

REPORT

**City of Bellingham**  
**Permit Center Customer Satisfaction Survey**  
**2010 Quarter 3 and Quarter 4**

**February 2011**

Prepared by the  
Center for Economic Vitality  
at  
Western Washington University

Tom Dorr  
Jennifer Hill

(360) 733-4014



**Center for Economic Vitality**

*Western Washington University*

*College of Business and Economics*

Bellingham Towers  
119 N. Commercial St. Suite 175  
Bellingham, WA 98225-4455  
[www.cevforbusiness.com](http://www.cevforbusiness.com)

## ■ INTRODUCTION

During the last two quarters of 2010 (July to December), the Center for Economic Vitality in the College of Business and Economics at Western Washington University continued a satisfaction survey of recent customers of the City of Bellingham's Permit Center. This follow-up report includes respondents that used the Permit Center's services from October 2006 to July 2010.

This customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, so researchers first needed to obtain email addresses for the individuals that used Permit Center services. One hundred three (103) individuals completed the survey during the third quarter of 2010 (July to September) and another seventy seven (77) completed the survey in the fourth quarter (October to December). This resulted in a total of 180 respondents for a 28.4% response rate. This calculates to an 6.18% margin of error on the survey.

Since January 2009 the survey is conducted quarterly; however, the data for two quarters are aggregated and reported semi-annually. The findings of this follow-up customer satisfaction survey are compared to previous quarters' findings in order to inform the continuous quality improvement efforts of the Permit Center.

This report uses the convention of *italicizing* any response option from the survey in an effort to fully convey the voice of the respondents' survey responses. Appendix A documents the verbatim comments made by respondents to various open-ended questions and Appendix B presents the full script of the online survey. Any Permit Center staff names were removed.

Please note that some historical results have been dropped from the graphs due to space restrictions. In all cases, the baseline time period as well as the three most current time periods are shown.

## TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

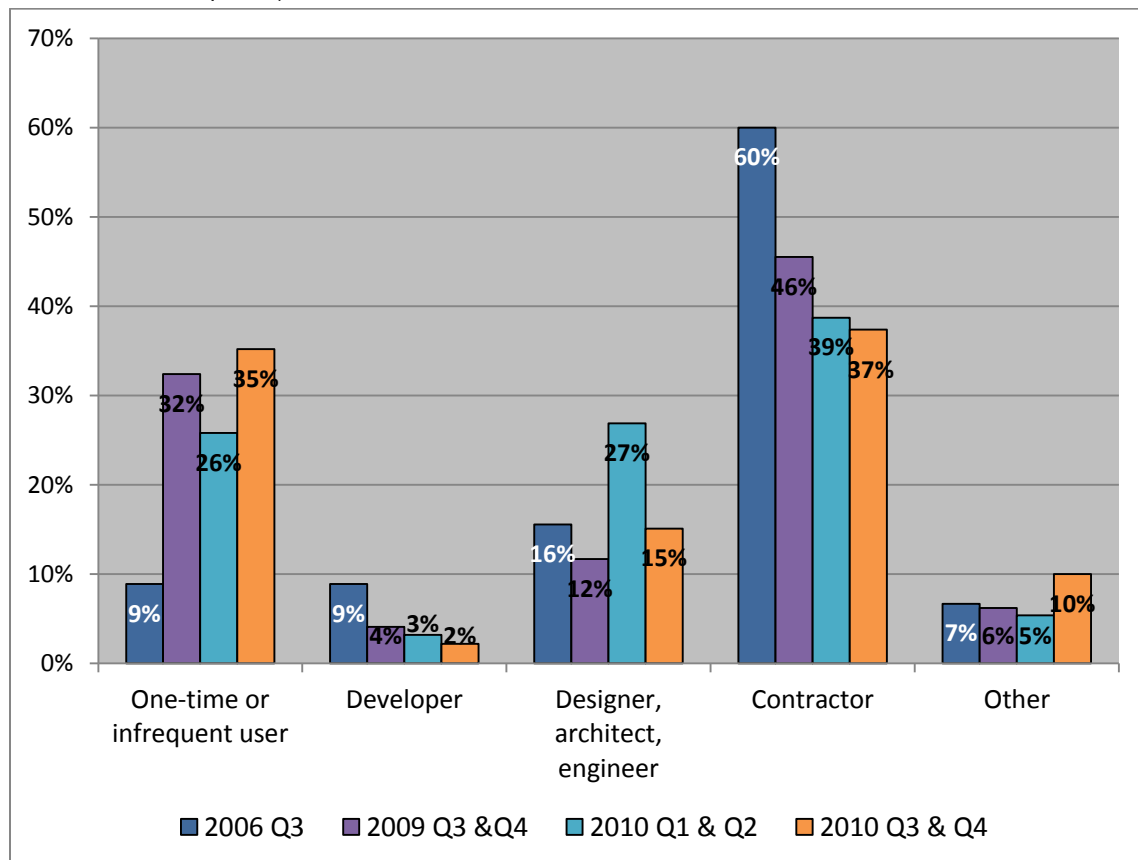
In order to understand the customers using the Permit Center, users were asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from July to December of 2010. As figure 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were contractors (37%) and one-time or infrequent users (35%).

In the last half of 2010 there was an increase in use by one-time or infrequent users. However, usage by designers, architects and engineers fell significantly. Usage by developers and contractors continues to fall. This could be a reflection of the current slowdown in the real estate market.

Customer types reported under other include: *builder/contractor, Building permit applicant/recipient, Development consultant, Homeowner upgrading property, Infrequent, as jobs on campus requires., Multi family owner/remodeler, Owner, owner builder, Owner's Representative WWU, Permit Expeditor, PLUMBING & HEATING, Professional development consultant, Property owner with multiple permit nee, Property owner/building a home, Sign company, Solar Design & Contracting, when we have events...mulit during year, WWU facility management project manager.*

**Figure 1. Distribution of Permit Center Customer Type**

(N=179 for current time period)



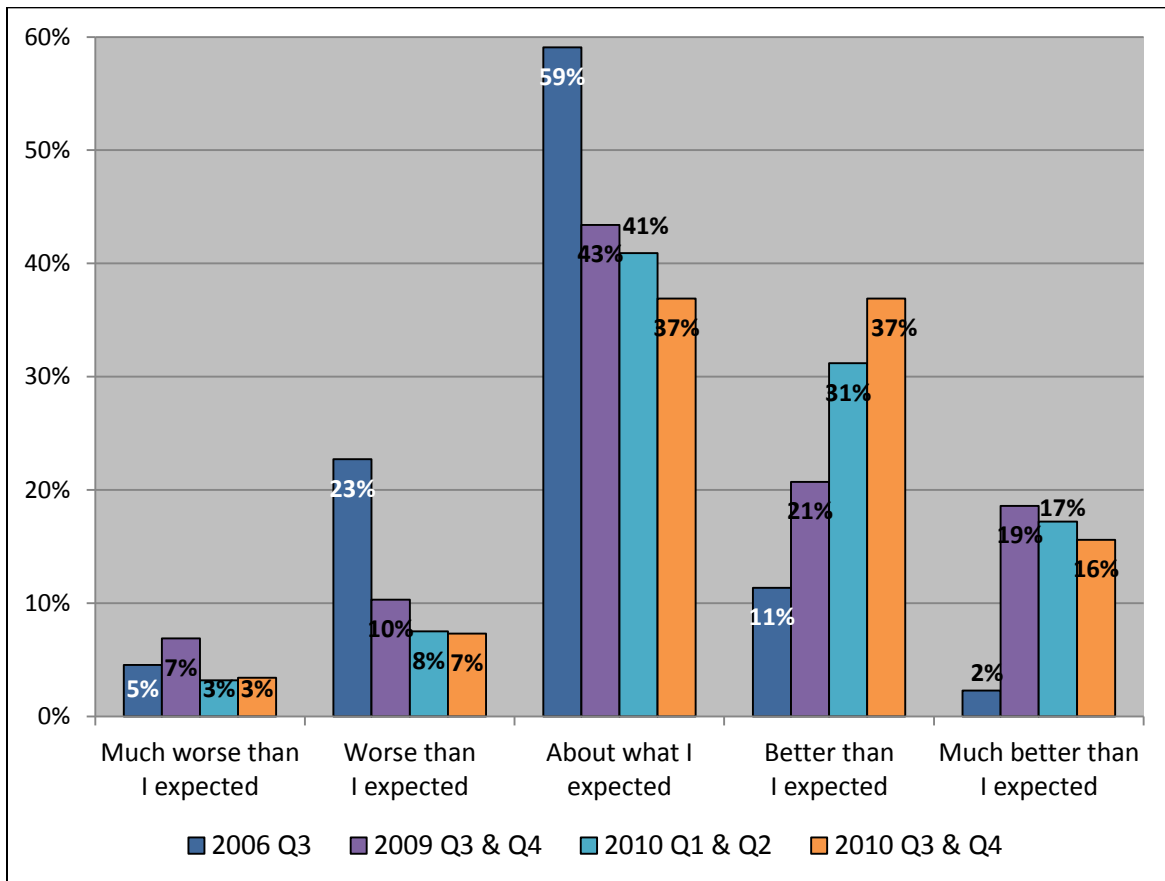
## OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that during July to December of 2010, 53% of respondents said that their experience was *much better than I expected* or better. Of particular note is that those who reported the experience being *better than I expected* rose to 37%. This reflects the highest satisfaction reported to date.

Only 10% of customers reported that their experience was *worse* or *much worse* than expected during the last half of 2010.

**Figure 2. Overall Experience with the Permit Center**

(N=179 for current time period)



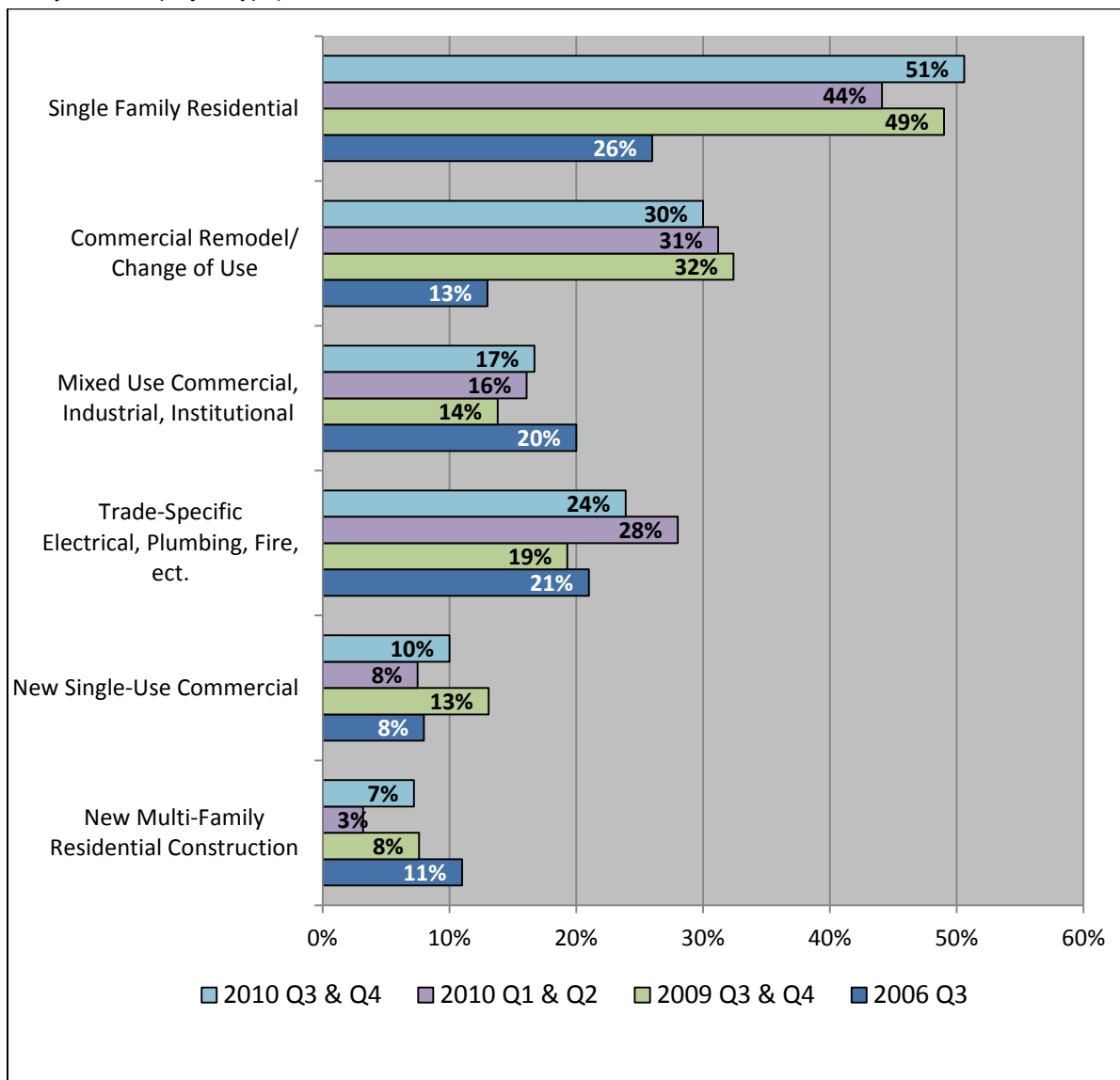
## PROJECT TYPES

Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of project brought them in to the Permit Center. As figure 3 shows, single-family residential remains the most common project type, accounting for over 50% of the reported projects. Notable shifts in project types since the first half of 2010 include an increase in the number of new multi-family residential projects. There was a relative decrease in the proportion of commercial remodel and trade-specific projects.

