

REPORT

**Small Business Development Center
City of Bellingham Permit Center
2006 Fourth Quarter & 2007 First Quarter Survey**

May, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

From the fourth quarter of 2006 through the first quarter of 2007, Western Washington University's College of Business and Economics' Small Business Development Center (SBDC) sub-contracted with Applied Research Northwest to continue 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 March 2007.

This customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, so researchers first needed to obtain email addresses for the individuals that used Permit Center services. Many Permit Centers users (128) in this time period had also used the Permit Center during the third quarter of 2006 (the baseline period), so their email addresses were already available. Of the 194 new users in this time period, 130 new email addresses were gathered.

Eighty-three (83) individuals completed the survey during this time period, resulting in a 32% response rate. This calculates to a 9% margin of error on the survey, a slight improvement over the 13% margin of error in the baseline study.

The findings of this follow-up customer satisfaction survey are compared to the baseline findings in order to inform the continuous quality improvement efforts of the Permit Center. A couple of survey items have changed since the baseline survey: the departmental professionalism section was changed from a yes-no response scale to a continuum, and open-ended items were added after the pre-application and pre-construction meeting sections.

Also new to the current survey was the opportunity for respondents to request a copy of the results of this study. Thirty-five (35) respondents provided their email addresses at the end of the survey (43%) so that they could receive a memo of this study's key findings.

This report uses the convention of *italicizing* any verbatim response option from the survey in an effort to fully convey the voice of the respondents' survey responses. Appendix A presents the full script of the online survey, and Appendix B documents the verbatim comments made by respondents.

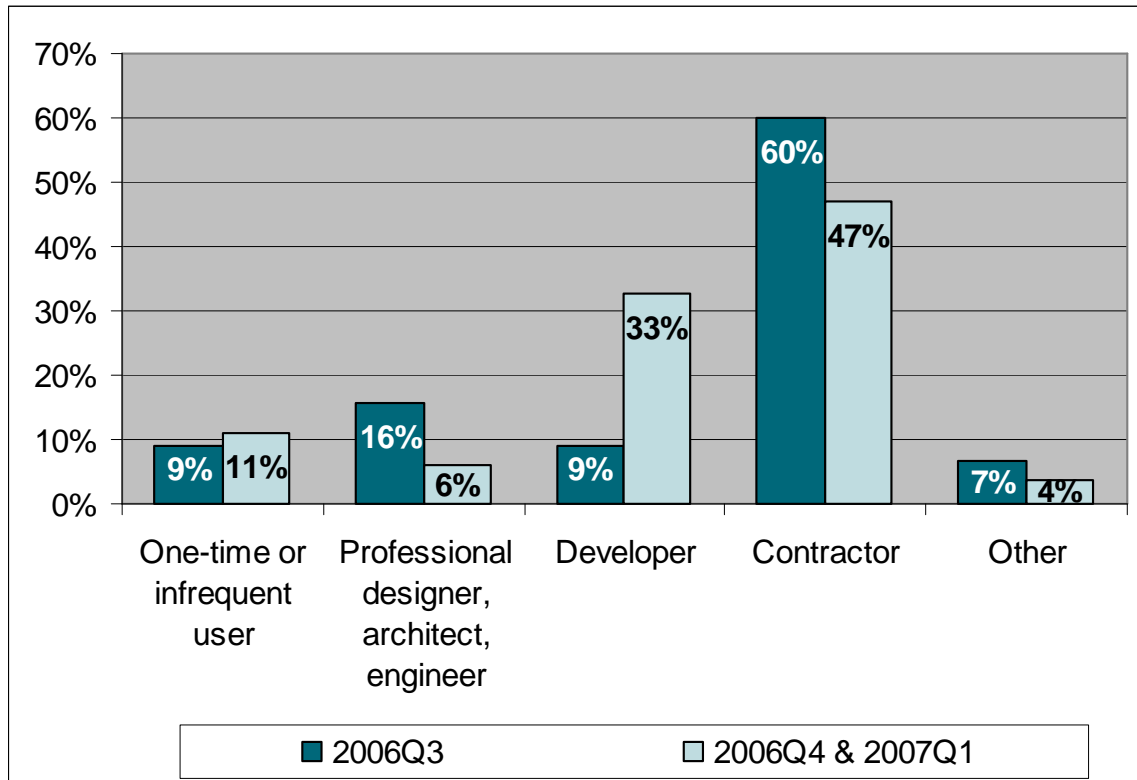
TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

Customers of the Permit Center were first asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from October 2006 to March 2007. As figure 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were contractors (47%) and developers (33%). One-time users made up another 11% of the sample.

The biggest shift since the baseline study is the large increase in the proportion of developers (from 9% to 33%) and the relative drop in the proportion of contractors (from 60% to 47%).

