

Community Assistance Plan to Address Residential Permit Delays



Pursuant to Chapter 338, Laws of 2023 (SB 5290)

Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Authorizing legislation

The 2023 Washington State Legislature enacted Chapter 338, Laws of 2023 (SB 5290), which directed the Department of Commerce (Commerce) to develop a plan for communities to secure technical support staff needed to review residential housing permits. Specifically, Section 12 of the legislation requires Commerce to:

[D]evelop a plan to provide local governments with appropriately trained staff to provide temporary support or hard to find expertise for timely processing of residential housing permit applications. The plan shall include consideration of how local governments can be provided with staff that have experience with providing substitute staff support or that possess expertise in permitting policies and regulations in the local government's geographic area or with jurisdictions of the local government's size or population. The plan and a proposal for implementation shall be presented to the legislature by December 1, 2023.

Key findings

City and county planning departments are overwhelmed and working through significant, interwoven challenges.

- **Staffing challenges.** Cities and counties report great difficulty in finding enough qualified applicants for the vacant positions responsible for local permit review, which is intensified by high retirement rates as well as prior staff layoffs during economic downturns. Many communities have sought staff from out-of-state, or temporary contractors to meet the demand for urban planners, engineers and building inspectors.
- **Permit backlog.** Cities and counties are experiencing a backlog of building permit applications and when compounded with the staffing shortage, contributes to significant delays in obtaining building permits.
- **Historic planning workload.** Planning programs throughout the state are at maximum capacity and their ability to conduct timely permit reviews is compounded by the need to fulfill new state planning requirements, which are updated regularly by the Legislature.

Recommended approach

The opportunity to address these challenges and deliver trained staff that can provide temporary support or hard to find expertise for timely processing of residential housing permit applications is through a resource list/roster of available consultant firms. This resource list/roster would be updated annually and communicated widely. At present, Commerce received 41 responses from firms that each provided that they are available and interested to offer their technical services with a blended hourly rate of approximately \$150 per hour. This is a meaningful and cost-effective approach that can meet the identified needs of communities.

Commerce cannot staff local permit review. To maintain operational integrity and clear lines of authority, local permit staff must be employed or contracted by the local government directly. Staff that would be hired by Commerce would be state government employees working for the department and responsive to distinct missions. It is not difficult to imagine a scenario where legitimate policy disagreements could arise between the department and a particular local government. Having employees with split lines of authority and accountability could create an untenable situation that would slow the response to the permit backlog. It is also a more cost effective approach as Commerce would require new full-time employees with a variable workload, rather than discrete contracted, or on-call consultants to provide the needed skillsets and services when and where they are needed most.

In addition, there is currently no reliable measure to compare backlogs between jurisdictions and to determine which communities require the most support. Commerce would face challenges in allocating limited staffing resources equitably, and would recommend strongly against the role to prioritize who receives the limited support we would have available. Creating winners and losers is in direct conflict with our public mission to strengthen communities. Of further concern for Commerce would be direct competition with private sector technical assistance providers in offering direct assistance to cities and counties. Such a market intervention would put the state in a leadership position it does not currently occupy, and may need to sustain so that market shifts do not make private sector assistance less available and less affordable to communities..

If a dedicated team of on call permit reviewers is needed, other organizations may be able to play this role if clear lines of accountability to the local governments are present. For example, regional councils or statewide associations that are directly accountable to local governments may be in a better position to fill this role than a state agency. Local governments have the power to organize such services under the Interlocal Cooperation Act ([Chapter 39.34 RCW](#)) so that they may jointly develop or acquire needed capacity. The state could play a role in facilitating these arrangements provided ultimate accountability and policy making authority rests with the local governments whose permitting authority the review is exercising.

With all of these considerations, Commerce had determined it can best assist jurisdictions in other ways more consistent with its primary technical assistance functions. In addition to developing and updating a regular resource list/roster, Commerce has identified a number of ideas that individual jurisdictions can take to help expedite permit processing. To illustrate, communities could simplify codes, streamline permit review processes and increasing administrative decision making authority. Moreover, Commerce found a number of potential actions it could take to assist jurisdictions including the development of best practices and model ordinances.

Next steps

The challenges communities are facing to navigate the permit backlog are, at present, endemic. Without sustained resources to address the interwoven symptoms, one-time solutions provide only temporary improvements in performance outcomes. Once Commerce develops the initial resource list/roster of consulting and staffing firms, Commerce will build lasting improvement by:

- **Publishing the resource list/roster so that it is broadly available** to all cities and counties in the state that are struggling to find adequate support to fulfill their permit timelines. Commerce intends to maintain the roster annually to provide up-to-date listings of professional entities available for hire. This includes casting a broad net to ensure representation of veteran owned businesses and women-owned and minority firms.
- **Utilizing the informative and beneficial perspectives and suggested solutions in implementing the requirements of Chapter 338, Laws of 2023 (SB 5290).** Individual respondents to the interviews and survey recommended approaches that we will explore in further detail during development of the various technical assistance tools, including a Local Project Review Guide.
- **Considering if it is feasible to expand the data metrics captured, to map the locations of consultants and vendors, and to provide a method for vendors to add their companies directly to the consultant list.** This scope of work would be subject to appropriation. In addition, Commerce will explore the allocation of funding based on whether the resource list/roster can be maintained internally, or if a contract pathway is necessary.

The contractors and firms identified on the initial resource list/roster will provide basic to highly technical building permit assistance, but also civil and structural engineering permit review, critical areas support, land use planning, and review and inspections. The resource list/roster will also will be of benefit not only to

jurisdictions, but may also prove a vital resource to the consulting and building industries, and may lower barriers to entry into the development process for small developers. Commerce is committed to supporting communities to navigate the permitting challenges they are experiencing, and will continue to investigate ways to provide technical support or other methods to assist jurisdictions with their permit backlogs. Our ongoing commitment to improvement may include future budget requests for the development of best practices, grant programs or model ordinances, but we must first see how this current improvement performs and can meet the needs cities and counties statewide.