Please note that respondents could select more than one type of project, so the total number of projects (249) exceeds the total number of respondents (n=179).

**Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types**

(Ns vary for each project type)



## PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

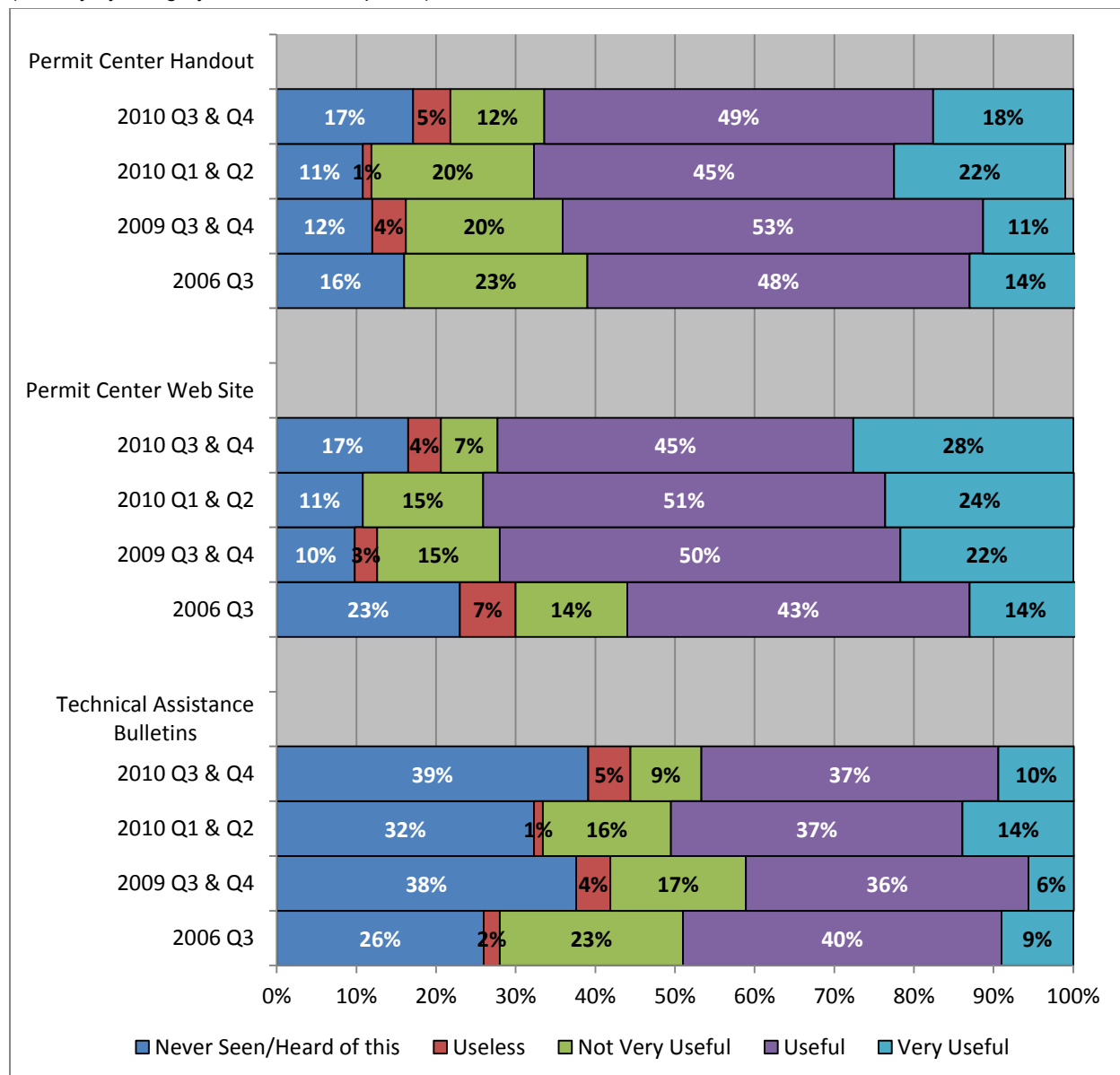
The first rating items on the survey asked respondents to indicate how useful the Permit Center support materials were. This included the Center’s website, handouts, and assistance bulletins.

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of customers that found the website and handouts *useful* or *very useful* remained steady from the last half of 2009 through the last half of 2010.

Awareness of technical assistance bulletins is at the lowest level in over a year. Users that reported technical assistance bulletins as *useless* or *not very useful* fell to 14%, down from 17% in the first half of 2010.

**Figure 4. Usefulness of Permit Center Materials**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



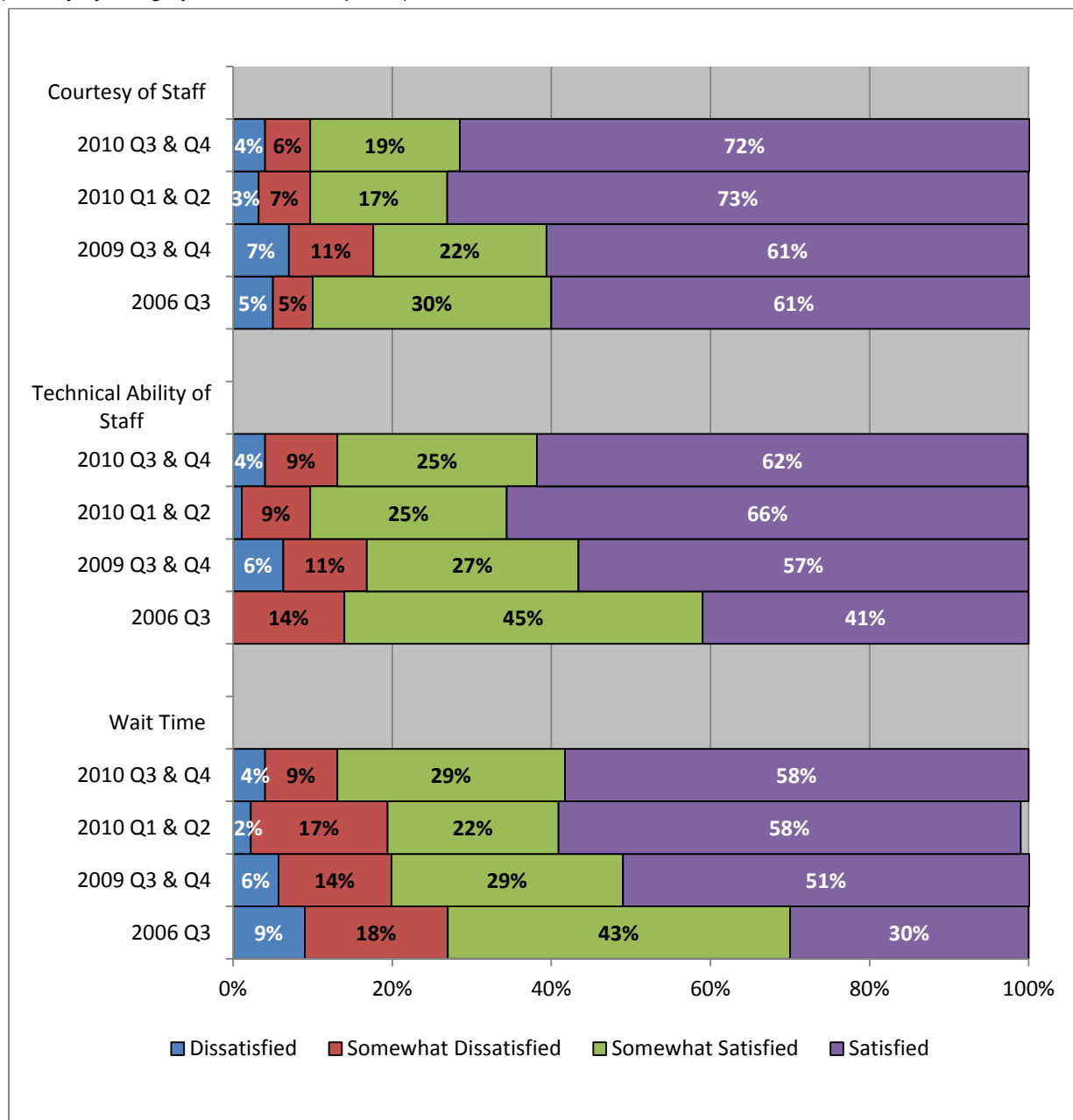
## COUNTER ASSISTANCE

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the Permit Center’s counter staff. Respondents are most satisfied with the courtesy of the counter staff (72%).

The greatest improvement in respondent satisfaction is seen in wait time, which rose to 58% *satisfied* from 30% when the survey was first conducted in 2006.

**Figure 5. Customer Satisfaction with the Counter Assistance**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



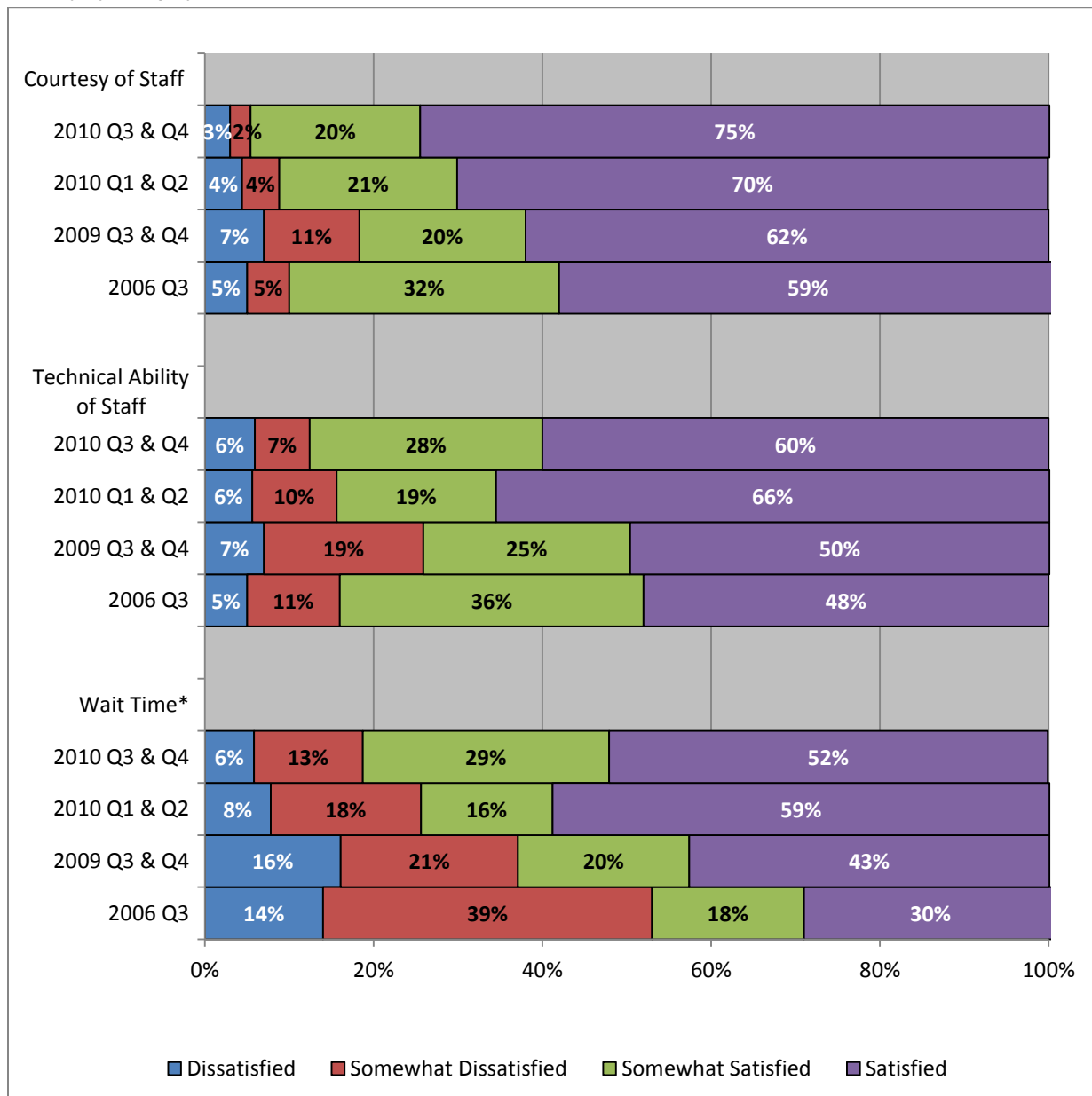
## PROCESSING APPLICATION

Permit Center users were asked to evaluate the application processing procedures. As figure 6 shows, the courtesy of staff was again the highest rated aspect of this particular process.

Users who reported being *satisfied* with the technical ability of staff and the wait time fell by 6% and 7% respectively. However, it should be noted that users who report being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* decreased in all categories.