Figure 1. Distribution of Permit Center Customer Type

(N=83 for current time period, N=45 in 2006 Q3)



OVERALL EXPERIENCE

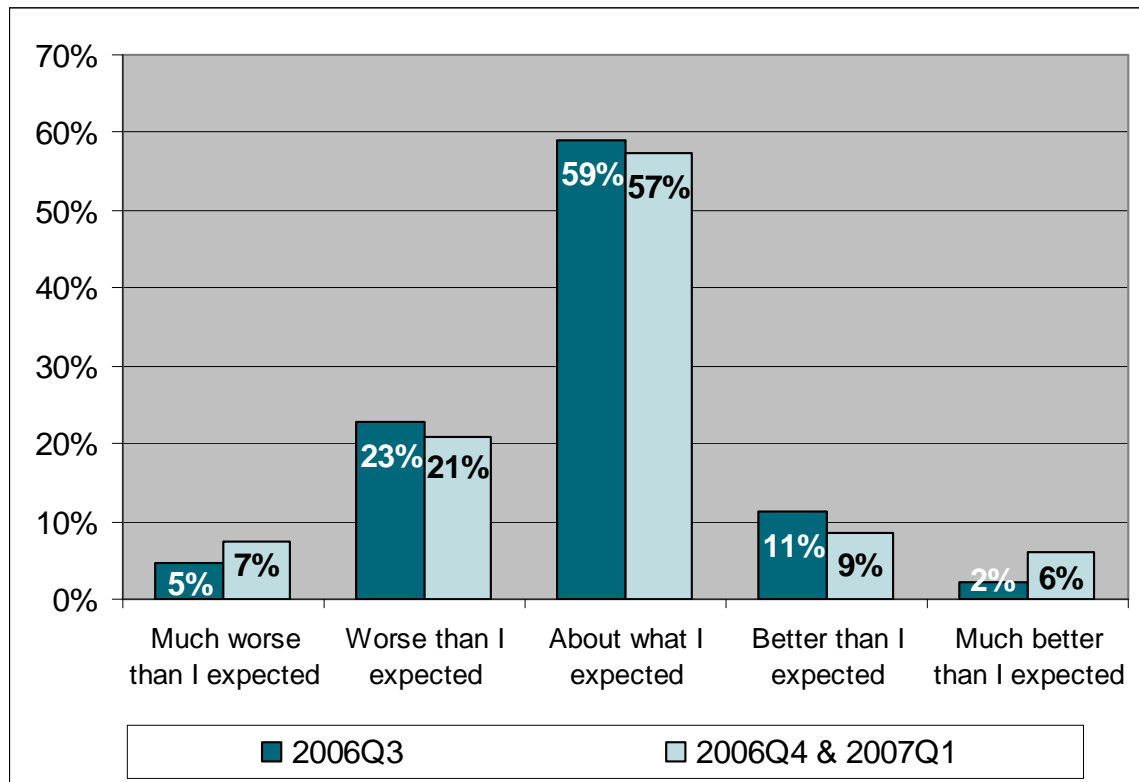
Respondents were then asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents (72%) said that their experience was *about what I expected* or better, which is exactly the same value as reported in the baseline study. This high proportion of respondents indicates that customer expectations are being met by the Permit Center, although there is no empirical improvement since the third quarter of 2006.

However, more than one in four respondents (28% again) reported that their experience was *worse or much worse* than expected. While this is still the minority of customers, it is still a noticeable proportion that needs to be addressed in quality improvement efforts.

One respondent chose not to answer this question.

Figure 2. Overall Experience with the Permit Center

(N=82 for current time period, N=44 in 2006 Q3)



