

Building Permit Strategy and Action Plan

Goal:

To reduce permit issuance and inspection processing times while maintaining a high degree of building code and by-law compliance

Strategies:

1. Improve the quality of permit application and building plan submission (completeness of application and compliance with codes) and construction (compliance with codes)
2. Increase the permit processing and inspection service capacity of the City of Winnipeg's existing resources through:
   - Employing an audit-based approach to permit application plan reviews and inspections
   - Increasing reliance on professional seals and certificates associated with permit application plan submissions and inspections
   - On-going continuous system improvement initiatives
3. Increase accountability for code compliance on the part of professionals and trades persons in the construction industry

Action Items / Initiatives:

1. **Process improvement actions in residential inspections (see Appendix B)**
   Implementation Status: Complete
   a. Builder Defect Self Certification Program (DCP)
   b. Appointment-based Inspection System (AIS)

Supports Strategy		
1	2	3
	✓	✓

2. **Audit approach to plan review and inspection of residential construction (see Appendix B)**
   Implementation Status: Spring, 2012
   Permit Types Affected: new single-family dwellings and two-family dwellings and their accessory buildings (e.g. non-commercial housing) and major renovations
   Description:
   - Established professional home builders, for which the City can establish an ongoing statistically significant history of performance, will be eligible for the audit approach to both residential plan examination and inspections.
   - Based on a statistically weighted sampling plan, applicants with a performance history of code compliant permit applications and inspections will be audited, at both the plan examination and inspections stages, less often than those whose performance shows a history of non-code compliant plan submissions and / or deficiencies on inspection.
   - Applicant performance data will be assessed regularly to maintain meaningful performance records.
   - Audit frequency will be assigned to balance issues of Public Service capacity, applicant performance, and public safety.
   - The program 'systematizes' what is intuitive to many: those builders that have a history of measurable quality and have proven to be consistent in terms of code compliance, will receive fewer plan reviews and inspections. Those that have not will continue to receive standard inspections of their plans and work.

Supports Strategy		
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Winnipeg

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3. Required Professional Designer's (engineer / architect) Certificate of compliance for all commercial projects[1] requiring professionally sealed plans (See Appendix C)

Supports Strategy		
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✓	✓	✓

Implementation Status: Spring, 2012
Permit Types Affected: All construction of new commercial buildings, additions to commercial buildings, and interior alternations that currently require professional seals.
Description: All current commercial permit applications which require a professional seal[2] will be subject to a requirement of a professional certificate of compliance (Certificate). The Certificate indicates that the plans submitted are in compliance with all relevant by-law and building codes
The Certificate indicates that the City of Winnipeg will rely solely upon the Certificate and will not conduct any plan review or plan examination of the plans as they relate to certain lower risk and non-immediate life-safety items in the Manitoba Building Code, except by way of possible audit. (see proposed examples in Appendix D)
An additional owner's certificate will be required which acknowledges understanding of the City's reliance on the professional seal, understanding that compliance with all building code issues is required, and acknowledgment that the City recommends that the owner requires his professionals to hold a minimum of $1M professional errors and omissions insurance.

4. Introduction of Optional Professional Certificate Program (OPCP) for professional submission of qualifying commercial building plans. (See Appendix E)

Supports Strategy		
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✓	✓	✓

Implementation Status: Spring, 2012
Permit Types Affected: All commercial building permits for new construction and additions where professional seals are required, or for which an owner is submitting under professional seal. The Designated Employee will not allow projects representing significant complexity[3] to be subject to this option.
Description:

- An option will be given for commercial permit applications (including staged permits) submitted under seal for the permit to be issued with no-building plan examination of issues relating to building code
- This option will be selected through the submission of a certificate by both the professionals involved in the submission as well as the owner.
- Permits will be issued after the building plans and permit application is reviewed for compliance with other City by-laws but not for building code. Assuming compliance, the target for permit issuance under this option is after five business days.
- Audits of compliance with building code issues will be performed on 15-30% of the plans submitted under this option
- Audits revealing non-compliance with code will result in owners being required to take action to remediate the issue of non-compliance

1 - Commercial buildings mean all buildings except single-family dwellings and two-family dwellings and their accessory buildings and multi-family dwellings without shared exit facilities and with no dwelling units above another.
2 - All commercial building permits relating to new construction, additions, and interior alterations of a nature that currently require submission of plans by a registered architect or engineer.
3 - E.g. Hospitals, schools, high-rise building, large assembly spaces, etc.



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5. Early screening of permit applications for missing or inadequate information

Implementation Status: Immediate and on-going

One current frustration of permit applicants is being informed weeks after submission that the detail or nature of their submission is incomplete. The subsequent time necessary to re-submit could have been spent during the initial wait period.

Even when there is a long queue time for applications to be reviewed, more could be done to engage in a screening early in the process to allow applicants to address obvious submission deficiencies sooner, thus reducing the overall processing time.

Supports Strategy		
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6. Better communication regarding City requirements for permit application submission

Implementation Status: On-going

Examples of current initiatives include:

- A clearer checklist of requirements for complete submission of most applications for commercial interior alterations is being developed
- A technical support officer assigned to work with front-line permit technicians to ensure more thorough review of permit applications and communication with applicants at the time of application submission

Supports Strategy		
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7. Increased training opportunities

Implementation Status: Q2, 2012

The Public Service will work to develop and offer training relating to building code and by-law requirements for professionals, licensed tradespersons, and non-professionals who regularly submit building plan applications.

Supports Strategy		
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8. Increased accountability for professionals, licensed tradespersons, and applicants

Implementation Status: Immediate and on-going

Under the subsection 153(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter[4], the Public Service can forward to the respective professional association information about non-compliant plans submitted under seal. Additionally, the City can take disciplinary action associated with non-compliant work done by tradespersons performing work under the authority of an individual or entity licensed by the City.

Supports Strategy		
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In both cases, the City plans to take a more assertive approach to holding these individuals accountable for compliance with established codes and by-laws, particularly for egregious and significant counts of non-compliance, or repeated non-compliance with less significant violations.

Applicants (e.g. established residential builders) who have poor records of compliance will also be subject to increased audits.

4 - 153(1) If an employee of the City believes, on reasonable grounds after inspection of a plan, or on the basis of other information relating to any construction, that an offence has been committed under The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Act or The Architects Act, the employee may inform the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba or The Manitoba Association of Architects of the circumstances leading to that belief.



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9. Development of additional resources and internal capacity building

Supports Strategy		
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Implementation Status: Immediate and on-going

Steps will be taken to continue attempts to develop additional internal resources and capacity through:

a. Continued hiring and training of permanent and temporary staff
b. Continued assignment of overtime, as appropriate

Increased attention will be given to standardizing and implementing training for front-line, plan examination, and inspection staff. Longer-term action will look to developing cross-training to assist in shifting resources and capacity to areas representing process bottlenecks.

10. Re-alignment of the Permits X-Press initiative to engage in continuous improvement activities and employ tools and thinking associated with 'lean process improvement' philosophy

Supports Strategy		
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Implementation Status: Immediate and on-going

The City began the Permits X-Press initiative in 2004 to attempt to address a variety of issues associated with the permit application experience, including permit issuance times. While this initiative has resulted in a variety of successes, it is felt that it could be re-energized as a continuous improvement unit and engage in a variety of process improvement initiatives which deal with a 'lean' process improvement philosophy.