Introduction

Background

Washington is facing a statewide housing shortage as our population continues to grow. Commerce has estimated that [the state needs to add 1.1 million homes over the next 20 years](#) to meet existing and future housing needs. In addition, more than half of these housing units need to be affordable for residents at the lowest income levels. This dynamic requires the construction of more than 50,000 new units annually to keep pace with expected population growth.¹

Gov. Inslee and the Legislature enacted over a dozen bills during the 2023 legislative session and more than \$2.4 billion in state funds to “speed up construction of thousands more housing units – from emergency housing to multifamily developments and affordable housing.”²

Among the various bills adopted in 2023 was [SB 5290](#) (Chapter 338, Laws of 2023), which focused on updates to the [Local Project Review Act](#) as a means to streamline project permit review and increase the rate of residential housing development across the state.

City and county responsibilities

By January 1, 2025, this legislation requires local government jurisdictions to enact all of the new permit procedures updated to the Local Project Review Act in the administration of permit application processes.³ Specifically, this new state law required the following updates to policies, codes and systems:

- Updates to permit data collection requirements, public notification, and determination of completeness requirements ([RCW 36.70B.070](#) and [RCW 36.70B.110](#));
- New timelines for project review – and new requirements to refund fees if timelines are not met ([RCW 36.70B.080](#)); and
- Requirements for jurisdictions subject to the Review and Evaluation Program ([RCW 36.70A.215](#)) and cities within those counties, to prepare and submit to Commerce annual performance reports on permit time periods. This includes the total number of decisions issued during a year, average number of days from a submittal to decision, and other details to track consistency and measure permit delays.

Commerce responsibilities

Chiefly, updates to the Local Project Review Act also required Commerce to produce this report, which provides a pathway for local governments to access appropriately trained staff to provide temporary support or hard to find expertise for timely processing of residential housing permit applications. However, Commerce was also required to provide technical assistance programming, and subject to appropriation for the specific purpose, to provide grants for communities to modernize permit systems and for consolidated permit review.

Specifically, Commerce must:

¹ Washington state will need more than 1 million homes in next 20 years, Commerce News, WA State Department of Commerce, Mar 2023, <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/news/washington-state-will-need-more-than-1-million-homes-in-next-20-years/>

² Housing/Homelessness – Proposed 2023-2025: Budget and Policy Highlights. Office of Financial Management (OFM).

³ Streamlining Local Permit Review Procedures. MRSC. <https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/planning/land-use-administration/streamlining-local-permit-review-procedures#examples>

- Subject to appropriation, develop two grant programs for consolidated review of residential building permits and transitioning from paper permit review to digital permit review;⁴
- Convene a digital permitting work group to pursue the feasibility and desirability of a statewide permit process and tracking software that is capable of virtual inspections, electronic review, and has capacity for video storage. This includes a companion legislative report with recommendations by August 1, 2024;
- Assist counties and cities with setting reasonable and sufficient permit fees structures for consolidated review of residential building and land use review;
- Develop a template and guidance for jurisdictions to report timelines and permit data on an annual basis; and
- Develop guidance on local project review pursuant to Chapter 36.70B RCW.

Community assistance plan to address residential permit delays

Section 12 of SB 5290 (Chapter 338, Laws of 2023) requires Commerce to develop a plan for jurisdictions to increase staff capacity so that they may meet permit review timelines. Local governments struggle with sharp increases in development followed by slow-downs that increase development costs and delay project permitting. The Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic are prime examples of when the state’s economy faced serious challenges in unemployment, and the housing market crashed with statewide tax revenues also experienced decline.⁵

Commerce intends to develop a resource list/roster of skilled consulting and staffing firms that are available to assist jurisdictions with staffing needs from basic to highly technical development proposals for building permit assistance, civil and structural engineering permit review, critical areas support, land use planning, and review and inspections. Through our Request for Information (RFI), Commerce received responses from 41 firms that each provided that they are available and interested to offer their technical services with a blended hourly rate of approximately \$150 per hour.

This resource list will be made widely available on a dedicated Commerce webpage (currently under development), and communicated frequently to communities at conferences, in our regular newsletters and other communications channels. Commerce will cast a broad net to veteran owned businesses and women-owned and minority firms to ensure a diverse pool of vetted contractors are available to support communities’ technical needs. Commerce will update this resource list on an annual basis and will provide current listings of work groups available for hire either on an “on-call” or on a project-specific basis. The data set will be of benefit not only to jurisdictions, but will prove a vital resource to the consulting industry, building industry, and will lower barriers to entry into the development process for small developers.

Study approach

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the key issues jurisdictions are facing meeting timelines and processing permits, Commerce began a collaborative discovery phase of outreach, first in the manner of

⁴ In the 2023-25 biennial budget, Commerce received \$3 million in fiscal year 2024 grant funding for the permit modernization grant programs and did not receive funding to address staffing shortages. Commerce is also requesting to shift these grant funds to fiscal year 2025 so that Commerce can create community awareness of these funds and sequence them with the anticipated release of the Digital Permitting Process Work Group Report to the Legislature in August 2024.

⁵ Guiding Washington through the Great Recession. Office of Financial Management. October 2012.

https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/legacy/reports/Guiding_Washington_through_the_Great_Recession_final.pdf

interviews with professional work groups, followed by a survey questionnaire sent to county and city planning directors, and lastly a Request for Information from consulting firms sent to the Washington State Electronic Business Solution database (WEBS for vendors), the Washington State Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises database (OMWBE), and Commerce's Economic Opportunities webpage.