PROJECT TYPES

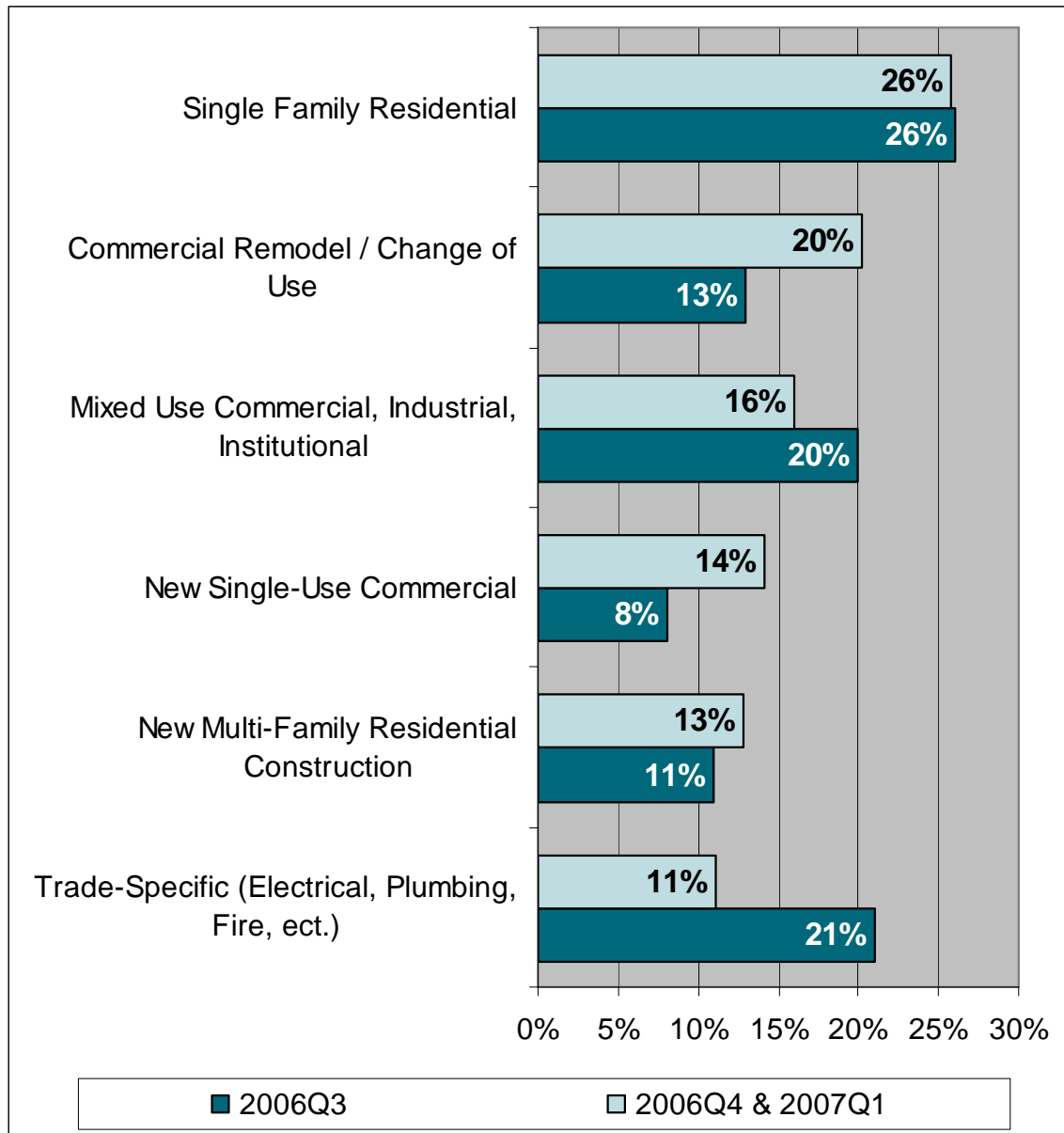
Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of project they were working on that brought them in contact with the Permit Center. As figure 3 shows, single family residential projects were again the most common, although all categories were selected more than 10% of the time.

Please note that respondents could select more than one type of project, so the total number of projects (163) exceeds the total number of respondents (83).

Since the baseline study, the biggest changes in project type are an increase in commercial remodeling, as well as a decrease in trade-specific and mixed-use commercial projects.

Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types

(N=83 for current time period, N=45 in 2006 Q3)



PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

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

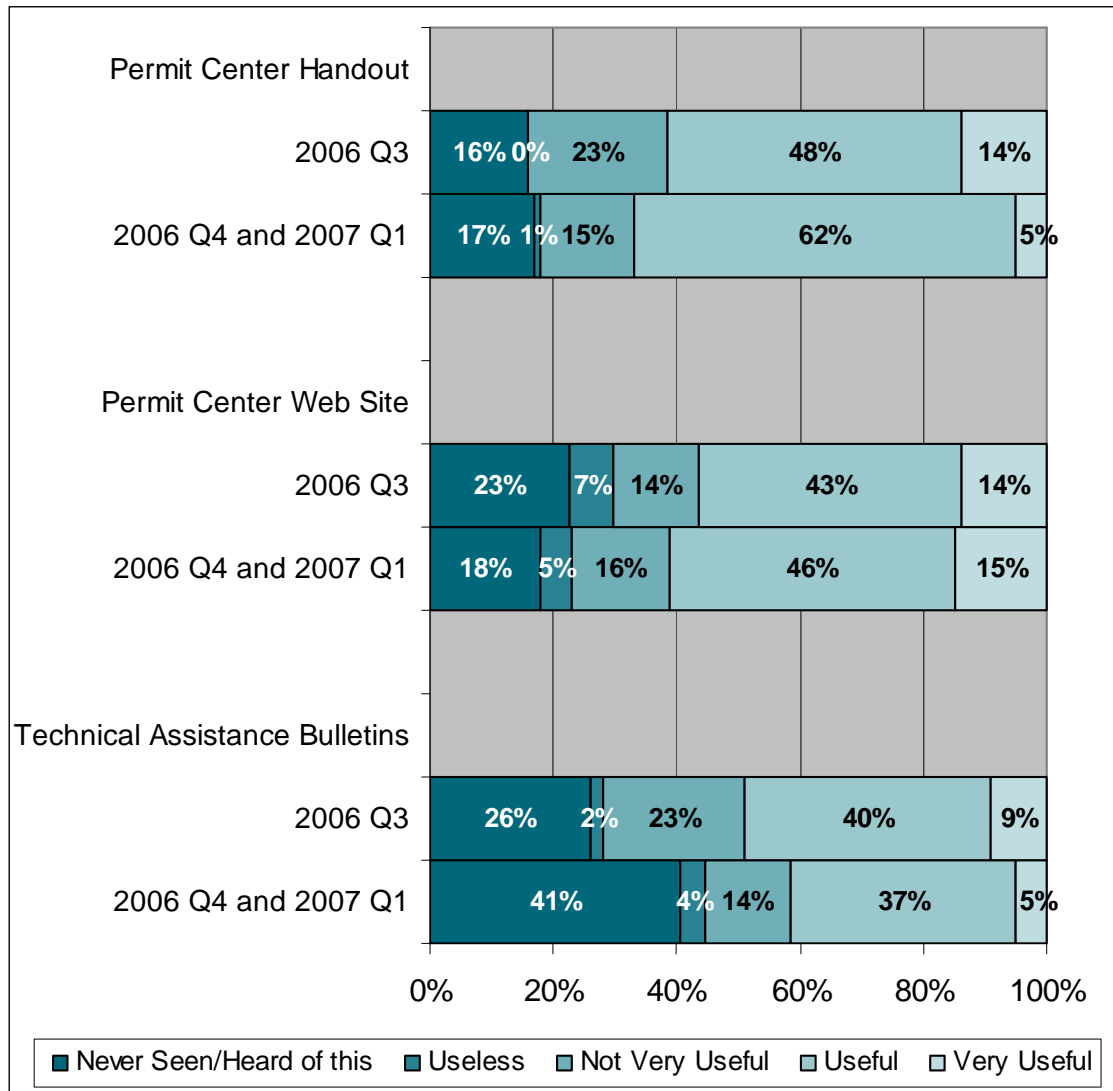
Figure 4 indicates that all three types of resources were found to be relatively useful to customers, with the handout rated as 67% *useful* or *very useful* (up from 62% last time). The only drop in usefulness was for the technical assistance bulletins (from 49% to 42%).

Customer awareness about the availability of handouts and the website remained fairly flat, while the awareness of the technical assistance bulletins dropped significantly since the baseline survey (from 26% unaware to 41% unaware in the current time period).

Increasing the awareness of the highly rated but somewhat under-utilized resources could positively affect customer satisfaction with the Permit Center.

Figure 4. Usefulness of Permit Center Materials

(N=81 for current time period, N=44 in 2006 Q3)



