Legislation Details (With Text)

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Type:	Consent Calendar Item	**Status:**	Passed
File created:	3/28/2023	**In control:**	Permit and Resource Management
On agenda:	5/16/2023	**Final action:**	5/16/2023
Title:	Permit Sonoma Management Review Revised Implementation Timeline and Approach		
Sponsors:	County Administrator, Permit and Resource Management		
Indexes:			
Attachments:	1. Summary Report.pdf, 2. Att 1 BerryDunn Management Review Final Report.pdf, 3. Att 2 Implementation Schedule, 4. Att 3 ACEC Recommendation Letter.pdf, 5. Att 4 March 7 2023 Presentation		

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
5/16/2023	1	Board of Supervisors	Approved as recommended	Pass

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): County Administrator's Office, Permit Sonoma
Staff Name and Phone Number: Yvonne Shu 565-1739, Tennis Wick 565-1925, Scott Orr 565-1754
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:
Permit Sonoma Management Review Revised Implementation Timeline and Approach

Recommended Action:
Receive revised Management Review Implementation timeline and approach from Permit Sonoma.

Executive Summary:
A formal management review of Permit Sonoma was completed in January 2023. This item features the high-level implementation schedule that Permit Sonoma has developed to address the recommendations from the management review. Once approved, Permit Sonoma anticipates that their implementation schedule will take 18 months, with most technical updates occurring within the first year and the recommended ongoing efforts commencing thereafter. A public facing dashboard will be maintained to communicate progress to the Board and public.

On March 7, 2023, the Board directed staff to return with a consent item that adds the following additional information:

- Address American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) comments
- Customer Service Committee customer member List
- Additional information on the structure of third-party plan check contracts

Staff is presenting the revised implementation timeline and approach which includes additions to the Discussion section, Customer Service Committee overview, and Resources section to address comments and direction received on March 7, 2023 during the Board's review of the implementation timeline and identified

additional resources to execute improvements.

Permit Sonoma has advanced several already in process initiatives since the last meeting, such as the rollout of Digital Plan Room for permit review, but these are not reflected in the attached timeline.

Discussion:
The Sonoma County Administrator's Office (CAO) periodically conducts department reviews to evaluate County departmental programs, operational, and organizational effectiveness, and last year Permit Sonoma was the department selected for review. The consultant, Berry Dunn McNeil & Parker LLC (BerryDunn) delivered the results from their management review of Permit Sonoma to the Board of Supervisors on January 31, 2023.

Implementation Schedule

BerryDunn recommended 15 initiatives for consideration.

1. Expand instant issuance of over the counter (OTC) permits and implement an express permits program

2. Create and publish application response and review time frame targets

3. Consolidate and standardize Accela statuses (Accela is the online permit portal)

4. Expand use of task functionality in Accela and implement due date tracking

5. Expand online submittal, electronic review, update required fields and status inquiry

6. Establish contracts with third-party plan reviewers to provide as-needed supplemental review assistance

7. Implement a checklist-based review and resubmittal process for plan review

8. Manage time accounting in Accela and develop a policy for plan review time tracking

9. Modify and promote third-party review process for select application types

10. Implement a self-certification program for select application types

11. Establish a customer service framework

12. Centralize process improvements and establish a governance process

13. Develop standard operating procedures and training materials

14. Provide opportunities for customers to learn about the Permit Sonoma process

15. Standardize division and section structure

Permit Sonoma supports all of the recommendations and has provided a high-level implementation schedule for the 15 initiatives and 110 tasks contained within the report (**Attachment 1**). The schedule may need to be updated after June budget discussions.

The 15 initiatives encompass three broad categories that serve as the foundational goals for successful implementation: Efficient Permitting, Organizational Excellence, and Maintenance of Existing Operations

During Implementation.

Efficient Permitting

Increase the efficiency and ultimately the speed at which permits can be attained by members of the public looking to develop property. This includes efforts such as standardizing permit reviews, workflows, and submittal processes, as well as updating county code to streamline permit approval sequences.