**Figure 6. Satisfaction with the Processing Application**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



\*In past surveys wait time was asked as efficiency. Starting in 2009 the wording was changed to wait time

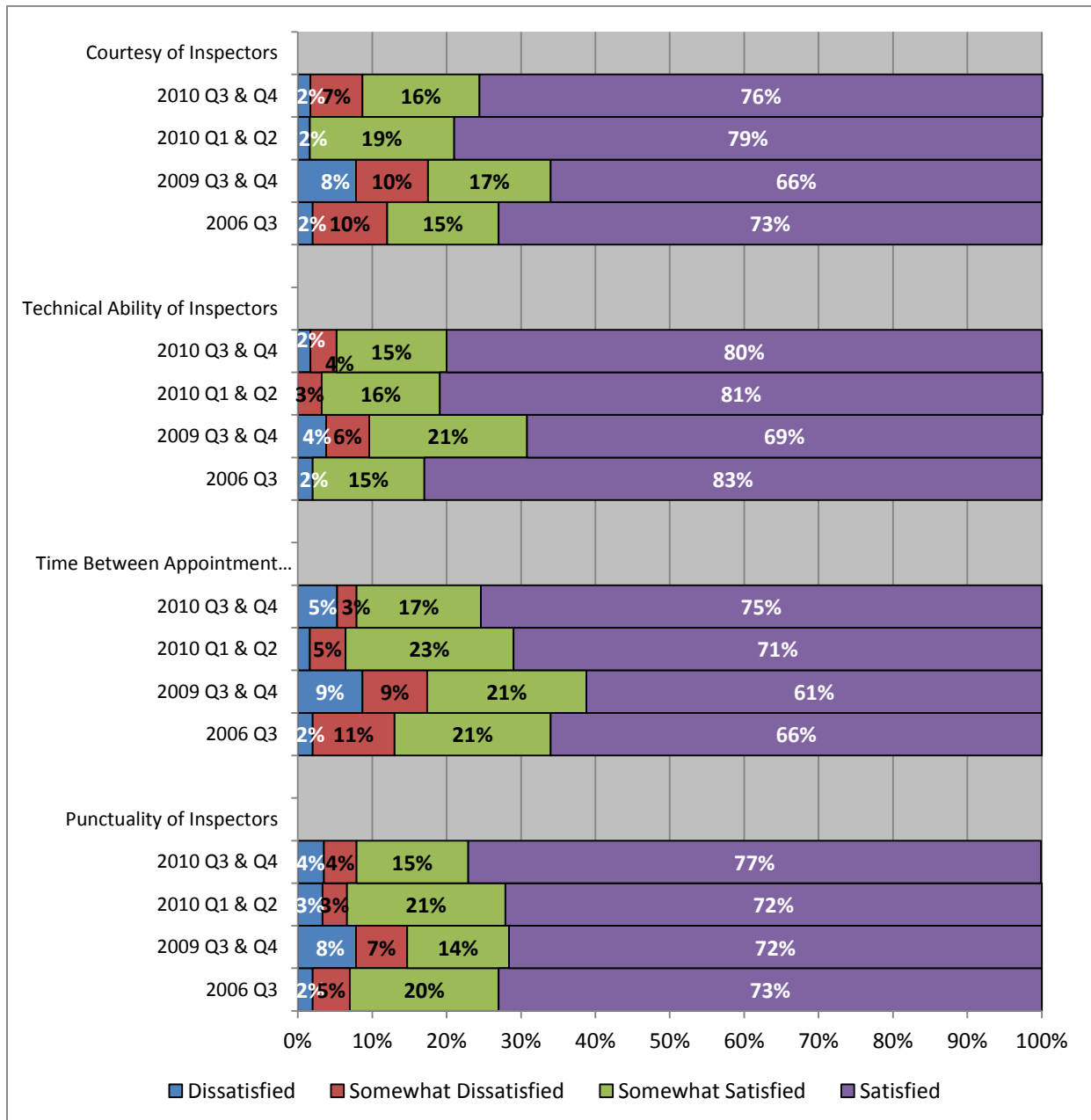
## INSPECTORS

The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Figure 7 shows that for the first half of 2010, users were most satisfied with the technical ability of the inspectors (95% *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*).

During the last half of 2010 users reported the most dissatisfaction with the courtesy of the inspectors (9% *dissatisfied* or *Somewhat Dissatisfied*)

**Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



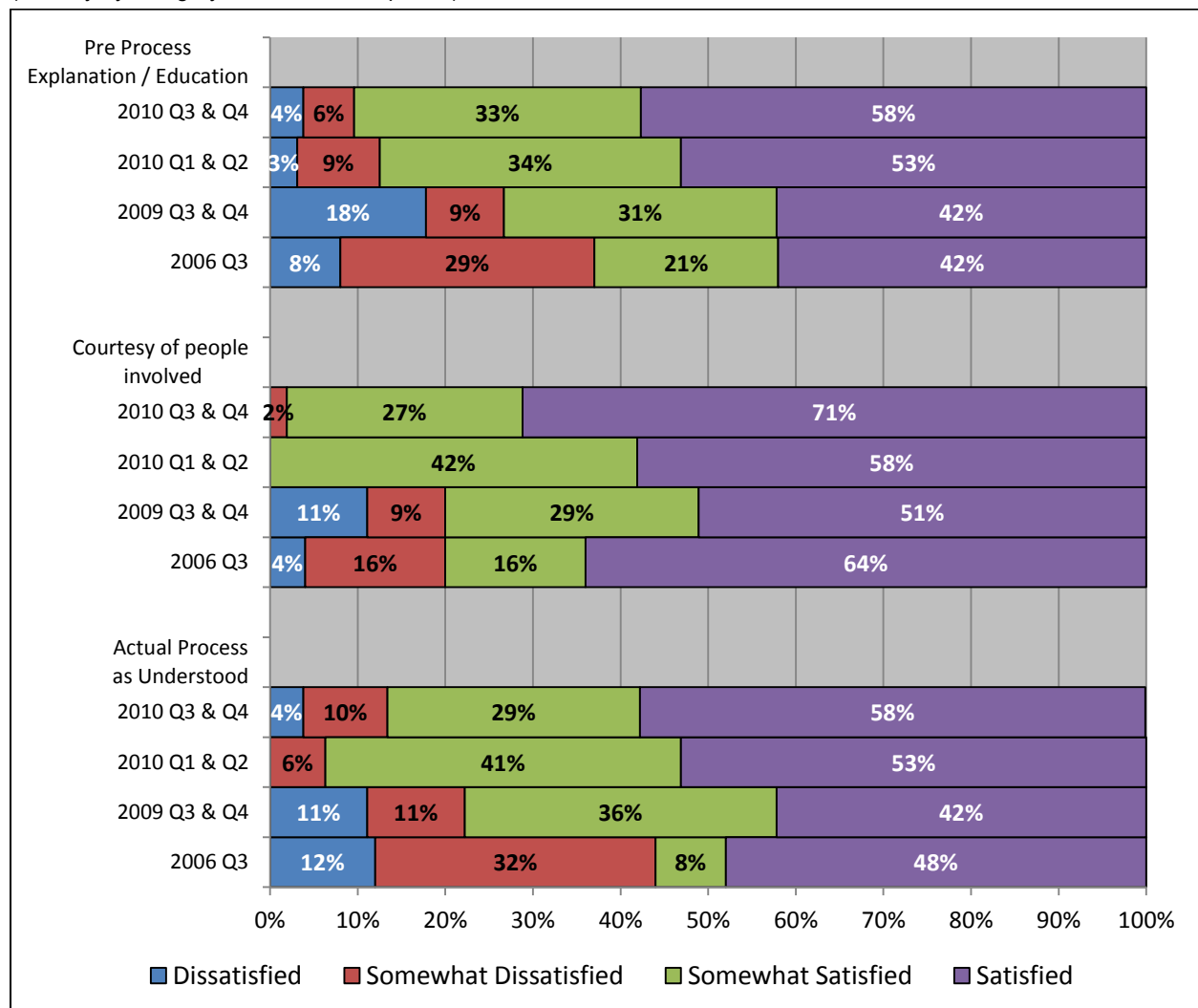
## CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, the customer satisfaction rate for the preprocess explanation and courtesy of people remained close to levels reported in the first half of 2010.

Respondent satisfaction with the actual process as understood decreased to 87% being *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*, down from 94%. However, this is an increase from 2009 satisfaction levels.

**Figure 8. Satisfaction with Certificate of Occupancy Process**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



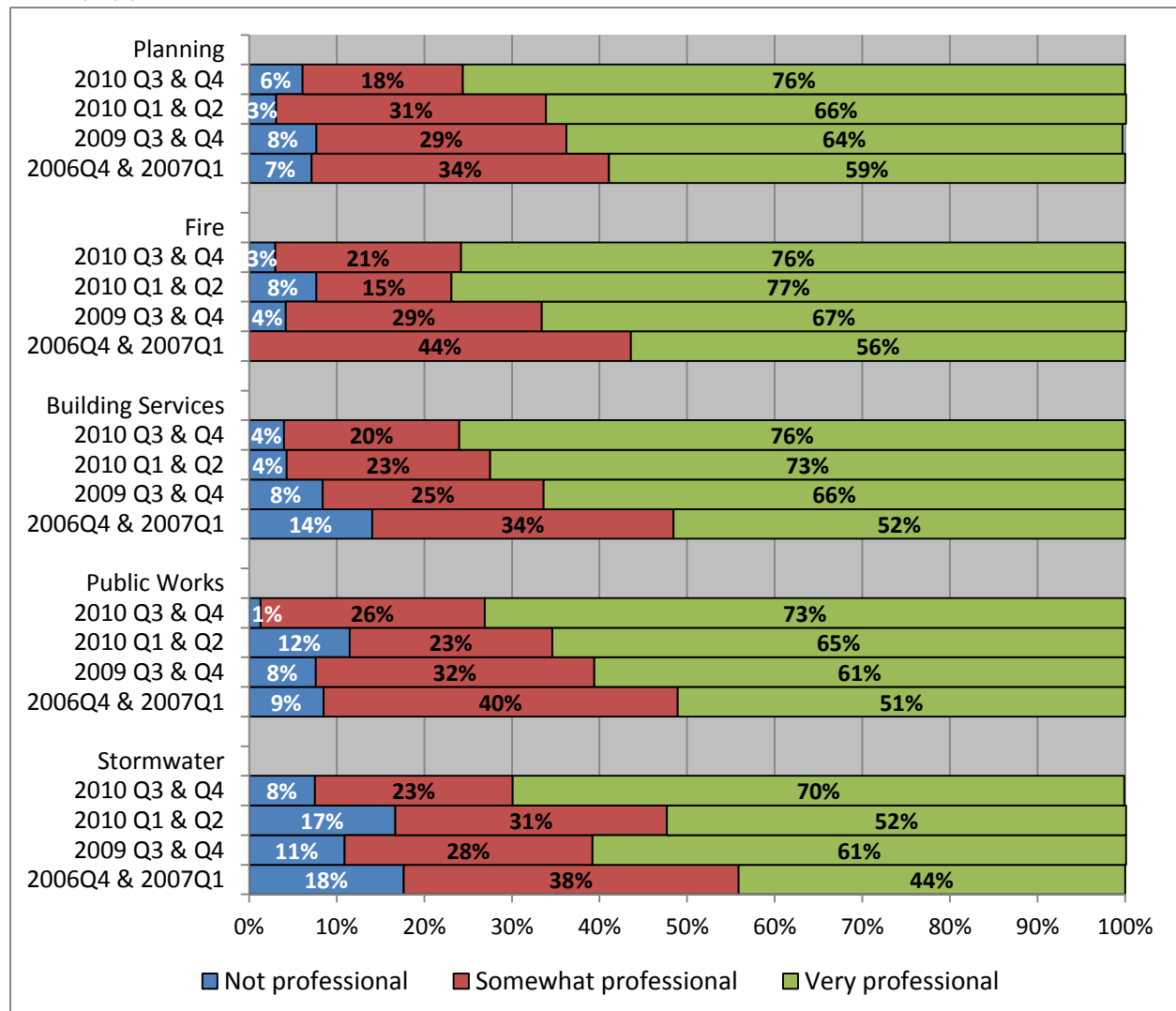
## PROFESSIONALISM

Customers of the Permit Center were asked to rate the professionalism of each department with which they interacted. (The results of this section can not be compared to the baseline time period because the format of the items changed.)

As figure 9 indicates, fire, public works and storm water departments increased slightly in the percentage of respondents selecting *somewhat professional* or *very professional* during the last two quarters of 2010. Planning saw a slight decrease in the percentage of people who reported *somewhat professional* or *very professional*.