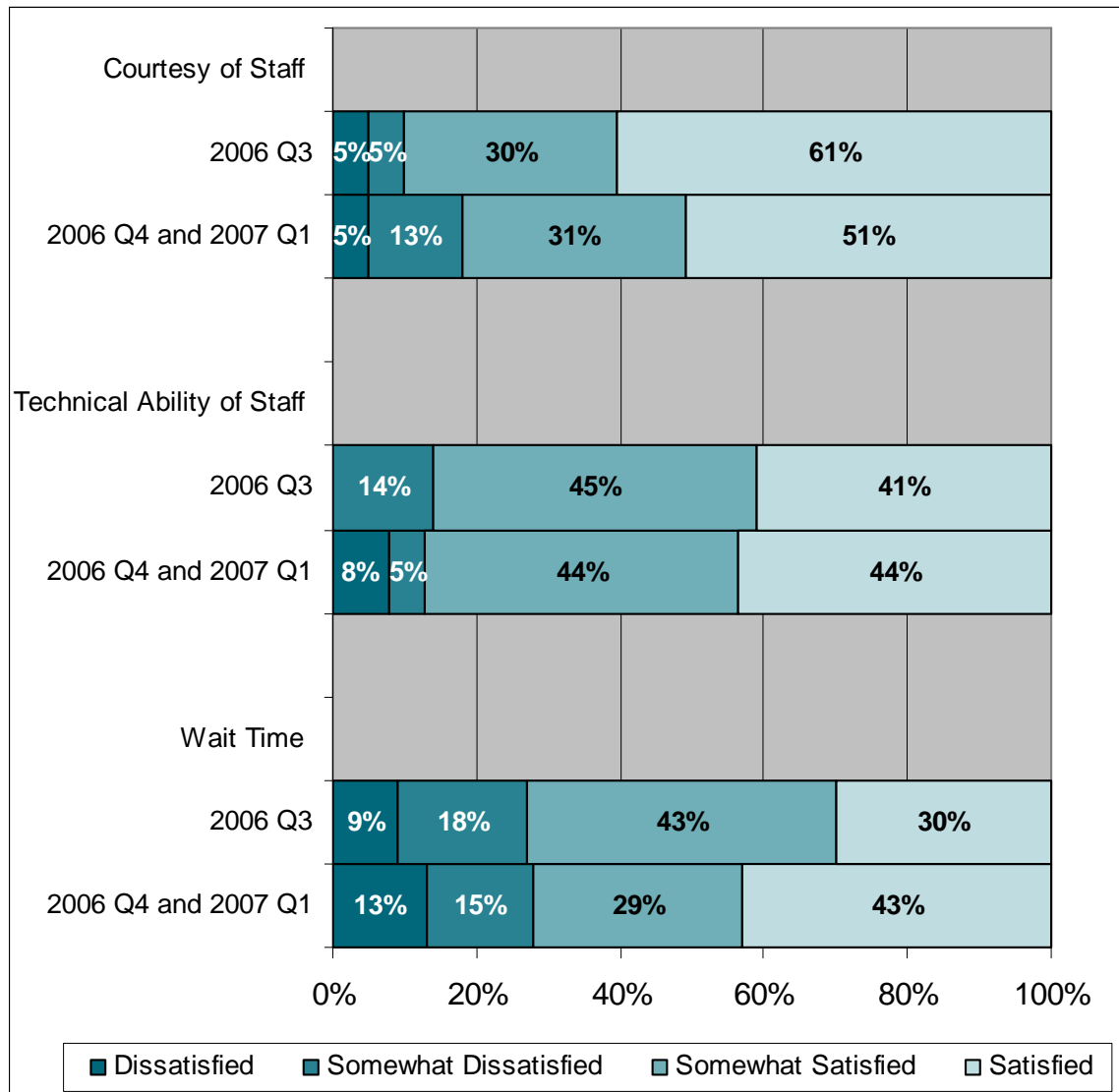
COUNTER ASSISTANCE

Respondents were then asked to indicate their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the Permit Center's counter staff. Satisfaction with the courtesy of the counter staff was still relatively high, although there was a noteworthy drop since the baseline study (from 91% to 82%). This drop is not statistically significant, however.

Respondent satisfaction with wait time and the counter staff's technical ability remained relatively flat over the past two time periods.

Figure 5. Customer Satisfaction with the Counter Assistance

(N=75 for current time period, N=44 in 2006 Q3)



