS project in an incremental approach within year-to-year budgetary constraints.

Projected Cost
The projected cost for the implementation of these enhancements is yet to be determined.

Funding Status
These enhancements are being funded through a variety of existing Public Works funding sources.

Fire: Current Status

The Department continues to be an active participant in the PALMS Bridge to Implementation project. At this time, most of the Department's efforts have been focused on improving the Land Development Unit (LDU) business processes and

workflow, participating in the enhanced subdivision review process, and having Department personnel participate in One-Stop services related to Zoning Permits/CUP approval.

Customer Service Enhancements

- Modified business processes to accommodate the expansion of One-Stop services.
- Installation of multiple 24-inch monitors at each plan checker's work station to enhance plan checker's ability to review electronic plans.
- Streamlining of internal document distribution between County agencies.
- Electronic review of subdivision projects and submission of reports.
- Providing a Department representative at the One-Stop for review of Zoning Permits/CUP projects.
- Additional customer service enhancements that are in progress include:
    1. Purchasing web cameras so personnel can participate in video conferencing.
    2. Upgrading computers to support multiple monitors and enhance digital plan review.
    3. Completing modifications to office space to develop a professional environment for video conferencing.

Fire: Future Outlook

While the Department continues to enhance our land development and other closely related processes, we still see tremendous potential for PALMS growth in other divisions/sections of the Department. These include:

- Environmental Impact Reports, Oak Tree Permits, and Fuel Modification Plans (Forestry Division).
- Environmental Impact Reports (Health Hazardous Materials Division).
- Building, Sprinkler, and Fire Alarm Plan Check (Engineering Section).

To date, the Department has not identified appropriate COTS software to support these operations. However, we remain open to testing and/or piloting COTS software that have been identified by other Departments.

Projected Cost

The projected cost for the implementation of these enhancements has yet to be determined.

Funding Status
The Department has funding available to make modest improvements to hardware and software that will support PALMS. Funding for COTS software that will support multiple Departments' processes will need to be examined as a group as a larger funding source or potential grant may need to be identified and applied for. Oftentimes, the greatest annual expense related to software purchases are related to multiple users and licensing fees.

Public Health/Environmental Health: Current Status

As the County moves forward with the implementation of the PALMS Bridge project, the Department of Public Health (DPH) remains committed to actively participating in the improvement project initiated by DRP to enhance the County's land entitlement review process. The improvements that are beneficial to DPH's involvement in the land entitlement process include videoconferencing, conducting electronic plan review and markup, and participating in One-Stop services for conditional use permits and subdivisions.

Customer Service Enhancements

- One-Stop services for Land Entitlement projects provide applicants with early knowledge of conditions of project.
- Expanded customer communication including video conferencing.
- Utilizing electronic plan submission provides applicants with faster turnaround times and cost savings.

Public Health/Environmental Health: Future Outlook

On August 21, 2012, the Board of Supervisors approved the implementation of Environmental Health's new permitting and inspection data management system, EnvisionConnect (EC). The primary goal of the EC project is to automate all of Environmental Health's permitting and inspection functions and manage all of the data into a single, consolidated database. With EC, Environmental Health can share information with other departments and access external system data regardless of how the data structure is provided. With a centralized data management system combined with web-enabled capability, EH can improve business processes and increase customer service.

Projected Cost
To participate in the initial improvement project to enhance the County's land entitlement process, DPH projects the initial cost to be less than $100,000.00. The future costs associated with the sharing of information utilizing the new PH Envision

Connect software system will need to be quantified and cannot be determined at this time.

Funding Status
Once this cost is determined, it can be recovered through the permit and license fees assessed by DPH.

Parks and Recreation: Current Status

In addition to collaborating with other County Departments to complete the PALMS Bridge project, DPR reviewed its legacy system, FoxPro Quimby, currently being used to track residential subdivision land entitlements and Quimby Act compliance. This involves monitoring park and trail conditions of map approval, collection and receipt of Quimby fees, issuing final map clearance reports, budgeting and accounting for Quimby expenditures, and managerial reporting. DPR is working with Internal Services Department to acquire a cost estimate to rebuild the application using a web-based technology to streamline internal and interdepartmental processes and enable sharing of common data.

Customer Service Enhancements

- In addition to improved work flows and shorter service delivery times from a new and seamlessly integrated Quimby database, DPR will be submitting recommendations to amend the Quimby ordinance to use American Community Survey (ACS) data as it becomes available from the United States Census Bureau, instead of data available on a 10-year cycle from the Decennial Census for household densities. Updating the estimated household densities on a more regular basis enables Quimby parkland obligations and in-lieu fees to accurately track and reflect population changes in DPR's Park Planning Areas.

Parks and Recreation: Future Outlook

DPR will continue to determine business requirements and finalize the document to start the rebuilding efforts. Some of the application development phases include:

- Rebuild and reengineer the 20+ years old FoxPro Quimby application onto a more robust environment and with scalable technology.
- Application enhancements to Quimby fee collection and receipt processes (e.g., ability to accept credit card payments and issue e-receipts), improvements to budgeting and monitoring Quimby expenditures to conform to legally-mandated requirements;

- Improve workflows, reduce redundant tasks, and enhance interagency collaborations by providing an Extract-Transfer-Load (ETL) mechanism and/or Application Programming Interfact (API) to integrate with PALMS and/or eCAPS allowing sharing of common data and eliminating double entries.
- Implementation of Electronic plan checks and review tools.

Projected Cost
Preliminary cost estimate per Internal Services Department is in the range of $350,000 to $500,000 for the replacement of the current Quimby application. The future system integration cost for a comprehensive enterprise solution to include other County Departments is to be determined.

Funding Status
Additional funding for the enterprise solution will be required to bring the project to fruition. DPR is currently exploring multiple funding sources and is strategizing with the CIO and other Departments for a possible share of cost for a portion of or full implementation of this project.

Closing
Please let us know if you have any questions or your staff may contact Dennis Hunter of Public Works at (626) 458-4006 or dhunter@dpw.lacounty.gov, or Dennis Slavin of Regional Planning at (213) 974-6407 or dslavin@planning.lacounty.gov.

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