**Figure 9. Rating of the Professionalism of each Department**

(Ns vary by year and department)



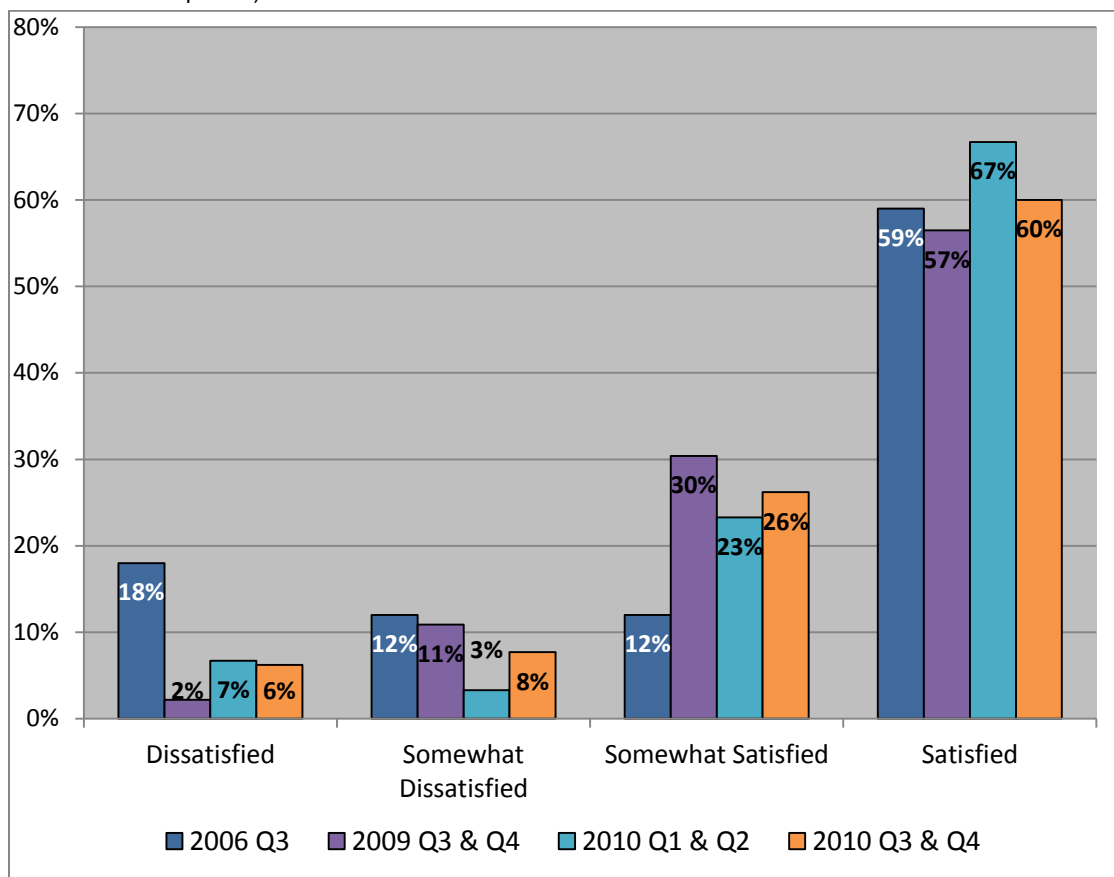
## PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-application meeting (n=65) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, the percentage of *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* customers decreased slightly in the last half of 2010, down to 86%. Respondents that reported being either *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied* decreased to 14%.

Customers who participated in these meetings were asked to provide suggestions that might make the meetings more effective. Their verbatim responses are presented in Appendix A of this report.

**Figure 10. Distribution of Satisfaction with Pre-Application Meetings**

(N=65 for current time period)



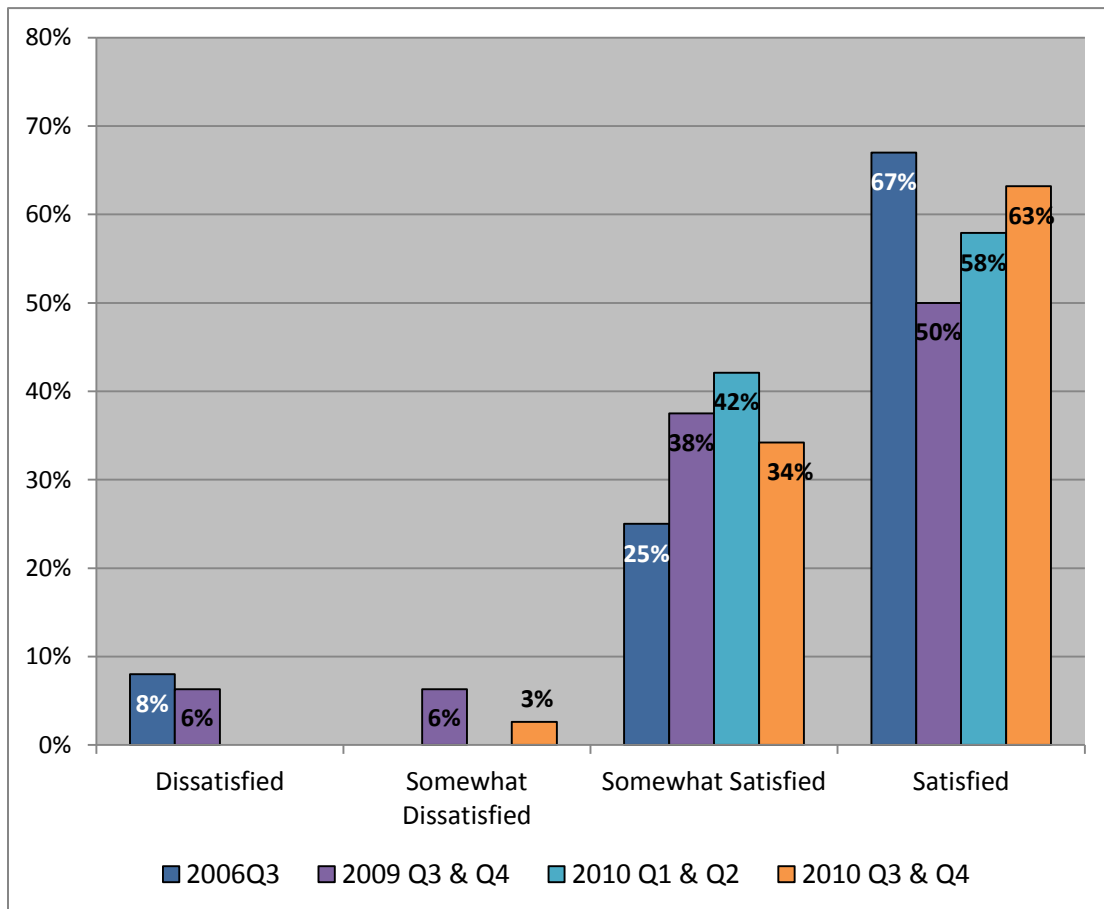
## PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-construction meeting (n = 38) were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, in the last half of 2010 there was a slight increase in the percentage of users who reported being *somewhat dissatisfied*. However, those that reported being *satisfied* rose to 63%.

Respondents that participated in a pre-construction meeting were asked to provide suggestions that might make the meetings more effective. Their verbatim responses are presented in Appendix A of this report.

**Figure 11. Satisfaction with Pre-Construction Meetings**

(N=38 for current time period)



## SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

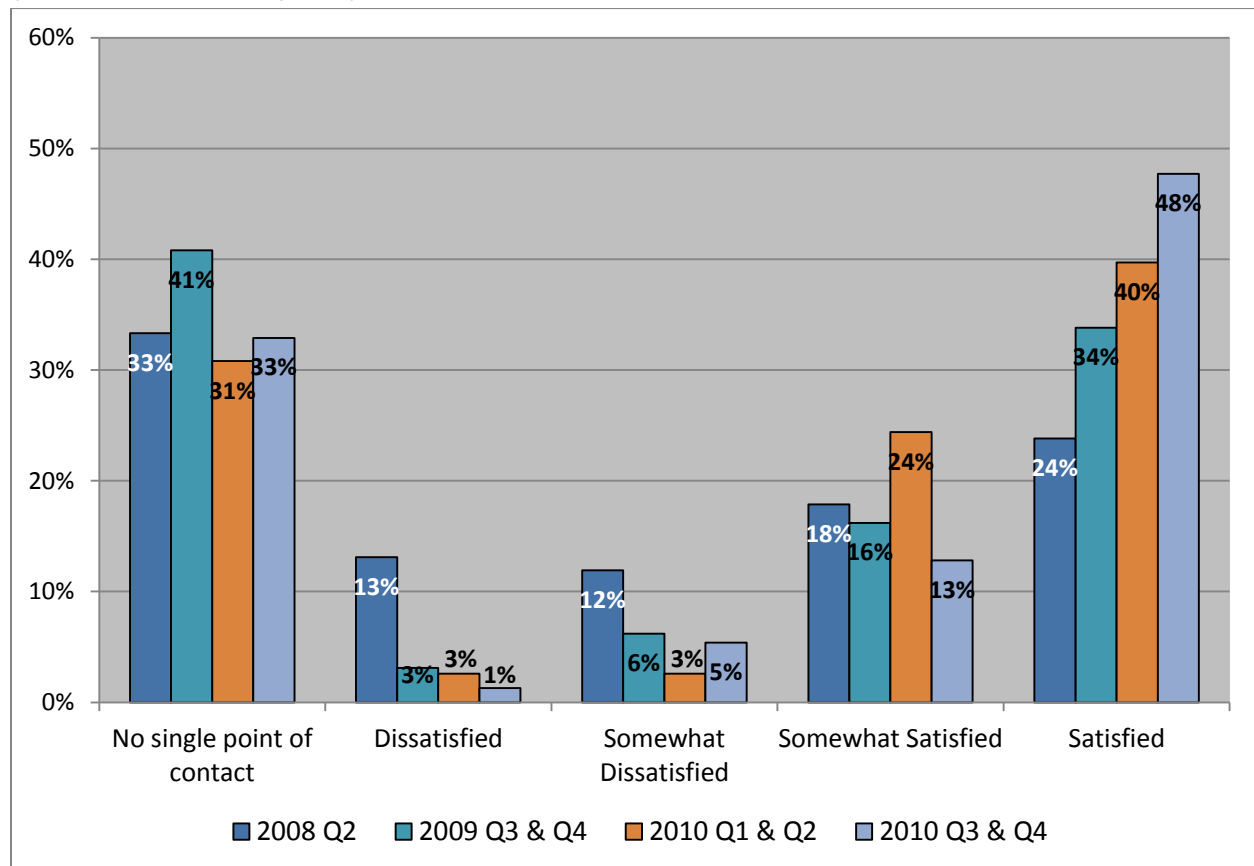
Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the Permit Center’s ‘single point of contact’ approach. As figure 12 indicates, the percentage of respondents who were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* decreased to 61% in the second half of 2010.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they did not have a single point of contact increased to 33%, up from 31% in the first half of 2010. This shows a trend of approximately one-third of Permit Center users not aware of or not using this service.

When the *no single point of contact* responses are removed from the analysis, 90% of the remaining respondents reported that they were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*.

**Figure 12. Satisfaction with Single Point of Contact Approach**

(N=149 for current time period)



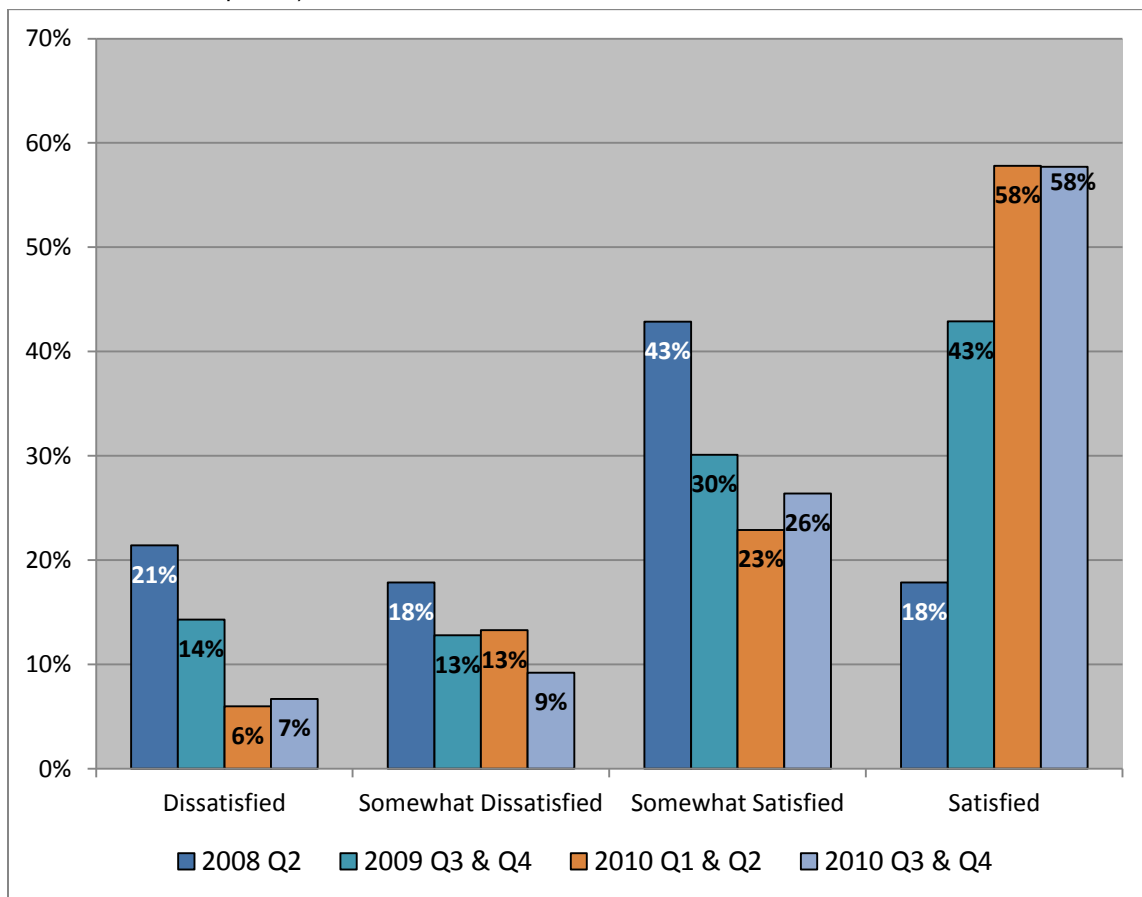
## TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS AND TIMELINES

Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with the Permit Center’s emphasis on transparency of the process and timelines.