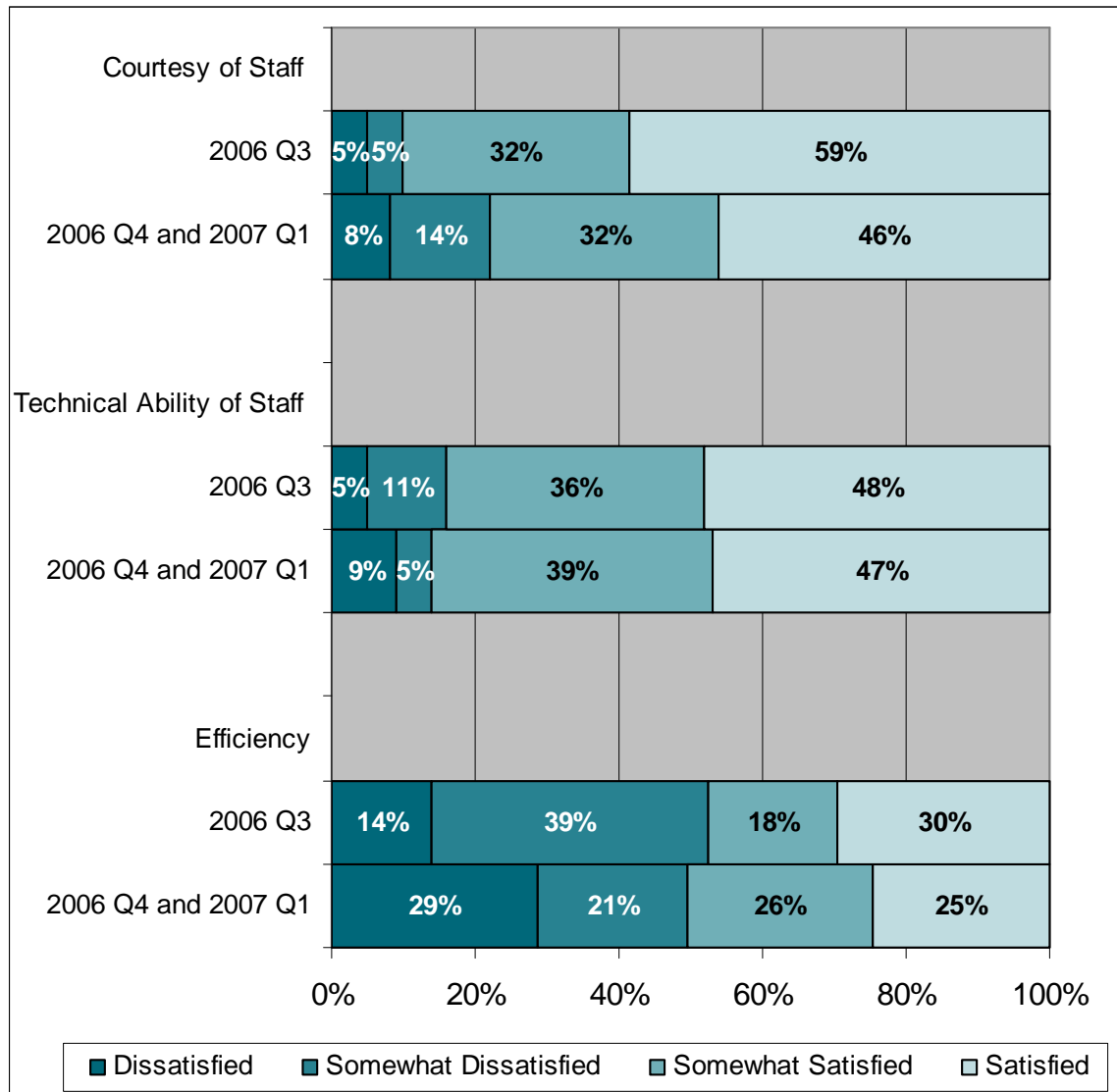
PROCESSING APPLICATION

Permit Center customers were then asked to evaluate the processing application procedures. As figure 6 shows, the courtesy of staff was again the highest rated aspect of this particular process (78%), although this represents a noteworthy drop from the baseline study (91%). This drop is not statistically significant.

The customer satisfaction with other components in this section (technical ability and efficiency of application staff) remained relatively flat since the baseline survey.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with the Processing Application

(N=77 for current time period, N=44 in 2006 Q3)



INSPECTORS

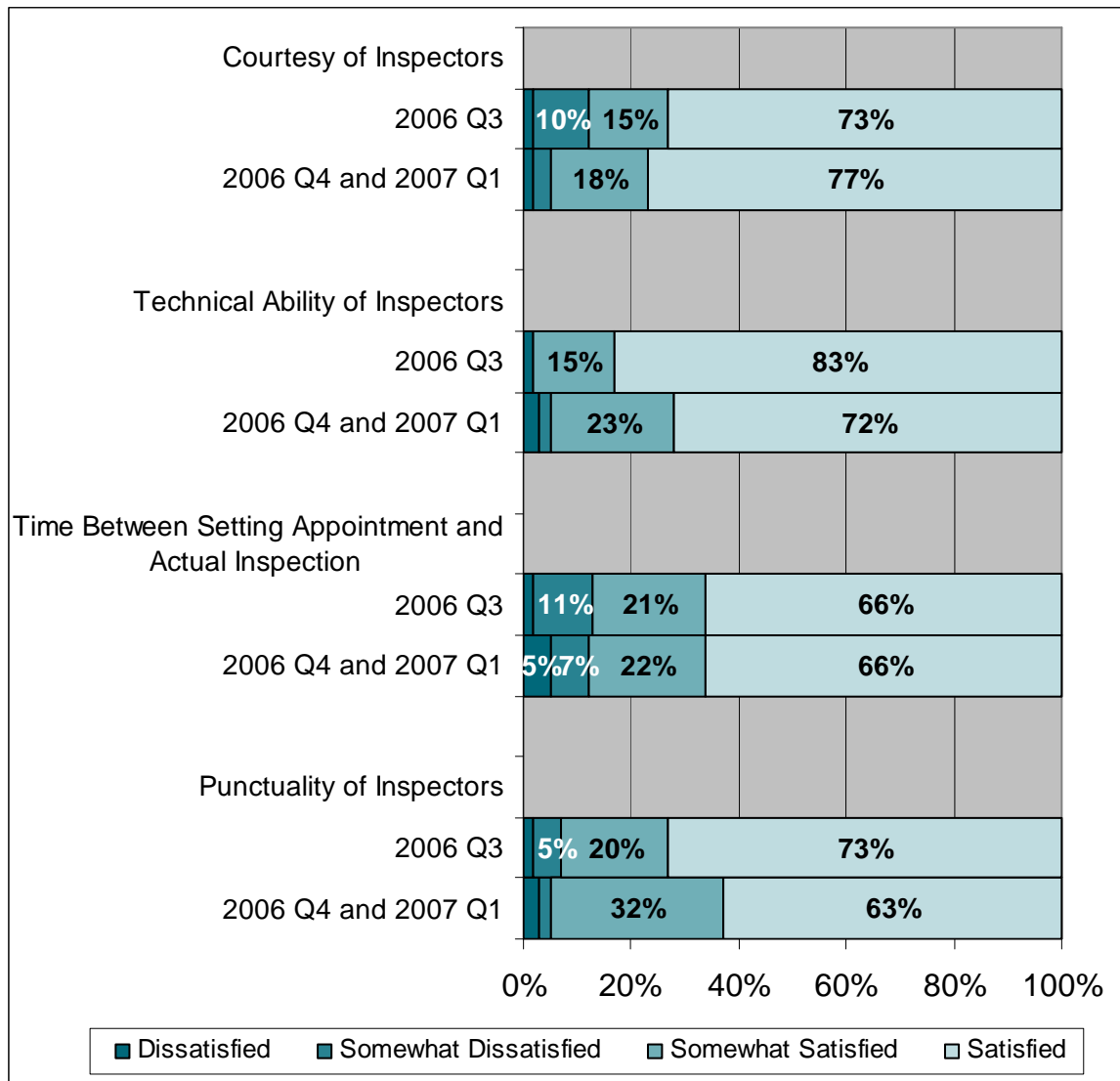
The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Seventy-seven percent (77%, up from 73%) of customers reported that they were *satisfied* with the courtesy of the inspectors.

