



Office of the City Manager

February 15, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: *DWR* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager
Re: Planning & Development Department Customer Service Survey

On February 1, the Planning & Development Department released the latest edition of its customer service survey. The current survey, open from February 1 through March 31, asks customers who have completed the building or zoning permit process to anonymously answer questions about their experience. Every customer who included an email address with a permit application which was completed in the last year has been invited to participate.

The Planning & Development Department's Customer Service Improvement Initiative also included surveys in 2019 and 2021, and the results are part of the Performance Measures which the department reports to the City Council and the public. Many of the same questions have been asked in each of the three editions of the survey, to create an improvement benchmark which is being 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 participants 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.

Since that memo, additional service improvements have been made, including:

- Adoption of a new Zoning Ordinance. This project originated from a City Council referral, which sought to clarify the Zoning Ordinance to make it more useable for customers.
- Development of better online resources to prepare customers for applications, including the recently updated *Guide to Submitting a Zoning Project Application*, at <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Guide-to-Submitting-a-Zoning-Project-Application.pdf>
- Reestablishment of the Interdepartmental Roundtable process, which gives applicants for large projects the opportunity to discuss proposals and get feedback from multiple City departments in one sitting, prior to submitting a formal application.
- Additional staff in the Land Use Planning Division to handle the large volume of development applications and improve customer turnaround times.
- Improvement of training materials for new planners, to help ensure consistency in interpretation and practice.
- Adoption of updated Building and Housing Codes, to advance the City's goals such as green building and improved sustainability, and to consolidate state and local housing codes which had previously been difficult to find and use.

Once the 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
Anne Cardwell, Deputy City Manager
Jenny Wong, City Auditor
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager
Jordan Klein, Director, Planning & Development Department