Interviews

Interviews included discussions with the following agencies, associations and higher education institutions and touched upon a variety of issues, best practices and suggestions for jurisdictions experiencing delays in residential permit processing ([Appendix A](#)):

- American Planning Association
- Association of Washington Cities (AWC)
- Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW)
- City of Bellevue
- City of Seattle
- City of Tukwila
- Eastern Washington University (EWU)
- Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties
- Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC)
- Tovar Planning
- Washington Realtors
- Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC)
- Western Washington University (WWU)

Interviewees cited the difficulty maintaining adequate staffing levels, pros and cons of using third-party review firms, the growing complexity of development codes as new laws and regulations are enacted, cumbersome permitting practices and identified a number of specific problem areas:

- Some permit delay can occur between the time when the permit is approved and when it is picked up leading to additional delays in approval time for the permit
- Contracting is not always a viable solution
- Difficulty of finding staff is on the building and civil side of plan review
- Finding inspectors has been a problem
- Frozen staff positions due to budget shortfalls
- Plan review assistance is needed in many areas, fire marshal, building plan review, storm water review, environmental review, etc.
- Some municipalities also require municipal staff to review third party analysis, thus double the review.

Interviewees also provided a great deal of insight, best practices and field-tested solutions:

- Full cost recovery Enterprise Fund Models that utilize permit fees and incorporate a component of financial reserves to retain core staffing can help to minimize the need to utilize consultants and help to increase predictability.
- Statewide cooperative purchasing agreements can help jurisdictions to streamline the procurement processes associated with hiring consultants.
- Intergovernmental agreements can create a pool of resources available to multiple local government agencies.

- It can take a long time to staff up and also to get consultants familiar with the code and processes (especially if they are out of state), so many jurisdictions keep multiple consultants “on-call”. The “on-call” consultant relationship can extend over time and result in familiarity between the consultant and the city/county and its code and processes.
- Having consistency among codes, tip sheets, and application forms will simplify the process.
- People are needed from multiple career paths to enter the talent pool and increase the pipeline of new people entering the field.
- Have consistency of metrics for tracking permit timelines and measuring permit delays.
- Local jurisdictions could use a chess clock method (a clock with a method to stop the clock from running for a period while the other party makes their move) that stops until after resubmittal and also that stops the clock when the permit is ready to issue not when it is picked up as developers can sit and wait to take out permits that are done to avoid paying fees any earlier than necessary.
- By charging a surplus fee during the high part of the cycle, there can be enough reserves that cover key staff through downturns. Larger projects pay a slightly higher percentage of surplus fees.
- There will always be some staff out on medical leave, family leave, etc. so you need to have enough core staff to maintain review times in their absence.
- Pre-app meetings are extremely helpful. Improvements such as streamlining codes can also help.
- Look to regional councils of government as possible providers of overflow permitting services.
- Have a full cost recovery system as a best practice.
- Create ombudsman, landing pages and hot lines for permit processing.
- Utilize planning students through studios, capstone projects and theses to help jurisdictions. Students can help on a variety of tasks such as assisting with comprehensive plan checklists and conducting research.

Survey questionnaire

Next, Commerce developed a survey questionnaire consisting of 19 questions that were sent to the directors of all cities and counties throughout the state. It covered a range of topics related to staffing issues and the use of supplemental resources and services to address them, with a focus on communities' current permitting conditions and challenges. Twenty-eight jurisdictions completed the questionnaire and [the complete survey results are available online](#).

Approximately 80% of respondents were from cities while the remainder represented counties. Almost half of respondents were from small jurisdictions (less than 20,000 residents) while under 10% were from large communities (over 200,000 residents). More than 50% of survey results came from the Puget Sound with other regions in the state ranging from 7% to 14%.

Approximately 75% of survey respondents indicated they have faced a lack of in-house staff for the timely processing of residential permits ([Figure one](#)). About half of communities report that this deficiency relates to expertise in permitting in their jurisdiction or geographic area. In addition, these staffing deficiencies relate to expertise in almost all types of residential permit applications, including single-family and high-density housing permits. Just over 75% indicated the same difficulties with mixed-use housing permits. More than 70% of community respondents provide that they currently secure additional permit review support from on-call consultants ([Figure two](#)).