Overall, the survey items pertaining to inspectors show a mixed pattern of change, although none of the changes are statistically significant. Specifically, courtesy improved, technical ability and punctuality declined, and the time between setting the appointment and the actual inspection remained constant.

The overall satisfaction in this section (when combining the *somewhat satisfied* and *satisfied* responses) is again the highest off all the areas that Permit Center customers evaluated.

Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors

(N=60 for current time period, N=41 in 2006 Q3)



CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

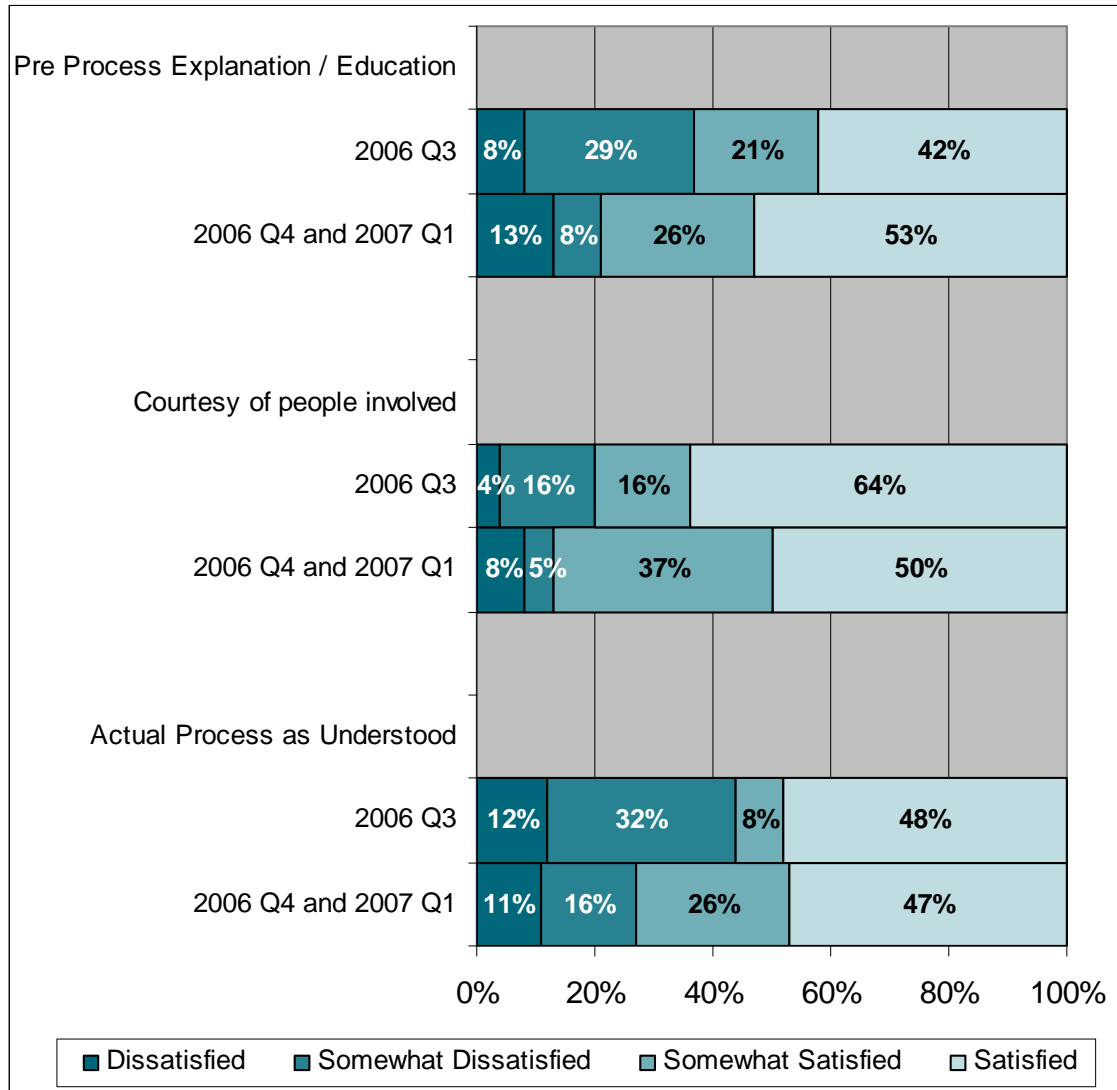
The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, there were a couple noteworthy changes in the satisfaction reported by Permit Center customers. When combining *somewhat satisfied* and *satisfied*, all three items (courtesy, explaining the process, understanding the process) saw an improvement since the baseline study.