Organizational Excellence

Increase the ability of the public to track their permit in the process, understand what is being required and why, and better estimate on how long it will take to complete the process. While permitting often includes extremely technical information, it should be easy to view the status of a permit and see where it is in the review cycle. A successful organization also builds process improvements into its core mission, similar to the County's Five-Year Strategic Plan.

Maintenance of Existing Operations During Implementation

Increase capacity and decrease interruptions to essential services. This effort will require significant time investments of staff with direct working knowledge of existing practices, critical thinking ability, and dedication to overcome technical setbacks. It would undermine the goals of this effort to backslide in permitting efficiency and transparency while we are dedicating existing resources to process improvements.

American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) Recommendations

On March 6, 2023, the American Council of Engineering Companies California North Coast Chapter provided a comment letter regarding the management review. Their comment letter addresses six specific initiatives and provides requests for each one of the six. For Initiatives, 6 and 10, the request is to implement and fund. For Initiatives 1, and 9, the request is to implement, fund and expand. For Initiatives 2 and 7, the request is to implement and fund with specific modifications.

The modifications for Initiative 2 include evaluating how many applications can be processed by staff in a defined time period, to set plan review time frames by application type, and implement the action plan when the number of applications exceed staff capacity.

The modifications for Initiative 7 include have each plan review comment reference the code section that is the basis for the comment and comments should be based on code requirements not staff's satisfaction with the design.

Management supports the ACEC recommendations and are taking steps implement the Initiative's and the recommended modifications.

Schedule Overview

Permit Sonoma intends to initiate 26 of the 110 tasks in the first month of implementation after receiving Board approval of the methodology and resource allocation. These tasks include developing new policy for express permitting (1.1), assigning a team to implement the policy (1.2), a review of existing timeline and status data (2.1, 2.2, 3.1), contract procurement (6.1), and developing a checklist for a standard application format (7.1). The remaining 84 tasks will follow the implementation schedule (**Attachment 2**) and are anticipated to take approximately 18 months for full implementation.

The implementation rollout will include the creation of a number of teams, primarily identified from existing staff, as identified in the following initiatives: Expand OTC and Express Permits (1), Expand Task Functionality and Due Date Tracking (4), Expand Online Submittal, Electronic Review, Required Fields, and Status Inquiry (5A -D), Centralized Improvements and Governance (12), and Standard Operating Procedures (13).

Team needs identified by the report include an Express Permitting team, Customer Service Committee, Process Improvement Team, Accela Improvement Team, and Standard Operating Procedure team.

Permit Sonoma sees value in consolidating the total number of teams from 5 to 3 to create a core group that is responsible for focusing on process improvements, rather than spreading out the tasks across a larger proportion of the organization, to balance resources between daily business and these initiatives. Upon creation, each team will assess the implementation responsibilities (**Attachment 2)** and build out a meeting schedule, individual staff assignments, and specific deadlines related to the schedule, such as September 15 instead of Month 3.

The **Customer Service Committee** will be a combination of staff, department leadership, and engaged customers. The foundation of this team exists currently as the Director's Advisory Group, but within the first month of implementation, Permit Sonoma will update the roster to serve as one of the core pillars for the changes to come. This committee is critical to establishing a feedback loop for continuous process improvement, where challenges are discussed, solutions proposed and implemented, refinements are made, and then continually repeating the process.

Recommended Customer Member List

Name	Affiliation
Steve Brown	Adobe Engineering
Adriana Reyes	Munselle Engineering
Daniel Strening	Architect
Demae Rubins	Summit Engineering
Elsa Frick	Professional REHS
Jerry Eddinger	Eddinger Enterprises
Jessica Chavez	BC Engineering
Michala Tarara	SC Barns
Neil Peoples	Architect
Patrick Alcayaga	
Ryan Gleason	Brelje and Race Engineering

The **Express Permitting Team** will be a multidisciplinary working group dedicated to maintaining a high level of service during the implementation of the consultant recommendations. The team will include representatives from permit intake, building, engineering, and planning sections that will conduct simultaneous review on projects. These disciplines are the primary sections responsible for building permit review, and this team will be needed to offset staff being assigned to process improvements.

