

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

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Streamlined permit process improves Hampton's ability to assist developers, contractors

Feb 10, 2016 – Centralizing Hampton's development permitting into one place has streamlined the process for developers, City Council was told at a morning briefing. And standards created to make sure reviews are conducted promptly are being met between 87 percent and 99 percent of the time.

Hampton started work on the next generation of a central permits office – now known as the Development Services Center – in 2012. At the time, the city heard concerns from developers that Hampton's processes were time-consuming, inconsistent and had not kept pace with new technologies.

Land development has become much more complicated for developers, homebuilders, contractors and do-it-yourselfers. Requirements recommended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as well as state and federal environmental regulations, have been instituted to reduce the impact of flooding and to reduce harmful effects of development on the environment. A byproduct of those changes is that everything from building new subdivisions to adding a deck on a house has become more complicated - especially in low-lying and waterfront areas of the city.

The city brought in customers and an outside consultant to address concerns and improve processes. Today, Hampton's Development Services Center is a one-stop shop. All permits – zoning, site plan, codes, utility, fire, stormwater and wetlands – are in one place. Trained project managers help customers through the myriad of requirements and provide information and advice.

Although the office is housed in the Community Development Department, it works across various departments, with contributions from Public Works, the city attorney's office, Economic Development, IT and the 311call center.

An online system streamlines much of the paperwork. Site plans can be submitted and reviewed online. And inspectors in the field report real-time results of inspections so contractors know when they can schedule the next phase of their work.

“Our Development Services Team is committed to delivering superior service,” said Community Development Director Terry O’Neill. “We understand we live and work in a rapidly changing world and therefore we must be committed to adapting to our customer’s needs through a process of continuous assessment and improvement.”

In fiscal year 2015, the first full year of operation, the new center issued:

- 978 residential building permits (99 new single family homes)
- 339 commercial building permits
- 1,274 mechanical permits
- 1,256 electrical permits
- 818 plumbing permits

Standard delivery times have been instituted, with many times considerably shorter than what's allowed by the state:

- Zoning review of all building & zoning permits – 2 calendar days
- Residential building plan review – 7 calendar days
- Commercial plan review – 24 calendar days
- Commercial tenant build-out – 10 calendar days
- Site plan review – 30 days per submission (permitted 60 by state law)
- Subdivision review – 30 days per submission (permitted 60 by state law)
- Property line adjustment – 10 days per submission (permitted 60 by state law)

Computer systems track the office's on-time performance. For example, the zoning reviews for FY15 were within the 2-day window 99 percent of the time. Tenant build-out, site plan and subdivision reviews were 100 percent within the time window. Residential and commercial building review times lagged only slightly, with 87 percent and 94 percent on-time performance in FY15. The team seeks customer feedback through surveys and informal discussion, keeping a focus on continuous improvement, said O'Neill.

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