




Office of the City Manager

March 13, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Re: Planning & Development Department Customer Service Survey

On February 1, the Planning & Development Department released the 2024 iteration of its customer service survey, slated to remain accessible for responses through March 31st. This survey gathers feedback from customers who anonymously answer questions about their experience with completed building or zoning permit applications. Invitations to participate have been extended to all customers who provided an email address with an application in the last year, as well as to those who visited the Permit Service Center.

The Planning & Development Department's Customer Service Improvement Initiative also included surveys conducted in 2019, 2021, and 2023. The results are part of the Performance Measures reported to the City Council and the public in the City's bi-annual budget process. Many of the same questions have been asked in each of the four editions of the survey, to create a benchmark for improvement that is tracked over time. Survey questions include:

- Helpfulness of online City resources in preparing an application prior to submittal
- Consistency of information received across multiple City sources
- Professionalism and courtesy of City staff
- Type of customer and number of applications (e.g., single homeowner, frequent contractor, small maintenance project, major renovations, etc.) so we can gauge how well our services are received by different client groups
- Method of submittal: online or in-person

Survey respondents can also offer additional comments. While the survey is anonymous, participants may choose to provide their contact information if they want Planning staff to follow up with them directly about their particular suggestions or concerns.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Planning & Development Department retained an outside consultant with expertise in municipal planning and building operations to assess Berkeley's services through surveys of customers, staff, and their own observations. Later in 2017, and

again in 2018, the Planning Department presented its Customer Service Improvement Initiative at Worksessions of the City Council, focusing on achievable recommendations that would meaningfully improve the customer experience.

In a September 2021 Off-Agenda Memo to the City Council, the Planning Department described service improvements made since the 2019 Worksession, including new online tools for application submittal which had been made available to customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another Off-Agenda Memo to Council in February 2023 provided additional updates.

Since the last update, additional service improvements have been made, including:

- Continued improvements to Planning's online guides and application forms, making them easier to understand and use for customers at all levels of experience. See <https://berkeleyca.gov/construction-development/permits-design-parameters/permit-types/permit-forms>
- Streamlined the way the department reviews and responds to Address Assignment requests, a requirement for many types of new housing units including ADUs.
- Created new reports for persons seeking information on active housing projects, available to anyone at <https://aca.cityofberkeley.info/citizenaccess/Default.aspx>. The new reports (under the Zoning tab) satisfy a frequent area of customer request for data on new housing applications, pre-applications, and zoning permits in the appeal period.
- Enabled submittal of solar permits via SolarApp+, an easy and intuitive way of submitting permit application for near-instant approval of residential solar installation permits.
- Assembled information about all City development impact or mitigation fees in a single place, for the first time ever, at <https://berkeleyca.gov/construction-development/land-use-development/understanding-impact-fees>.

Once the latest Customer Service survey closes and we analyze the data, we will include results as part of the City's performance measurement reporting program, in the budget process and elsewhere.

cc: LaTanya Bellow, Deputy City Manager
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