The Process Improvement Team, Accela Improvement Team, and Standard Operating Procedure Team will be consolidated into the **Process Improvement Team**. The Process Improvement Team will be the primary group tasked with implementing the consultant recommendations. While there is some overlap, this team at its most basic level will identify solutions to the challenges outlined in the BerryDunn report, work with our Accela consultants on implementation, and then write the SOP manuals for proper implementation. There is immediate benefit to writing SOP manuals, but this work would be duplicative if the process improvements and Accela workflows are successfully updated.

Resources

BerryDunn identified several factors that will determine the success of these initiatives. These factors are executive support to allocate county resources, including appropriate staff, third-party resources, a structured project management methodology, and a champion to increase the likelihood of initiative success.

Staffing

Permit Sonoma is recommending the addition of 6.0 FTE positions to support a successful implementation of the BerryDunn recommendations. After the Board has the opportunity to review the project management methodology and timeline today, Permit Sonoma will return with position allocation details and a budgetary request during the FY 2023-24 Budget Hearings in June. It is anticipated that with successful implementation of the report that there may be a need for position attrition over time, due to a combination of more efficient processing and code updates resulting in a reduced staff workload.

1.0 Assistant Director. During the Board's recent evaluation of the Permit Sonoma Director's performance, there was consensus that the Director's current span of control is not sustainable. Ten years ago, the department had an $18 million budget and 90 employees in three divisions. Today the department relies on a $60 million budget to fund 208 employees in six divisions. New areas of focus, including the Fire Prevention and HAZMAT functions formerly housed in the Fire and Emergency Services department, as well as new programs, such as cannabis regulation, have been added to Permit Sonoma over the past decade. As the department mission has become more complex and sizeable, the Director needs an assistant to support day-to-day operations so he can focus on policy, strategy, and overall organizational development. The added support will ensure continuation of department operations while the management review is implemented. This position will also model the Best Management Practice example of San Diego County referenced in Initiative 15 of the BerryDunn report, that directs Permit Sonoma to work with Human Resources on an organizational structure to implement the plan. An Assistant Director job classification for Permit Sonoma does not currently exist. Therefore, staff is recommending the Board grant approval today for Permit Sonoma to work with Human Resources to develop an Assistant Director job classification. Human Resources and Permit Sonoma will return to the Board in the near future to request the adoption of the new classification and to add the position to Permit Sonoma's allocation list.

1.0 Department Analyst. This position will be created to assist the Ombudsperson with public assistance and process improvements. The addition of a position to assist applicants with permit navigation would allow the Ombudsperson time to address needed structural process improvements. The new staff would also provide technical support to assist in facilitating those improvements.

1.0 Permit Technician. This position will assist in improving intake and permit issuance timelines for Building, Well and Septic, and Engineering. This position will support internal and external customer service levels and

improve response time by assisting clients through the permit submittal process.

1.0 Engineering Technician. This position will improve plan review and inspection timelines for Engineering. This position will perform reviews of permit applications and perform field inspections and testing of construction development for compliance with approved plans, specifications, and county standards to ensure public safety is maintained.

1.0 Engineer. This position will improve plan review and inspection timelines for Well and Septic. The position will review plans, specifications, and calculations submitted by architects, engineers, and designers for conformance to Sonoma County Code, local ordinances and/or state model codes for on-site wastewater systems, and wells. This position will also approve projects for issuance of grading, sewer, septic, well, or encroachment permits.