Figure one: Communities experiencing a lack of internal staff capacity

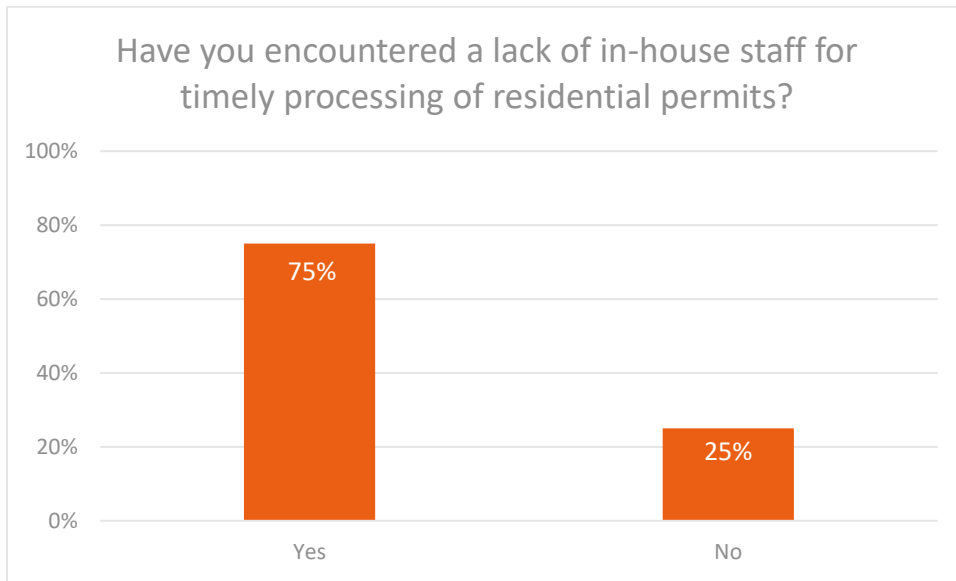
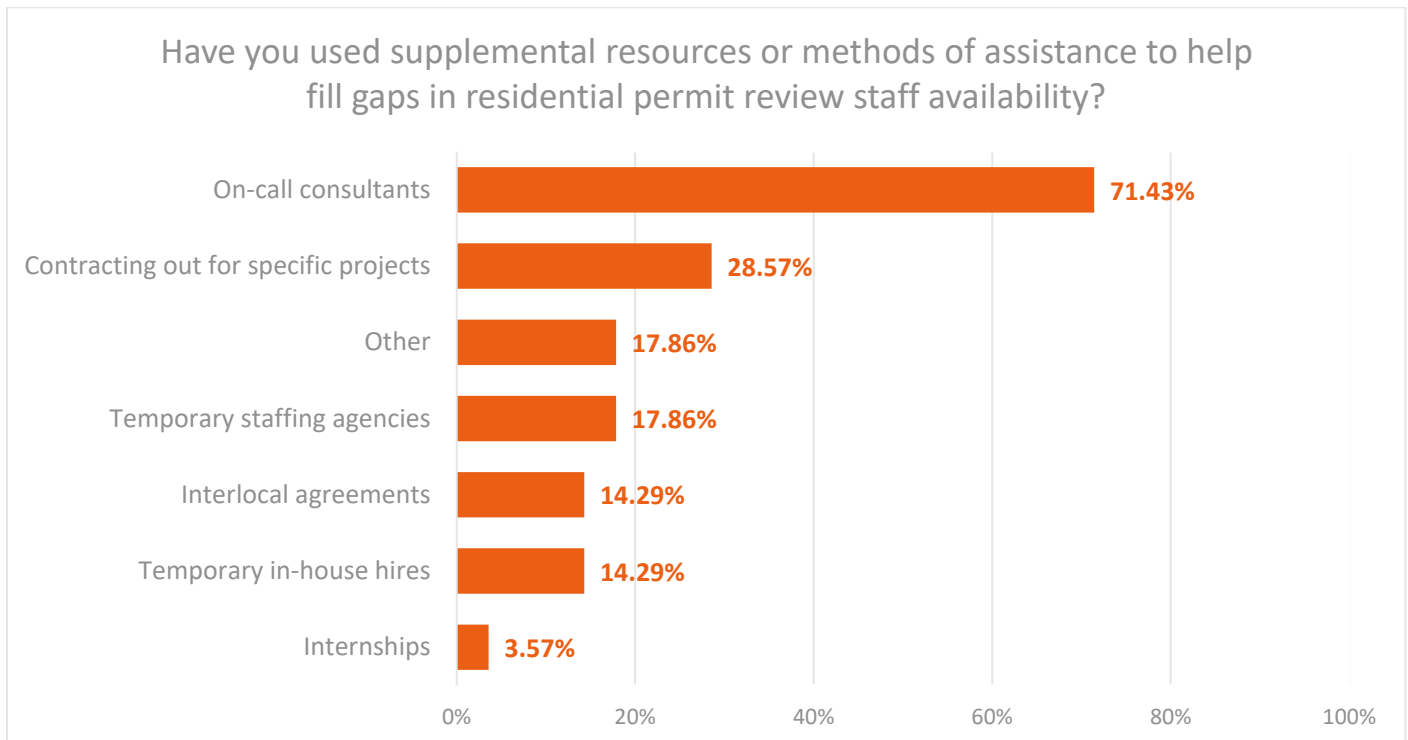


Figure two: Communities address the lack of internal staff capacity in various ways



Sources cited during the interviews for recruiting support for residential permit review staff include:

- Professional associations such as the American Planning Association, the Planning Association of Washington, the Association of Wetland Managers, the Association of Washington Cities, the Washington Association of Building Officials, and the Washington State Association of Counties.
- City/county job website postings
- Direct mailing/marketing
- Government job boards, such as governmentjobs.com

- International Code Council
- Indeed
- LinkedIn
- Local newspaper
- Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC)
- NeoGov
- Social media
- Town reader boards
- Universities and community colleges
- Word of mouth

Request for Information

Commerce distributed a request for information (RFI) to compile a list of consulting firms and staffing agencies that could provide support to jurisdictions experiencing backlogs in the processing of residential permits. The request went to Washington’s Electronic Business Solution ([WEBS](#)) for vendors, Washington State Office of Minority and Women’s Business Enterprises ([OMWBE](#)), and the [Commerce Economic Opportunities](#) page.

Commerce received 41 responses to a set of five questions. The private third-party consultant firms ranged from small to large planning firms covering a broad range of services, across Washington, and from also from firms working in Oregon and Colorado. Commerce collected the following information:

- **Full contact information:** This includes the primary contact, company name and location
- **Types of residential permit review services offered:** A wide array of services could be available depending on the firm, including geotechnical, geologic, critical areas, and more. From basic to highly technical, and single family to high density multifamily. From mixed use projects, platting, special use permits to civil, structural, environmental review, planning, developing and reviewing processes, and whether the services would be online, remote or on-site.
- **Approximate blended hourly rate⁶:** Firms ranged from engineering, building, critical areas, stormwater, and land use planning and design; consultant fees ranged from \$50 to \$240. The average, median and mode of fees came to approximately \$150 per hour.
- **Availability to serve new jurisdictions:** In brief, can you provide services now? All 41 respondents answered yes, that they provide daily, on-call, on-staff and customizable services.
- **Additional information:** Generally, the respondents were happy to share more about their years of experience, services, capacity, and successes.