As figure 13 indicates, the percentage of respondents who reported that they were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* rose to 84% in the last two quarters of 2010. Respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* with the transparency of the process and timelines rose slightly to 7%.

**Figure 13. Satisfaction with Transparency**

(N=163 for current time period)



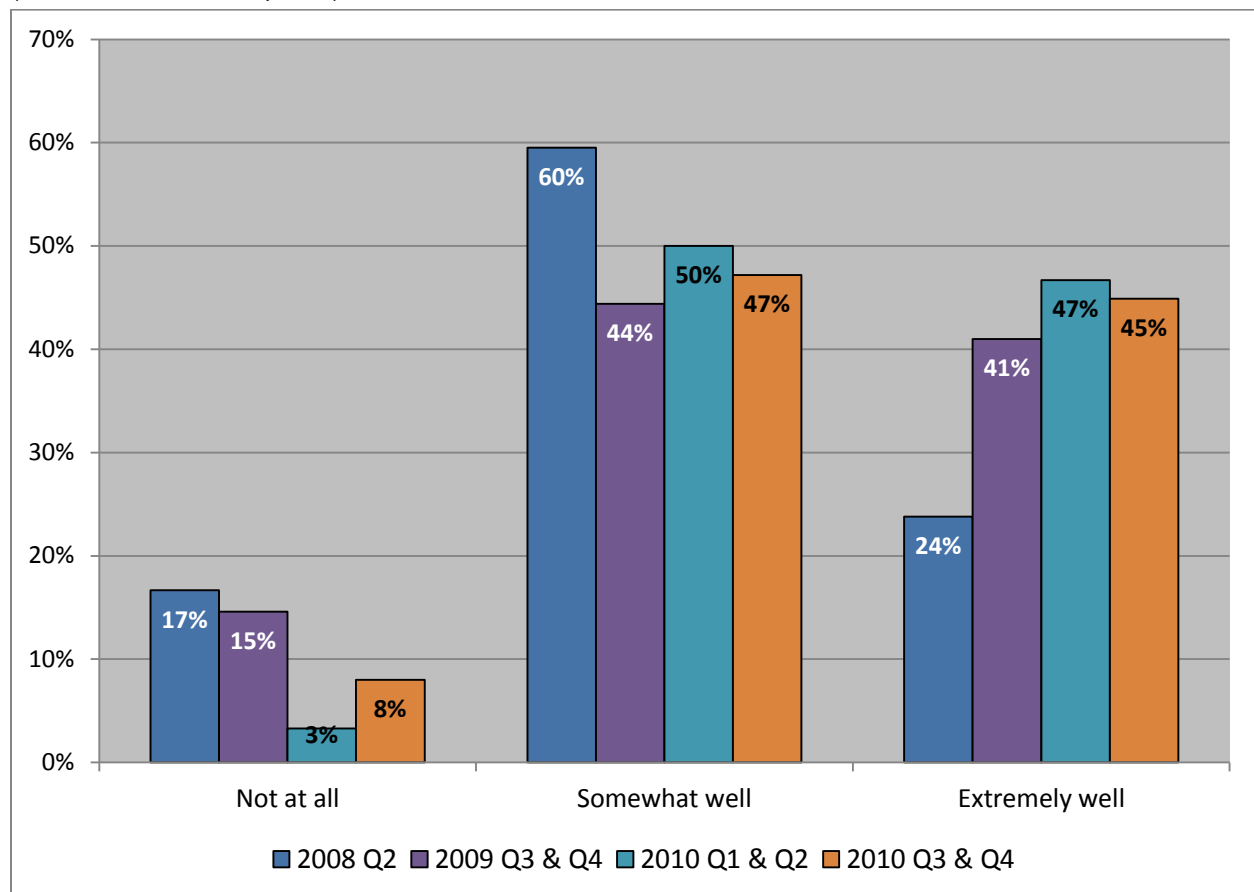
## COMMUNICATION ABOUT PERMIT REVIEWS

Customers were asked about how well they were kept informed by the Permit Center about any permit reviews that were needed and how long the review would take.

As figure 14 indicates, the majority of respondents (92%) were either *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed by the Permit Center staff. Respondents who reported not being informed at all rose 5% in the second half of 2010, up to 8% of respondents.

**Figure 14. Communication about Reviews**

(N=176 for current time period)



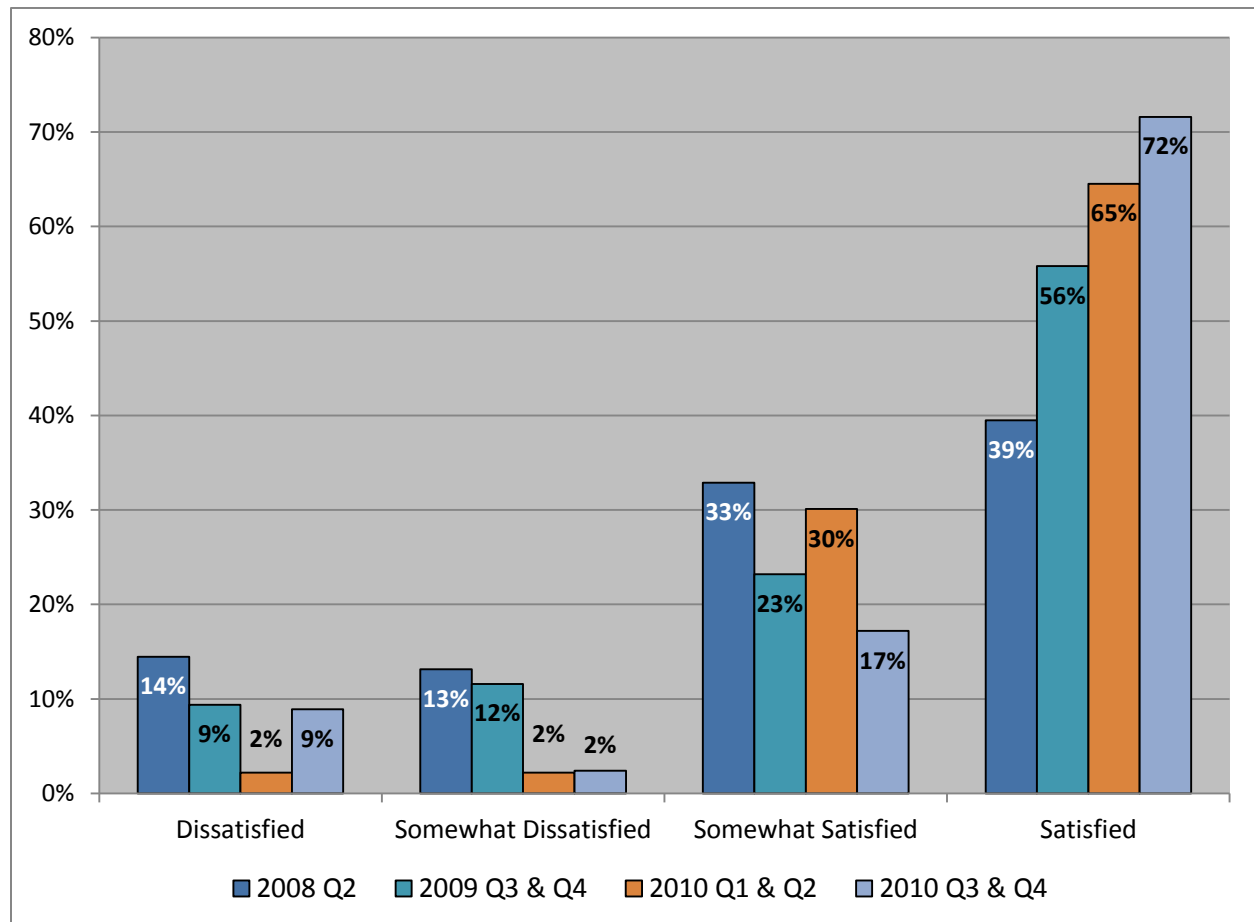
## COMPLETENESS OF APPLICATION REVIEW

Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with how completely Permit Center staff reviewed their application before it was submitted.

As figure 15 indicates, the majority of respondents (72%) were *satisfied* with the level of review completeness by Permit Center staff. The percentage of respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* increased significantly to 11%. This is up from 4% in the first half of 2010.

**Figure 15. Level of Completeness in Application Review**

(N=169 for current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

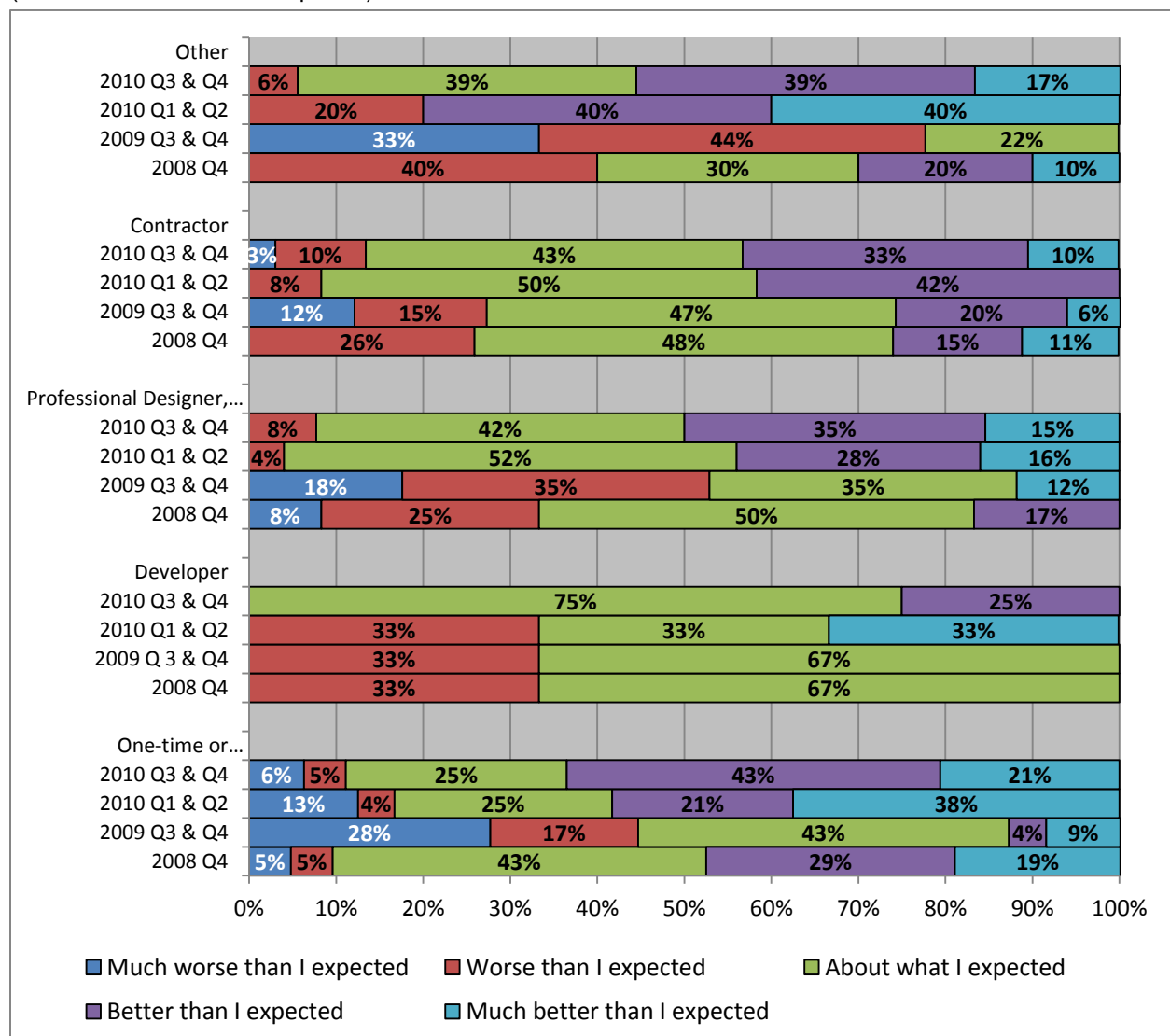
By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 2, it is possible to match the customer type with the overall experience they had with the permit center.

As figure 16 indicates, one-time or infrequent users had the highest percentage of respondents selecting *better than I expected* or *much better than I expected* for the last half of 2010 (64%). Thirteen percent (13%) of contractors reported the experience was *much worse than I expected* or *worse than I expected*.

No developer reported that the experience was *worse than I expected* or *much worse than I expected*. It should be noted, however, that there were only 4 respondents that were developers.