1.0 Planner. Planning review is necessary on most building, grading, and septic permits, but many of the underlying analysis relies on Zoning Code requirements. Most of the necessary improvements that rely on planning will require code updates through the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. These updates include the recommendation of a Zoning Administrator, online planning application submittal through Accela, increasing the number of over-the-counter zoning clearances, and reducing the number of uses that require a discretionary use permit.

Budget

After a preliminary evaluation of contract and staffing needs to support implementation of the consultant recommendations, Permit Sonoma will include as part of the FY 23/24 program change requests the following resources:

Estimated Contract Expenses: approximately $650,000
- Third-Party Plan Review: Building $200,000
- Third-Party Plan Review: Well and Septic $75,000
- Third-Party Plan Review: Engineering $75,000
- Admin/Accela Support $300,000

Estimated Position Annual Staffing Costs: approximately $1,500,000

Position	Bargaining Unit	Approximate Annual Cost
Assistant Director	Salary Resolution	$336,665
Department Analyst	Service Employee International Union (SEIU)	$230,025
Permit Technician II	Service Employee International Union (SEIU)	$191,435
Engineering Technician	Service Employee International Union (SEIU)	$214,715
Engineer	Western Council of Engineers (WCE)	$265,605
Planner	Service Employee International Union (SEIU)	$227,765

Third-Party Contract Structure

The department analyzed revenues and contract expenses for Building, Well and Septic, and Engineering, and

determined approximately 58% of plan review contract expenses are fee reimbursable, reducing the net discretionary budget request for contract services from $900,000 to $650,000.

Next Steps and Reporting Progress

In addition to including resources request as part of the FY 23/24 budget process, Permit Sonoma will provide an update on progress to the Board of Supervisors in November 2023. Within the first month of implementation, Permit Sonoma will create a dashboard of the 15 initiatives and 110 associated tasks that will be updated monthly on an easy-to-find, public-facing section of the Permit Sonoma website. The final dashboard schedule will be based on timelines consistent with the allocated resources.

Strategic Plan:

This item is aligned with the County's Five-Year Strategic Plan as follows:
Pillar: Organizational Excellence
Goal 1: Strengthen operational effectiveness, fiscal reliability, and accountability

With the findings from this management review, the Board and staff have a current, thorough assessment of Permit Sonoma's processes and services, with actionable recommendations on areas of potential innovation and improvement for overall service effectiveness. This outcome supports the intent of Organizational Excellence's Goal 1, Objective 3, which is to "establish expectations and performance measures for customer service for all county departments."

Prior Board Actions:

1/31/23:   Received findings from the management review of Permit Sonoma; requested Director of Permit Sonoma to return to the Board with an implementation schedule for the Board's consideration

5/24/22:   Authorized contract with BerryDunn in an amount not to exceed $120,000

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Permit Sonoma will submit FY 2023-24 budget requests, which is anticipated to require $650,000 for contracts and $1,500,000 for staffing in discretionary General Fund dollars annually, unless any of the positions are allocated for a limited basis. There may be a minor increase in permit fee revenue due to the increase in staff capacity to work on permits; however, the positions are intended to offset the hours that existing staff will work on implementing the management review recommendations, so the additional capacity will not result in a significant revenue increase during the 18-month period. The contract estimate is based on the level of staff recommended above.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

6.0 FTEs are necessary to implement the BerryDunn report tasks in the timeframe outlined. Without the FTEs described above, implementation of the report is still achievable but in a proportionally longer timeline, or as a tradeoff to a reduction in permit processing capacity in the interim period, unless capacity is achieved through other sources. 2.0 of the FTEs would be focused on implementation and coordination across all Permit Sonoma divisions and 4.0 of the FTEs would directly work on permit services to offset experienced staff devoting time to their assigned process improvements.

Attachments:

Att 1   BerryDunn Management Review Final Report
Att 2   Implementation Schedule
Att 3   ACEC Recommendation Letter
Att 4   March 7, 2023 Presentation

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
None