Summary

In this discovery phase, through a collaborative outreach approach, Commerce was able to develop a resource list/roster of 41 consultants and planning service providers ([see Appendix B](#)). Interviews, the survey questionnaire, and the request for information yielded the contact information, location, specialty area, blended

⁶ Blended means the full spectrum of possible staff assigned to support a community. From junior planner to senior project manager, and depending on the type of residential permit review (service), complexity, whether performed remotely versus on-site, and likelihood of travel time.

hourly costs of eager and available companies ready to assist local government jurisdictions specifically in local project review and processing.

It is Commerce's intent to make this list broadly available on a dedicated Commerce webpage (currently under development) as a resource to all cities and counties in the state that are struggling to find adequate support to fulfill their permit timelines. In addition, Commerce intends to maintain the roster annually to provide up-to-date listings of professional entities available for hire.

Additionally, Commerce will utilize the beneficial perspectives and solutions of individual respondents to the interviews and survey throughout project implementation. Many of the recommended approaches will be explored in further detail during development of the various technical assistance tools and the Local Project Review Guide in response to Chapter 338, Laws of 2023.

Subject to appropriation, Commerce could expand the data metrics captured, map the locations of consultants and vendors, and provide a method for vendors to add their companies directly to the consultant list. Commerce will explore the allocation of funding based on whether the resource list/roster can be maintained internally, or if a contract pathway is necessary.

Appendix A: Interviews

Perspectives from cities and counties

Bellevue - Jake Hesselgesser, Assistant Director, Aug. 2

- Bellevue has adopted an Enterprise Fund Model for permit fees which provides a component of reserves to retain core staffing and help minimize the need to utilize consultants.
- One way to approach securing consultants is through cooperative purchasing agreements that create a pool of resources.
- It can take a long time to staff up and also to get consultants familiar with the code and processes (especially if they are out of state) so many jurisdictions keep multiple consultants “on-call”.
- Operating the permit review process as a single line of business helps streamline the process.
- Trying to get consistency among codes, tip sheets, and application forms is the goal of simplifying the process through tools like the ecity.gov alliance.
- People are needed from multiple career paths to enter the talent pool and increase the pipeline of new people entering the field.
- More early retirements and relocations to other areas means institutional knowledge is being lost.
- Certain talent pools are more competitive than others.
- The talent pool of inspectors comes from the trades and jurisdictions and those positions must compete with private sector pay and/or benefits.

Seattle - Andy Higgins, Engineering Services Director Aug. 3

- There should be consistency of metrics for measuring permit delays.
- Tracking of permit timelines should be consistent among jurisdictions.
- Utilize a chess clock method (a clock with a method to stop the clock from running for a period while the other party makes their move) that stops until after resubmittal and also that stops the clock when the permit is ready to issue not when it is picked up as developers can sit and wait to take out permits that are done to avoid paying fees any earlier than necessary.
- Seattle went through several cycles of layoffs during the Great Recession.
- Those who were qualified to retire often postponed and people recently hired and trained were let go.
- This resulted in a significant backlog when the development rates turned up.
- We know development has about a 7-10 year cycle and we know the average downturn is 2-3 years.
- By charging a surplus fee during the high part of the cycle, there can be enough reserves that covers key staff through downturns.
- In Seattle’s system, larger projects pay a slightly higher percentage of surplus fees.
- During downturns staff can work on things including: process improvements, documentation, TIP sheets, trainings, etc.
- There will always be some staff out on medical leave, family leave, etc. so you need to have enough core staff to maintain review times in their absence.
- Consultants can cost a significant amount of money and it can be hard to get a good one.

Tumwater - Brad Medrud, Planning Manager, Aug. 2

- In addition to heaving permit processing loads, planning departments are having to tackle a lot of new requirements currently.
- It is very difficult to hire qualified staff right now.
- There are many retirements and not enough students finishing the planning programs to fill the gap.
- New hires tend to come from out of state or other local jurisdictions.
- Sometimes it is difficult to “sweeten the pot” with higher pay or more benefits due to budget constraints.

- Consultants can be a potential gap filler, but it can also be difficult to find consultants that have availability.

Perspectives from higher educational institutions

Eastern Washington University - Matthew Anderson, Program Director, Aug. 9

- There was an enrollment decreased during COVID but is back up now.
- Almost all students are finding jobs quickly upon graduation at both the masters and bachelors levels.
- However, a number of faculty positions have been lost due to financial shortfalls.
- There is a serious lack of resources to recruit students.
- Planning needs higher visibility as a field.
- Commerce should start a podcast about planning on NPR or other platform.
- There is a need to incentivize builders to build at a variety of price points.

Western Washington University - Nabil Kamel, Department Chair, Aug. 8

- Washington doesn't produce enough urban planning graduates to fill the staffing needs of jurisdictions so we import from other states.
- Washington is in the top 5 states with the ratio of total planning jobs to total jobs.
- Currently programs are at maximum capacity output.
- WWU has submitted a plan to get a Master's Degree program.
- School is swamped with request for planners.
- Virtually 100% of students are hired following graduation.
- Enrollment dropped about 10% during COVID but has now rebounded.
- The program lost faculty and are not allowed replacements because of a freeze on hiring.
- There needs to be at least a couple of hundred thousand dollars in immediate support to support students. Students need paid internships.