**Figure 16. User Type and Overall Experience with the Permit Center**

(N=179 for the current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

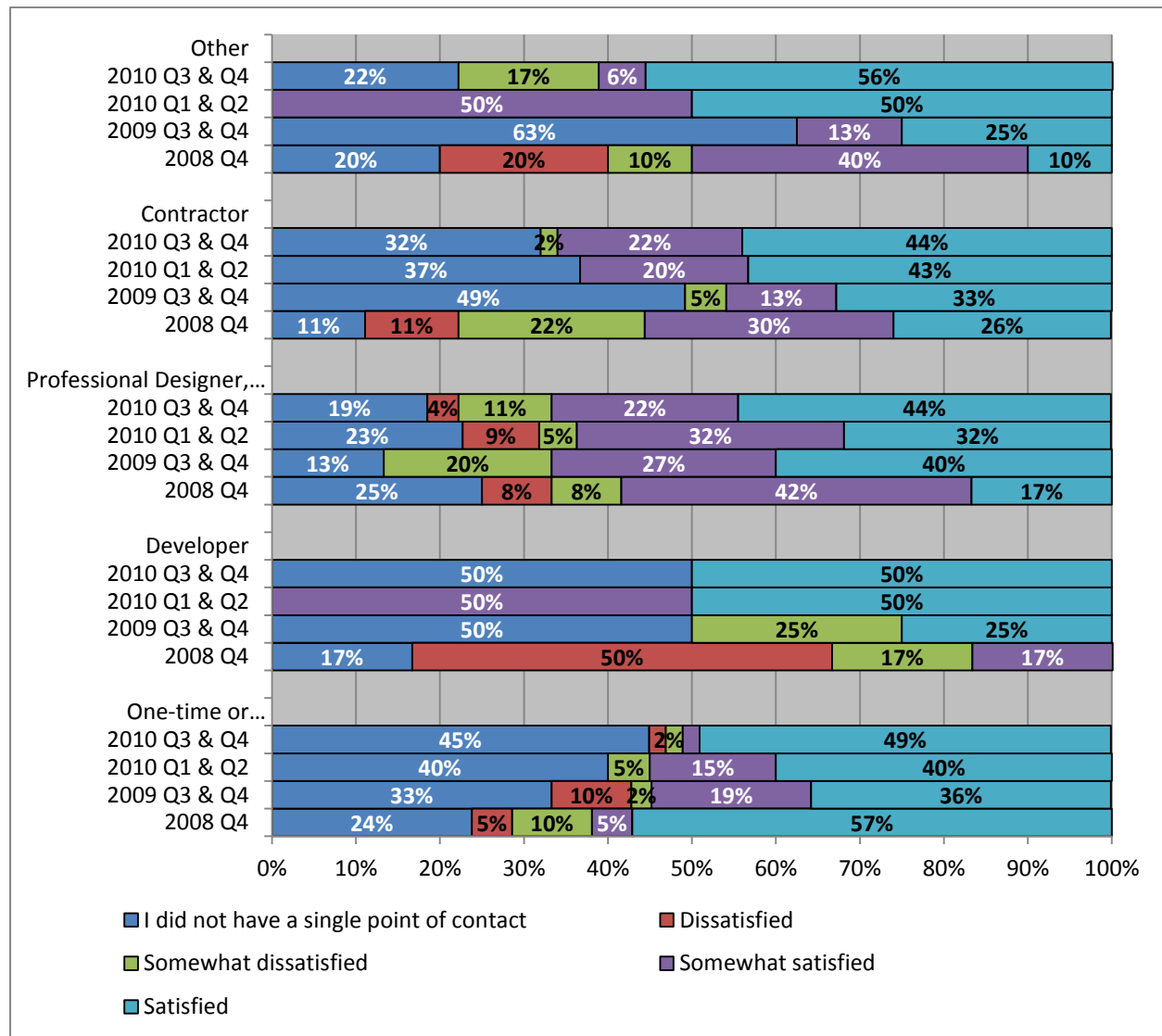
Next, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the Permit Center’s new ‘single point of contact’ approach with your project manager?”

As figure 17 indicates, other users were the most satisfied (56% *satisfied*). Four percent (4%) of professional designers, architects and engineers reported that they were *dissatisfied* with the single point of contact. The percentage of one-time and other users who reported not having a single point of contact increased in the second half of 2010 to 45% and 22% respectively. This illustrates that this service is either under-utilized or unknown to these groups of users.

When the single point of contact is removed from the data, one-time or infrequent users who reported that they were *satisfied* increased to 89%.

**Figure 17. User Type and Single Point of Contact**

(N=148 for the current time period)



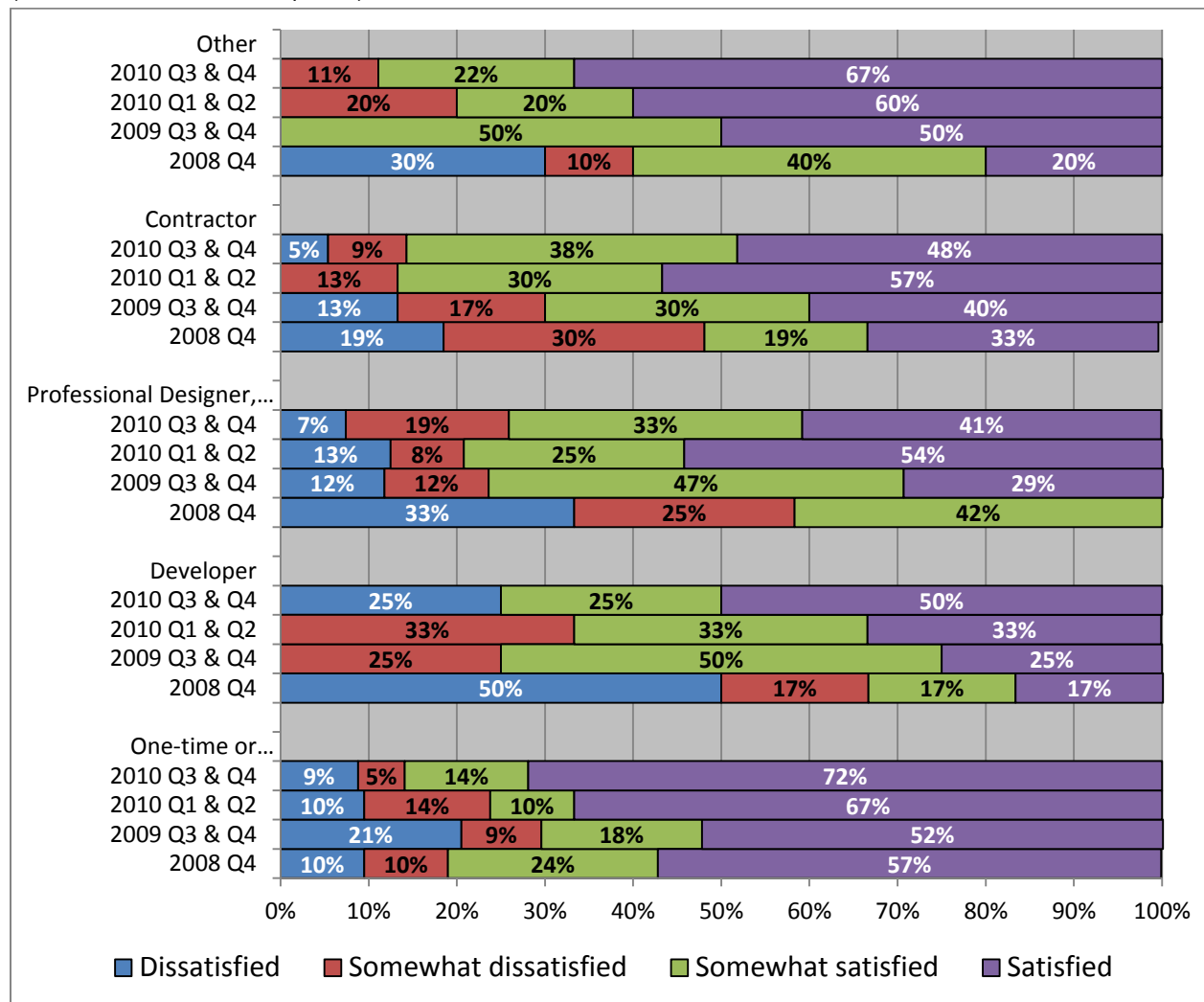
## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND TRANSPARENCY

By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 13, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the transparency of the Permit Center’s process and timelines?”

As figure 18 indicates, other users have the highest satisfaction rate with the transparency of the process and timelines with 89% reporting that they were *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*. Twenty-five percent (25%) of developers and 26% of professional designers, architects and engineers reported that they were *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* with the transparency.

**Figure 18. User Type and Transparency**

(N=162 for the current time period)



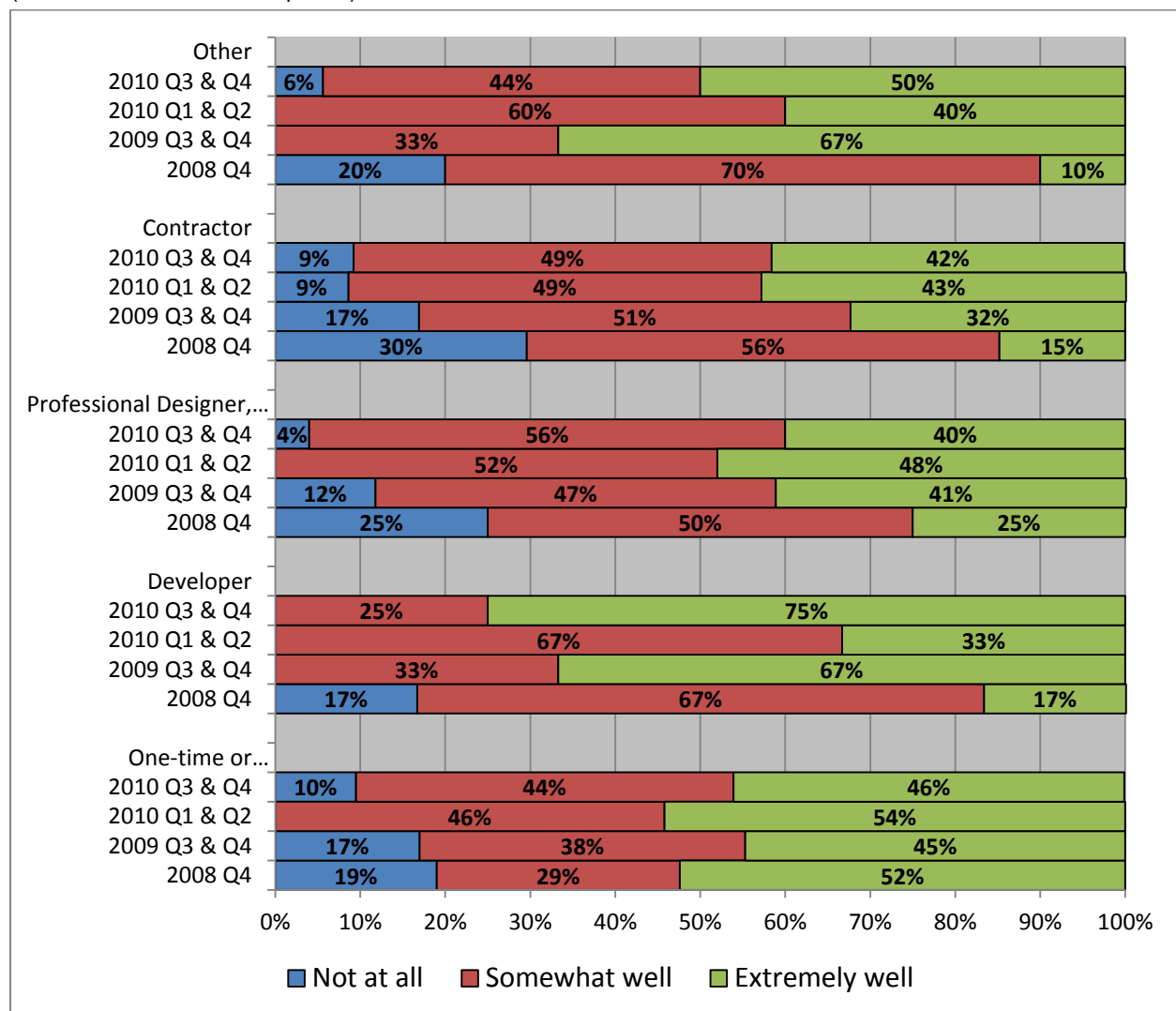
## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT DELAYS

By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 14, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How well were you informed about what kind of permit review was needed for your application and how long it would take?”

As figure 19 indicates, developers and professional designers, architects and engineers feel they were most informed about the process with 100% and 96% of users respectively responding that they were *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed. Six percent (6%) of other users, 10% of one-time users and 4% of professional designers, architects and engineers reported that they were *not at all* informed about reviews and how long they would take. In the first half of 2010 none of these users responded that they weren't informed.

**Figure 19 User Type and Communication about Reviews**

(N=175 for the current time period)



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated by the survey results from the second half of 2010, customer satisfaction with their overall experience at the City of Bellingham's Permit Center stayed the same as the first half of the year. This is an increase over the users' satisfaction in 2009. The courtesy of the staff remains the highest rated service aspect. Satisfaction with pre-application and pre-construction meetings continues to remain high. However, there are still some areas that need improvement. Almost one-third of users were not aware that they had a single point of contact. The majority of these users were one-time or infrequent users. In addition, more users reported that they were not informed of the permit review process and how long it would take.