Perspectives from statewide organizations

Association of Washington Cities - Shannon McClellan, Legislative Policy Analyst, Aug. 7

- Time is needed to account for unforeseen circumstance such as sick staff but jurisdictions should aim for less than the statutory minimums.
- Provide financial incentives for jurisdictions to meet timelines.
- Keep planning consultants on an "on call"/retainer basis and get them familiar with your code and processes.
- Reduce the amount of back and forth needed between staff and applicant.
- Each revision can result in 1-2 month delays.
- Trust professional level staff such as engineers and architects to help minimize review requirements.
- Get more planners into planning schools by doing things like offering more scholarships and internships.
- It can take newly graduated students up to 2 years to be ready to do permit review.
- There are currently a lot of staffing demands for other planning efforts in addition to permits

Municipal Research and Services Center – Steve Butler, Planning and Policy Manager, July 27 and Aug. 7

- Pre-app meetings are extremely helpful. Improvements such as streamlining codes can also help.
- Reduce conditional permitting and hearings if possible.
- And a good best practice is to pick up the phone versus sending letters when corrections are needed.
- Always have 2-3 firms on call for permit processing help when you have overflow or backlog.

- Set up a centralized boot camp or training program for internships.

Washington State Association of Counties - Paul Jewel, Senior Policy Director, Aug. 10

- Look to regional council of governments as possible providers of overflow permitting services.
- Make grants and funding available to jurisdictions for assistance and provide financial assistance to the planning programs at the universities.
- Provide financial assistance to smaller jurisdictions that can't afford to pay market rate.
- Jurisdictions that have the resources should raise wages to help recruit talent and fill openings in competitive environment.
- Utilize pre-approved building plans.
- Commerce could create a library of pre-approved plans that people could use.
- Have 2-3 firms on call for permit processing help when you have overflow or backlog.
- Utilize the MRSC rosters program to help secure consulting firms.
- Have a full cost recovery system as a best practice.
- Make investments in online services and reviews.
- Timely notifications of needs for corrections are important.
- Expand master planning options and offer expedited approval process with pre-approved master plan program.

Perspectives from the building and construction Industry

BIAW - Josie Cummings, Legislative Director, Aug. 9

- There is a need for better transparency and communication.
- It is hard to know where permits are in the process sometimes, systems that provide updates or status are superior.
- Online systems are better as are one stop shops for permitting.
- Small communities struggle with staffing, it can be hard for them to compete with the larger jurisdictions.
- Commerce could develop best practices for hiring and retention.
- In addition, Commerce could update permit best practices.
- And make grants available to help jurisdictions with delays.
- Especially provide money or grants to help communities opt into the options in 5290 and allow jurisdictions to implement 5290 options as pilot projects more quickly.
- Make external review of permits a possibility.
- Create ombudsman, landing pages and hot lines for permit processing.
- Also have quicker internal goals for permitting timelines compared to external goals.

Master Builders - Allison Butcher, Senior Policy Analyst, Jennifer Anderson Director of Government Affairs and Dylan Sullivan, Aug. 3 and Aug. 18

- Commerce should consider developing model ordinances, technical support and best practices to help implement 5290.
- In addition, a model code for adoption of an enterprise permit system would be helpful.
- Finally, a model interlocal agreement for shared permit review is needed.
- Commerce should consider creating a best practices for hiring.
- In addition, Commerce should keep a database of vetted consultants.
- Engineering review is pinch point.
- Work by licensed professionals should be accepted without high peer review.
- Wave internal review if the licensed professionals agree to assume the risk.

- Streamline permitting processes and increase consistency.
- Review all codes and reduce duplication and complexity.
- Ensure consistent training so everyone is predictable and consistent.
- Make sure to memorialize interpretations.
- Jurisdictions need to get better at reporting their timelines.
- Commerce should consider developing a standardized application form and standardized check list.
- Pre-app meetings should be a best practice.
- They can help clearly define the process.
- Having in-person staff is beneficial.
- Move SEPA to comp planning as much as possible to help streamline and reduce the review process.
- In addition, design review should be as efficient and clear as possible.
- Give approval discretion to directors.
- Allow final plats to be administrative rather than require council action.

Washington Realtors - Jeanette McKague, Assistant Director of Land Use/Planning, Aug. 8

- Consolidated permit review offers holistic approach and is an improvement over dept. by department review
- Do more permits by right rather than through conditional decisions.
- Permit review costs should be covered by the general fund, few cities can be successful at enterprise system.
- Jurisdictions are swamped with new things to implement and lost a lot of staff to retirements and during the COVID downturn.
- Planning staff should not be expendable during downturns.
- Cities and counties need money to be able to staff up.
- Create a mentorship program for new planners to help them succeed and get up to speed.
- Consultants often don't have the knowledge base within your system.
- Consultants get put in awkward situations by getting second guessed by staff.
- Front counter staff should be empowered to give direct assistance.
- Attitude change is needed to view permitting as a partnership process.
- Consistency of interpretations is a problem.
- Preserving institutional memory is important.
- Best practices is to have final plat be administrative rather than council action.
- Stormwater requirements are significant hits to project timelines.
- Half of housing has to be 80 and below restrains the supply we get.
- Utilities are disconnected to 20 year plans.
- There are not enough inspectors.
- Jurisdictions need to get better at reporting their timelines.

Other perspectives

National American Planning Association - David Morely

- Planning Consultant Directory can be of assistance to jurisdictions looking nationally for assistance with permit review or other planning activities.
- In addition, some local jurisdictions are turning to freelancers to help fill gaps in staffing through outlets such as Upwork and Fiverr.