Discussions regarding improvements should try to identify what processes, procedures, or personnel have changed in the last six months that lead to the slight increase in dissatisfaction being reported. For example, the completeness of application reviews, certificate of occupancy process and technical ability of staff for counter assistance and inspectors all had higher rates of dissatisfaction reported by users.

Contractors, who are the largest percentage of respondents, reported a slight increase in the percentage that were dissatisfied with their overall experience. Satisfaction with Permit Center transparency remains high amongst all users.

There were a greater number of customer comments from this survey than with past surveys. The feedback in the first half of 2010 seemed much more positive than the comments in the last half of 2010.

## APPENDIX A: VERBATIM CUSTOMER COMMENTS

### Question 13: If you participated in a pre-application meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective?

- NA
- After much planning, drawing, etc....I was informed of a glitch....and that my plan for fire-separation was not code approved' the alternative was simply impossible. Why look for increasing density when the laws are so rigid??? It sounds good to have a "toolkit" but some major considerations were left out!
- City personal need to make a decision at the time of the meeting and stand behind it.
- cost and time /note my time has value
- Didn't really have a meeting per se, just a couple of conversations with staff. Overall very good, but a bit more patience with a first time "user" would be great.
- I enjoyed the ease of discussing my plans and receiving guidance from a planner in a private room, where I could sit down and spread out plans on a table.
- I think that staff should take pre-application meetings more seriously and attempt to provide more detailed feedback at these meetings. While every department is represented, I find that often comments are generic, in-applicable or not accurate for the specific project. Often my clients feel like the pre-app was a waste of time.
- Identified items to prepare for application need to be entered into the project file and backed up by EVERY staff member. All to offer rules and subjectivity changes which only makes for a frustrating experience by the applicant/professional.
- If a project clearly only will involve a couple departments, but a pre-application meeting is necessary and useful, may only invite necessary participants. I suppose the proponent could waive involvement from certain departments?
- If a project is subject to Design Review then the Design Review Planner should be in attendance and provide comments. On several pre-apps the staff planner assigned to provide comments did not adequately cover design review issues, and we were presented with contradictory conditions at a later date after the design review planner looked at the project.
- It would be much less expensive and much faster to make a private company monitored by a very small but skilled city staff.
- It would be very good to try and get staff notes out to applicant BEFORE the meeting, so applicant representatives can be better prepared to discuss an issue. The written meeting minutes notes of the meeting needs to be sent out in draft, to allow for corrections / clarifications by staff and applicant.
- XXXXX made thing easy over the phone and e-mails to where there were no need for a face to face.
- Lack of understanding of code and lack of understanding of what code applies.
- N/A
- no
- No. XXXXX was prepared, well informed, and helpful
- No. I got the information that I needed and found the counter person very helpful.
- NONE
- Review inspection procedures as or when work is completed. Plumbing insection was very hazy, plumber was not certain as to city procedures of how or when to ask re in;pections
- Suggestions from staff to make project more affordable for owner.

- That the planners put in writing what you will need for the application. After I came back in to submit permit they had changed what they said would be required.
- The idea of presenting questions before the pre-app. was a very good idea. XXXX made this suggestion. It allowed staff time to research, if needed, previous to the meeting.
- These are generally very good. Costly elements are discussed at this time, so that money is not wasted with wrong assumptions. City attendees are on the whole professional, and experienced. The owners are included so they know what to expect and understand better the guidelines that the City sets forth.
- They are very effective.
- We kept getting different answers in different meetings because there were several different levels to look at, floorload, building code, fire, etc. A handout to track what was said to keep all the ways of looking at the project (HOOPS to jump through) might be helpful.
- well accepted

**Question 15: If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective?**

- doesnt apply here...event permit
- Haven't been in one yet.
- It's a good idea to go to do this in a private room, as described above.
- Make suggestions about where I can locate the required direct vented tankless water heater. I finally gave up and bought a tanked one, after I had showed him what I bought and he rejected without any explanation.
- N/A
- NA
- NONE
- The electrical inspector was a pleasure to work with. I can't think of an improvement.
- The last one that I participated in was very helpful.
- These are useful - good to have everyone around the table, including project engineers so that they can be involved with the requirements of the specific inspector for that project. The people involved are often senior officials and can make decisions on the spot. Very helpful.
- we are not all professionals and when we have questions, we don't want to be treated as if we don't belong there.

**Question 18: Please provide any additional comments you would like to share with us regarding your experiences with the City of Bellingham Permit Center**

- A way to purchase permits online would be a real time and money saver. For residential electrical permits: streamline the pricing to make it more realistic (eg use square foot instead of per circuit). For commercial electrical permits: streamline the requirements for basic repairs and single circuits, etc. If L&I can do all these in an online format, it seem the city could also.
- An applicant should be prepared for the question about stating the approximate cost of the project, I was not prepared for this, pulled a piece out of the blue, and later learned that my fees (and probably my assessed valuation) were based on this estimate. Since then, I have learned from a prospective contractor that he kept this amount in mind, when he made his bid for the job. An experienced applicant would have been forewarned.

- Being told good luck by permit tech repeatedly after having my application rejected during submittal is kind of annoying. One good luck is good, multiple is like, "you lose! Better luck next time."
- XXXX and XXXXXX were very prompt and helpful. The zoning letter was critical to refinancing a property and they both expedited the results.
- Considering the cost of permits you need to pay for this time. Get a website that we can take out a permit with, and come on into the 21st century and make it so we can pay with credit cards.
- Counter help needs to communicate with inspector on pertinent questions not to argue with customer.
- Fast and efficient
- Fire is disjointed in the process which causes undo delays.
- For the most part, the women reviewing our permits at the counter were nice. There were one or two came across very unhappy and seemed to take that out on me. I'd rather not deal with that when I come in.
- Forget you are a beaurocratic entity, and that we are all out there trying to get a job done. If we were trying to circumvent the process, we wouldn't have stopped by the permit center. Help us to understand the process and not be-little us. Quit looking for ways to condem our project and help us move forward. It benefits all of us. I appreciate your desire to make things easier. I make two suggestions to people. Call your own company and try to get someone to answer and if and when they do try to get them to help, #2 send in a practice person who appears completely clueless and have the counter person try to help them. Watch and observe.
- From the receptionist to the department representative they were all very helpful and knowledgeable. A pleasure to deal with and highly recommended.
- I am a remodel contractor who is disappointed in the new expedited permits for green projects. Even though we only do remodels which by their very nature are "green" we can not always meet the requirements of a "green" project. To know that someone who has submitted a "green" project after one our projects could be moved up ahead of our review is a very unfair process that punishes us as well as rewards them. Creating this unfair advantage for one business over another is unacceptable. If you want to give a monetary discount for going "green" I am all for it and feel that is acceptable and should be reward enough. My company should not be punished though because we are working on a project that may not be able to meet the "green" standard.
- I am an electrical contractor and I feel strongly that we should be able to take out permits through the web site as well as in person . This is especially important now that the permit center has changed their opening time to 8:30 am.
- I am extremely pleased with the process. Everyone was professional, courteous, and I felt they were willing to make this process as easy and quick as possible. Particularly compared to other permit centers, they are a joy to deal with. Thank you.
- I believe that the increased permit rates will drive businesses out of the City into the county or elsewhere.
- I can't recall the web site in much detail, but in general it was very complete and easy to navigate. Your City staff can not be compared to the Seattle Dept I normally deal with. There is no comparison between the two for user support. You win hands down and it was a pleasure working with you. Keep up the great work!
- I had a Critical Areas Exemption permit and as I received aproval to cut down trees in a conservation easement, I was required to plant 3 trees for every tree cut down. While I agree that this the correct action, it was advertised that the City does the same on all their property. I asked how that was tracked and I was told it wasn't. I don't think it would

be too hard to track this to be sure that the goal is being met by the city on all their properties. How else could you be sure?

- I have completed a number of these surveys over the past two years and I will repeat the same comment I have every single time. The Planning Department, above all other departments, presents the most difficulty from a timing, professionalism and reasonability standpoint. Every project I work on seems to get hung up in planning. Whether it is staff taking extraordinary periods of time to complete their review, or staff making decisions that are inconsistent or not consistent with applicable codes, or staff just generally being negative about proposals. The City talks a lot about working with developers and fostering an attitude of "how can we help" and it seems like the planning department and planning staff is incapable of adopting that attitude.
- I rate my overall experience as being relatively negative because of the inefficiency of the permitting process. I want to be able to pay at the same place where I apply; and to do so with a credit card.
- I sincerely believe that the counter staff at the permit center who check for application completeness should not be making code interpretations. I am a professional civil engineer and I frequently get informed that my application doesn't meet code and therefore cannot be accepted. Code misinterpretation at the counter cause many misunderstandings. Code interpretations need to be made by reviewers who are experts in their fields. The experience level at the counter with respect to the various codes varies wildly. This is the only failure that I see at the permit center currently. Other than that, my experiences there are excellent and I enjoy working with the staff.
- I think the fee's are out of line, it is really hurting the Const Industry.
- I think things are really improving, but this was my first time actually using the services. I had heard horror stories before of diverging opinions from various staff members and departments. So far we have had none of that. We have only just begun the actual project, so we'll know more in the future.
- I tried to obtain one by myself without the help of a professional. I found that almost impossible to do and finally had to use a professionals service to expediate the process
- I was actually amazed at how helpful and pleasant everyone was during my remodel project. I can honestly say I had a very pleasant experience with everyone I worked with.
- I was treated professionally and courteously. One of the inspectors, who came by several times, was gruff, came when he wanted, didn't follow up on phone requests from contractor.
- I was treated rudely one time by the front desk attendant. Planners changed what they said I would need so it cost me money and time. The inspectors are very professional.
- I went from plans for a beautiful second story apartment over my small home, to a single room abd bath with an exterior staircase (the cost was prohibitive!) to a permit for a new roof with some new gables to get rid of a flat roof area. Not what I really had in mind!
- I wish I could remember XXXXXX's last name because I know there are 2 XXXXX's, but she walked me through and essentially completed my permitting process with professionalism and courtesy the whole way. As an inexperienced user of the permitting system I was so grateful for her approach to helping me get the process done.
- I've appreciated the STFI pilot program. It seems to be working well for re-roof permits.
- In the Home Occupation Permit Application packet, there were 3 references to a 500 foot distance to gather addresses and create mailing labels in order to notify residential neighbors of my application. Actually, I only needed to notify those residents within 100 feet of my home. This was extremely confusing and time-consuming for me. I did all the

research and prepared over 125 mailing labels for the 500 foot radius. Please correct all printed materials in your application packet to only specify 100 feet. Thank you.

- Intake is too restrictive. If the plan is perfect prior to submitting, why submit it?
- Interesting timing for this questionnaire - as we are not in the Permit Office as much as 2 years ago. When its busy, they are slow to react. When its not busy, they are slow to respond. To a great extent, that is the system, not the individual. I have known these individuals for a long time and they are pleasant and generally professional. Its the system that delays the project. The point of contact does not work well for the professional who has experience navigating the various departments - let us do the go straight to the decision makers - we know more about the project than anyone else and understand where the department and the project can meet for success. MOST professional in this area already design for energy efficient projects - to give projects that are paying money to get certifications from outside code requirements and City requirements - to give these projects preferential treatment and expedite the permit process is insulting to all other industry professionals - as though a project that is not attempting LEED is of lesser importance to the City is a wrong/bad/shameful use of the Permit Center. I realize this is a bit off topic, but it relates to how the professional feels they are being treated and appreciated.
- It is apparent that some in the center need to retire or move on to a job that they will be more happy performing.
- It was extremely hard too get someone to answer the phone and give information about an permit condition and to coordinate this information with the inspector.
- It was my first experience with the permit process and everything went very well.
- It would be helpful if a person who understood the processes, and had a general overall knowledge of the building codes were available during the application process so that the right permit application could be applied for in inception.
- It would help if you would answer your phones. Why do I have to drive all the way into your office and wait in the lobby to be told the person I need to talk to is out sick? If you are approving a permit with a condition on it, you need to make this clear when you notify people that the permit is approved. I shouldn't have to wait until I'm under construction before some inspector informs me that the permit hanging on my building isn't actually a permit yet. We had to go through nearly two weeks of hoop-jumping before the plans your office rejected were eventually approved by the same office without modification. A permit center employee who rejects an application should be on hand to answer questions about it so that s/he can say "oops, sorry, my mistake" without forcing the permit seeker through a bureaucratic nightmare. I never actually talked to the person who rejected my application, but he sure took his sweet time getting around to agreeing that he should have approved it the first time around. just job it out to a private company.a TI permit should take no more than 8 hrs.
- XXXXX at the front counter is not very friendly
- MUCH IMPROVED SINCE MY LAST ENCOUNTER
- Much time is expended in aquiring permits...would be equitable if the entire process could be handled online, e-mailing docs, paying online with a cc or electronic check, printing permits via e-mail, etc.
- My concerns about wait time were entirely a function of code provisions. Our application was reviewed in the shortest time period allowable under the code requirements. Staff was uniformly professional and helpful.
- My major complaint, ( and it is major) is that the electrical permits we get through the City are over 5 times more expensive than those we get through the state. BAAAD!

- Need better communication between the members in the permit center. Have gotten conflicting information different opinions on the same issue.
- Need complete checklist of items needed from COB after discussing project with counter tech. i.e. critical areas, soils test, etc.
- Need to work on expediting smaller scale projects. Turn-around times for small corrections need to be addressed by scale of corrections needed.
- No complaints.
- none..overall good...
- Not pleased with new closing hours. Making it even more difficult to access permitting staff. Can't you stagger the start times to allow for service on simple permits between 4:30 - 5:00 ?????
- Nothing so far. You're doing a good job.
- Overall, I'd say that I've had a very positive experience with the Permit Center - all of my requests were met and it was done in a timely manner. XXXXX was especially good at answering my questions and was very nice and easy to work with. I'll miss working with her in the permit center.
- Permit requirement for SFR dock changed unexpectedly after applic submittal from exempt to sub. development. This cost additional time and expense to the homeowner.
- Please fix the new digital parking meters. The one I used in front of your building wasn't working and I risked getting a ticket because it was "high tech" POS. The thing kept saying my parking spot number was invalid and spitting my money back. I tried about 5 times... I liked the old meters better - and I hated those too. All the other spots were full and I didn't have the time or patience to hunt around for a new space. I told the parking person what the problem was while I waited in line for the permit person and parking person was no help at all. Luckily I didn't get a ticket but it made the entire experience WAY more of a PITA than it had to be.
- Professional staff but at the same time friendly and easy to talk to .
- Single point of contact is sometimes missed in the initial review of the project. Additional reviewers or requirements were identified after application was submitted. Forcing additional visits to permit center.
- Staff needs to understand the level of frustration the "customer" experience when working through the permit process. In 20 years of business I have not seen in any other building jurisdiction the ability to complicate and have no accountability to the building process as much as is in Bham.
- Staff was extremely understanding and helpful.
- Still waiting for mechanical permits which should have been approved over the counter the same day they were brought in. Currently 2 days past the expected completion date of 1 week. I am now dealing with a client who will be losing money due to the slow response time to approve the permit. This is why so many people do not want to have their project permitted and have to deal with the city slowing down progress!
- Thank you for the assistance that was provided and positive attitudes of personnel involved!
- The inspector was very helpful
- The last couple projects we've done, we've had nothing but problems with inspector XXX. Last project, he came and did an inspection part way through the job, and then told us he didn't need to come back. 6 months after the project was complete we are now getting nasty phone calls from him saying he's turned this over to code enforcement because we never got a final inspection... He is very unprofessional and rude. As a Bham tax payer, it's disgusting to see that we're employeeding people like that. He either

hates his job and should retire or maybe find another job where he doesn't need to interact with people.

- The older(tenured?) employees appear apathetic,combative,rude and unprofessional. My experiences with the younger(3 years and less on job) were the complete opposite....very good. My Architect and I were very dismayed with our treatment on several permit center visits one recent project...and we have lots of experience dealing with this process. You have to be a masochist to enjoy going in to the permit center and PAY to be rudely insulted.
- the people both in the building and electrical permit departments were great to work with because that's what it felt like, we were working together. XXXX, the electrical inspector was a pleasure to work with.
- The people involved need to state which code applies. The section chapter and verse. I sure don't want anyone stating Engineering facts when they aren't qualified to do so. My personal opinion they should all be fired to save on the budget because they don't understand the code or know how to apply it. The purpose of the code is to make sure that: 1) The project be installed in a Craftman's like manner. 2) The project protects the safety of personel. 3) The project protects the safety of the equipment. In closing, With very tight budgets we need to get value for our tax dollars and having personnel not understanding what the code stands for we really need to look at eliminating their jobs. The personnel clearly don't know how to apply the code or what code applies. Its clearly a sign of incompetence and waste of taxpayers dollars for people that don't understand the code and how it applies. I clearly understand why contractors are clearly outraged over bellingham's permit Dept.
- The permit center does a very good job overall. The intent of question #2 is unclear as I expected very good service and got it therefore I answered that I got what I expected, not more.
- The permit center it'self has done a fine job and the paper portion works well. The plan review time for the fire permits is out of line and the knowledge of the inspectors is lacking and duplicitic. Poor workmanship is being approved because of lack of technical knowledge.
- The permit center seems to be working hard to help the contractor keep working and obtain the permits needed.
- The permit center staff are polite and helpful but I find that their knowledge level on anything but permit acceptance is rudimentary so they are consistently calling for planners or public works to help. Public Works staff are consistently knowlegdeable and helpful. Planning has consistently been the problem on timing of review, consistency of application of the rules, professionalism and courteousness.
- The Planning Department needs to be open and quite making decisions with there own personal beliefs and stick to what the code allows. They are anti business and concerned only with what they like, not what is good for the customer or business. This is one of the worst planning departments to work with. Very dissatisfied with them.
- The problem for me right now is that I have a deadline and the reviewer is on vacation and I have some questions holding up the process.
- The process for solar is more defined and smooth than it used to be. However, we were told solar would receive expedited treatment and the counter person had no idea about that until I persisted and then it happened quickly which was great. So, the counter people need to understand solar and know if it is going to receive expedited treatment. We continue to not understand the rationale for a 1000 pound system limit. This only allows installation of very small systems. Thanks
- The process was much smoother than I had expected. Thanks!

- The staff working the counters at the planning department are a tremendously valuable resource. They were very knowledgeable and helpful as I jumped through the hoops as a home owner the addition to our home. I also observed them working with escalated, frustrated individuals, which they handled with great people skills and grace. The process was long and complex, but the staff is awesome!
- The technicians at the permit center counter, particularly XXXX, are the jewels of the department. These people are valuable intermediaries between the public and the back office staff, and shield us from bureaucratic inertia, insensitive refusals, and make great efforts to help us navigate the departmental processes and decision makers. We all are lucky to have them.
- The tif fees were not brought up in any meetings we had in over two years of planning our renovation. It wasn't until just before we submitted our app that it was first mentioned, and I've heard the same from others. very difficult when planning a budget to have that thrown in at the last minute.
- There is a staff member that assists at the counter - XXXX. She is absolutely unbearable and unprofessional. Your other staff - XXXX and the other younger gal are very professional and courteous. XXXX should not be working in civil service whatsoever as I am one of SEVERAL contractors that have been treated with undeserved disrespect.
- There is inconsistency of opinion from one staff person to another over regulatory issues. Lack of warning to applicant over staff vacations/furloughs/leaves of absence create timing issues and re-education of other staff to try and get timely reviews. Timing of simple approvals are NOT happening across the counter, as promised. If all department staff, reviews permit intake, it could be conditionally approved, if complete right there saving EVERYONE time. Promised timelines are rarely met.
- There should be more over the counter permits handed out on small renovations that are interior or exterior that don't effect accessible issues or life.
- There were some errors on my deck plans that were not caught.
- This survery is far too general. Also, unfortunately, the quality of service is directly related to which staff member you work with. Many staff members act like they would rather do anything than come to the counter. There are some excellent staff, but the overall impression one gets is that there is a prevailing attitude of confusion, avoidance, and apathy. The first point of contact is really important -- that person needs to be knowledgeable, assertive and friendly. Stand in the hall and watch sometime. Two points that most of the staff is missing is that every person that walks in is contributing to their continued employment, and that every minute spent waiting is costing someone money. Some supervisor or upper level administrator (maybe XXXX, maybe XXXX) should have their desk out in the open, in front of the counter, to monitor how things are working and to help expedite and trouble shoot. Most of my clients just roll their eyes and shake their heads after spending time there. Go to the County and watch XXXX and XXXX work at the counter. There is a world of difference.
- This system is very helpful and efficient. Having access to all departments in one center is excellent.
- Though my experience at the Permit Center was brief, I found the staff and process very user-friendly. The online inspection scheduling was also helpful. I think that the general public has unrealistic expectations about what the Permit Center is supposed to provide applicants. That is, applicants have a responsibility to research what is needed AND to provide a complete/accurate application.
- time requirement for permit completion is often longer than the parking meters in front of the courthouse allow.

- To date we've been very pleased with technical assistance we've received as well as responsiveness of those associated with permit center/permitting.
- Two permits, one by me, one by contractor. Overall a good, better than expected experience.
- Verry very professional and the permit center made the process easy. Thank You
- We have people in our company that enjoy going to the city for permits due to the positive interaction with the city's staff. We also have people that dislike the staff and do not like working with them. Most likely a personality issue on one side or the other.
- We started this project about 2 1/2 years ago and I had heard horror stories about developing in Bellingham. Don't know if it's the economic downturn or something changed in the permitting process but thus far it's been a great experience and staff has been very accommodating. I especially like that the technical staff in all your departments is allowed to make common sense decisions, within the intent of the codes, in cases where proposed design elements may be slightly different than precise code interpretations. In short administrative decision making. I can assure you this is not all that common in other jurisdictions. Keep up the good work!
- We were disappointed with the permit process because we spoke to 2 different people who told us different things. Three times we were told things looked "good to go" but were then notified of problems. Each time we ended up paying more to our designer and engineer - for things that one person had said were fine, only to be told they weren't, by another. For the HUGE amount of fees Bellingham charges for a single resident permit, the service certainly doesn't match the charge. Some day this will all be over and we'll be living in our beautiful home - but the building department has made the beginning of our project stressful and discouraging.
- We would like to be able to pay for our permit at the Fire Department!!!!
- When calling in for an inspection I left a message for the inspector to call before attending as I had a 25 min commute to get to the job to open up. Some how the message did not get to him which resulted in some confusion. He was very nice about it and we worked it out on the phone. He explained that requesting the inspection on line was better than by phone. You may want to find out what happened to avoid this in the future.
- you are the only city that needs a set of prints for low voltage voice and data and i did not bring a set.

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY SCRIPT

Thank you for participating in the City of Bellingham's Permit Center's listening and feedback tool. The City of Bellingham will use your input to help improve the services offered by the Permit Center.

Your thoughts are greatly appreciated and will be confidential. All information reported to the City of Bellingham will be in aggregate form so that no one individual's answers can be identified.

1. Which description best fits you as a user of City of Bellingham Permit Center during (current time period)?

- One-time or infrequent user
- Developer
- Professional designer/architect/engineer
- Contractor
- Other, please specify

2. How have your recent experiences with the Permit Center compared to your expectations?

- Much better than I expected
- Better than I expected
- About what I expected
- Worse than I expected
- Much worse than I expected

3. Which description best fits your project(s) from (current time period)? (check all that apply)

- Single Family Residential
- New Multi-Family Residential Construction
- Commercial Remodel / Change of Use
- New Single-Use Commercial
- Mixed Use Commercial, Industrial, Institutional
- Trade-Specific (Electrical, Plumbing, Fire, etc.)

4. How well were you informed about what kind of permit review was needed for your application and how long it would take?

- Extremely well
- Somewhat well
- Not at all

5. Please rate each of the following RESOURCES provided by the Permit Center: (Very Useful, Useful, Not Very Useful, Useless, I've Never Seen/Heard of this)

- Permit Center Web Site
- Permit Center Handout
- Technical Assistance Bulletins

The following section of the survey pertains to the Permit Center as a whole. The individual departments (such as Planning and Fire) will be surveyed in a later section.

Please rate your SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE you received from the Permit Center from (current time period).

6. How well your application was reviewed for completeness by staff before you turned it in?

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Not applicable

7. General counter assistance

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

- Rate Counter Assistance: Technical Ability of Staff
- Rate Counter Assistance: Courtesy of Staff
- Rate Counter Assistance: Wait Time

8. Processing your application including review and corrections

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

- Rate Processing Application: Technical Ability of Staff
- Rate Processing Application: Courtesy of Staff
- Rate Processing Application: Efficiency

9. Construction Inspections (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

- Rate Construction Inspections: Technical Ability of Inspectors
- Rate Construction Inspections: Courtesy of Inspectors
- Rate Construction Inspection: Time Between Setting Appointment and Actual Inspection
- Rate Construction Inspections: Punctuality of Inspectors

10. Certificate of Occupancy Process (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

- Rate Certificate of Occupancy Process: Pre Process Explanation / Education
- Rate Certificate of Occupancy Process: Actual Process as Understood
- Rate Certificate of Occupancy Process: Courtesy of people involved

The Permit Center represents a number of departments that may have been involved in the review / approval of your permit application.

The following section will measure the effectiveness of those departments during your interaction with the Permit Center between (current time period).

11. For each department that you interacted with, please rate how professionally they treated you. (If you did not interact with any of the following departments, click on 'does not apply')

- Planning
- Public Works
- Stormwater
- Building Services
- Fire

12. If you participated in a pre-application meeting, please describe your satisfaction with that process.

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

13. If you participated in a pre-application meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective? (open-ended)

14. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, please describe your satisfaction with that process.

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

15. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective? (open-ended)

16. How satisfied were you with the Permit Center's 'single point of contact' approach with your project manager?

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- I did not have a single point of contact

17. How satisfied were you with the transparency of the Permit Center's process and timelines?

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

18. Please provide any additional comments you would like to share with us regarding your experiences with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center. (open-ended)

That is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for participating in this quality improvement project.