Tovar Planning - Joe Tovar, Principal Aug. 15

- Many jurisdictions have “On-call” consultants to help with overload.
- The “On-call” consultant relationship can extend over time and result in familiarity between the consultant and the city/county and its code and processes.
- Utilize planning students through studios, capstone projects and thesis to help jurisdictions.
- Students can help on a variety of tasks as demonstrated through recent efforts such as assisting with comprehensive plan checklists and conducting research on LAMIRDS.
- There should be more money for university planning.
- Code reform is important work that should be invested in.
- Commerce could develop model codes for development types like Multi-family to be simpler, uniform and streamlined.
- Perhaps incentives such as grant money or relief from SEPA could be offered to promote changes to codes and processes.

Appendix B: Request for Information

Appendix B contains summary responses of key information obtained from the consultants that responded to Commerce's Request for Information (RFI). Each of the 41 consultants that responded to the RFI indicated that they are available to support communities and can meet their technical needs across many specialized fields and services.

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
Aoka Engineering	Single Family, Multi-Family, Subdivision, Mixed Use, Civil	\$120	420 Throckmorton St STE 200 Fort Worth, TX 76102
Associated Earth Sciences, Inc	Third party geotechnical review of projects within geologically hazardous critical areas (landslide, steep slope, erosion, seismic and abandoned coal mines)	\$195-\$240	911 5th Avenue Kirkland, WA 98033
Atwell, LLC	We have experience providing civil review of the following permit types: single-family, fill & grade, site development, shoreline site development, subdivisions, multifamily, mixed-use, short plats, large lot plats, right-of-way improvements, and conditional/special use permits. We review all permit applications, plans, reports, and construction documents for compliance with Department of Ecology Standards and the local jurisdiction's municipal code and adopted standards. We also have experience developing and improving processes used to review the engineering components of permit applications (including assisting in the rollout of electronic permitting), updating engineering standards to stay current with state and county codes and emerging best practices, providing technical expertise and responses to complex questions from applicants and the public, and manage permit coordination with City staff and other agencies.	\$195	16000 Bothell Everett Hwy, STE 150 Mill Creek, WA 98012
Beck & Associates, PLLC	Single family, multifamily (all construction types), structural, non-structural (including accessibility, energy), mechanical, plumbing. Electrical review not offered.	\$150/hour	16425 SE 66th Street Bellevue, WA 98006
Boadus Pride LLC	Single and multiple family homes.	\$50	801 SW 16TH STREET STE 115 OFC20 Renton, WA 98057

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
Brienen Structural Engineers	Structural engineering review for new construction or remodels, additions, deck and roof extensions, shoring, foundations, wood framing, remediation from damage (fires, impact, etc.)	\$180/hr blended rate	1316 Central Avenue South STE 200 Kent, WA 98032
CG Engineering	All residential permits	\$150/hr	250 4th Ave S Edmonds, WA 98020
Clarity Consulting Engineers	Full plan review that includes: Architectural, Structural, Washington State Energy Code, Plumbing, and Mechanical	\$150/hour	13013 Lala Cove Lane Olalla, WA 98359
Darling Nava Consulting PLLC	Any types of residential permit; I previously worked at City of Fife & City of Olympia as Permit Specialist	\$168.00	5646 Yakima Avenue Tacoma, WA 98408
DBE LLC	plan, structure and road, etc.	\$80	2214 Lakewood Dr SE Olympia, WA 98501
EAS Engineering, LLC	Mechanical, plumbing, energy	\$19	6746 SE 3rd Street Renton, WA 98509
Energy Incentives, INC	Single Family Homes	\$125	3517 W CANAL DR Kennewick, WA 99336
Fischer Bouma Partnership	Both land use permit and building permit review for single family, single family subdivision, multi-family complex, and mixed-use project approvals. Focus on site/landscape plans, planting plans, and irrigation plans.	\$175	310 MADISON AVE S STE A Bainbridge Island, WA 98110
GeoResources, LLC	We would offer geotechnical review, and review of geologic hazard assessments for critical areas that include steep slope, landslide, erosion, seismic, and mine hazards. We could also offer review of critical aquifer recharge area reports and other hydrogeologic assessments, including infiltration feasibility.	\$135	4809 Pacific Hwy E Fife, WA 98424
H Studio Architecture + Drafting, P.C.	All	\$80-\$100	PO Box 2467 Battle Ground, WA 98604
Hargis Engineers	Washington State Energy Code (WSEC) plan review, specializing in buildings 4 stories or greater that utilize the Section C407 Total Building Performance (TBP) compliance path (i.e. energy modeling).	\$160	1201 3rd Avenue STE 600 Seattle, WA 98101

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
Hatcher Law, PLLC	Single family unit permits, single family subdivision review, multi-family complex review and/or mixed-use project approvals; commercial permits; re-zone application or comprehensive plan amendments	\$225	11616 N. Market St STE 1090 Mead, WA 99021
i2i Networks, LLC	As a Service Disabled Veteran Owned business, located in Whatcom County, we provide premise verification, data collection, and photogrammetry collection services nationwide for Telecommunications service providers which typically include residential & business counts, address & unit numbers, building & premise type, existing communications service type, and permitting agencies and requirements	\$80	PO Box 270 Blaine, WA 98231
Interlaken Engineering and Design, PLLC	Drainage design for single-family residential and plat projects. Review of associated infrastructure improvements.	\$115	7001 Seaview Ave NW STE 160-388 Seattle, WA 98117
Koble Creative, Architecture LLC	International Residential Code with WA Amendments International Building Code with WA Amendments	\$150	2117 NE Oregon Street STE 301 Portland, OR 97232
Lupine Land Use Planning	Single family unit permits, single family subdivision review, multi-family complex review and/or mixed-use project approvals outside of the Wenatchee city limits and UGA.	\$175	833 N Kansas Ave East Wenatchee, WA 98802
MAHAJAN CONSULTING	Building code review, structural review, accessibility review, energy code review for all types of residential and commercial buildings	\$125	2315 SE 112TH CT Vancouver, WA 98664
Marine Surveys & Assessments	Critical Areas Permitting, environmental permitting and assessments (FWHCA's, Wetlands, Shorelines). Including biological report review, third party assessments, habitat surveys, permit application review (SEPA, Shoreline permits, etc.), as well as reviewing mitigation and monitoring plans.	\$115	2601 Washington Street Port Townsend, WA 98368
Nexus Planning Services	Zoning and environmental review for residential development proposals Critical areas review Site Plan Review (Multifamily, Commercial, Mixed-Use) Subdivision (short/long, minor/major plats) Lot Line Adjustment SEPA/NEPA Environmental Review including Project & Non-Project EISs Variances Shoreline permitting	\$140	25 W. Main Street Floor 3 STE 9W Spokane, WA 99201

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
PACE Engineers, inc	Engineering Review Wetlands & Environmental Review Stormwater Review Land Use Permit Review	\$177	11255 Kirkland Way STE 300 Kirkland, WA 98033
Precision Land Services, Inc.	Preliminary Land Use and Final Engineering Review of Subdivision, Multi-Family, Commercial, and Industrial development projects.	\$143	604 W Evergreen Blvd Vancouver, WA 98660
Press Architecture LLC	PRESS Architecture is able to offer all types of permit review services for single and multifamily projects, infill "middle housing" projects, ADUs / DADUs, and accessory structures. Project reviews can include IRC, IBC, and zoning regulation.	\$150	1722 East Sprague STE 203 Spokane, WA 99202
Raedeke Associates, Inc.	We specialize in providing support to planning departments in their review of permit applications related to critical areas. This includes review of critical area reports, wetland and stream reports, due-diligence assessments, fish and wildlife habitat assessments, mitigation plans, and mitigation monitoring reports. We also provide support for FEMA Habitat Assessments, SEPA checklists, EIS technical reports, and shoreline permit review. We have been in business for over forty years, and currently or recently have provided support to multiple jurisdictions.	\$172	2111 N. Northgate Way STE 219 Seattle, WA 98133
Rainier Stormwater Engineering, LLC	Drainage Review	\$100	12031 SE 186th St Seattle, WA 98133
RB Builders	Single-Family and Multi-family permits	\$148	11756 16th Ave NE Seattle, WA 98125
Red Z Engineering	Mechanical Permit Review include HVAC and Plumbing.	\$150	4322 S 179th St Seatac, WA 98188
SAFEbuilt	Residential Plan Review - All Trades	\$110	3755 Precision Dr Suite 140 Loveland, CO 80538

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
Saturna Watershed Sciences, LLC	1) Local Critical Areas (Growth Management Act), including: geologically hazardous areas (landslide, alluvial fan, coastal/riverine erosion/channel migration zones), wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, hydrogeologic/groundwater/aquifer recharge assessment, Ordinary High Water Mark determinations; FEMA National Flood Insurance Program compliance; Shoreline Development (Shoreline Management Plans); and SEPA checklist review	\$150	112 Ohio Street Bellingham, WA 98225
SBN Planning LLC	Land-use review, zoning review, SEPA, shoreline permits, subdivisions, and development agreements. Pertaining to single family and multi-family residential dwellings of all typologies.	\$165	11628 2nd Ave NW Seattle, WA 98177
SCJ Alliance	<p>Consolidated permit review, Environmental review and threshold determinations</p> <p>Type I Permit – Administrative, Approval § Home Occupations § Manufactured Home Permit § Site Plan Review, Review § Administrative Use § Administrative Variance § Boundary Line Adjustment, Lot Combinations § Design Review (Multifamily, Commercial, ADU, etc.) § Short Plat/Short Subdivision (Preliminary) § Site Development Permit § Environmental Review related to residential permits</p> <p>Type II Permit – Quasi Judicial, Annexations, Appeals of Administrative Decisions, Binding Site Plan, Conditional Use Permit, Master Plan, Planned Development (PRD, PDD, PUD), Preliminary Plat (Subdivision), Rezone (no Comp Plan change needed), Street Vacations, Variance</p> <p>Type III Permit – Legislative, Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Development Regulation Text Amendment, Reasonable Use Exception, Transfer of Density Rights (TDR)</p>	\$185	108 N Washington STE 300 Spokane, WA 99201
Shockey Planning Group, Inc.	Subdivision and master site plan reviews; SEPA responsible official; Public hearing representation; PreApplication reviews; Complete application reviews	\$175	2716 Colby Avenue Everett, WA 98201
Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.	Grading, ROW, Stormwater, Critical Areas, Shoreline Compliance. Can be for single family or multi-family developments.	\$190	1687 114th Ave SE STE 100 Bellevue, WA 98004

Firm	Types of residential permit review services offered	Blended hourly rate	Consultant address
Sunday & Associates, Inc.	918-43 Environmental Consulting 918-72 Lakes, Rivers & other waterway mgt 926-23 Auditing Services-Environmental 926-42 Environmental Services 926-72 Planning & Advisory Services Environmental	\$150	PO Box 4445 West Richland, WA 99354
Ulrich Business Ventures, LLC	Multi Family Homes Single Family Homes Duplexes New Construction Accessory Buildings Mobile-Manufactured Homes Private Storage Structures Garages Decks Retaining Walls Fences Docks Swimming Pools Mechanical Plumbing Other residential permits.	Remote: \$70 Onsite: \$98	100 N Howard Street STE W Spokane, WA 99201
West Coast Code Consultants, Inc.	Single-family unit permits, single-family subdivision review, multi-family complex review, and/or mixed-use project approvals.	\$130	19109 36th Ave W Suite 207 Lynnwood, WA 98036
Zipper Geo Associates, LLC	Geotechnical	\$184	19019 36th Ave. W STE E Lynnwood, WA 98036