However, there is a redistribution of responses within the satisfied customers. For example, there is an overall increase in the satisfaction with pre-process explanations due to an increase in the highest response option (from 42% to 53%). Conversely, there is an overall increase in satisfaction with the courtesy of staff even though the highest response option dropped from 64% to 50% (*somewhat satisfied* improved from 16% to 37%).

None of these changes are statistically significant, however, and a larger sample size and/or a few more time periods worth of data points are needed to confirm this trend.

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Certificate of Occupancy Process

(N=38 for current time period, N=24 in 2006 Q3)



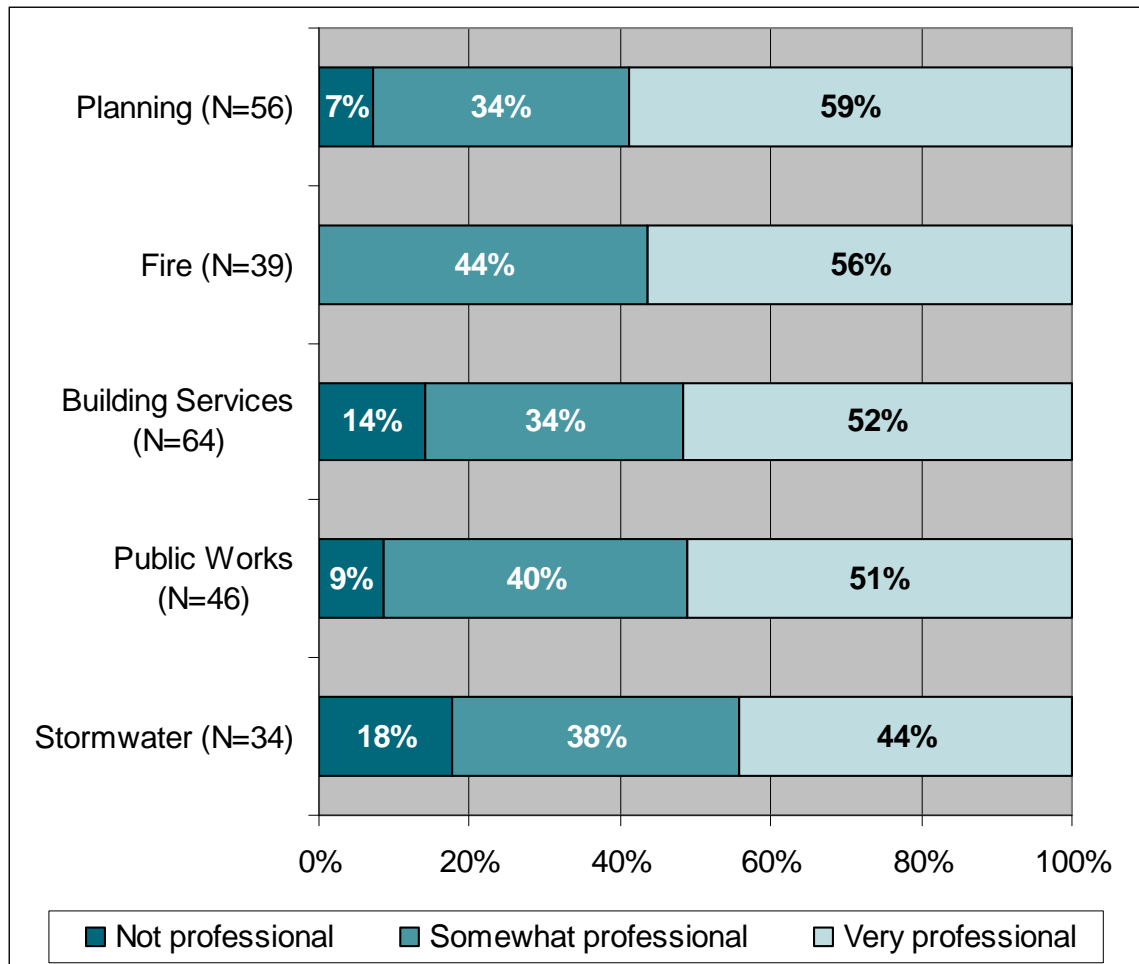
PROFESSIONALISM

Customers of the Permit Center were asked to rate the professionalism of each department with which they interacted.

The results of this section cannot be compared to the baseline survey because the format of these items was changed from baseline to follow-up: instead of indicating which departments they used and then rating professionalism, respondents in this time period were presented with all departments and asked to rate the ones that applied to them (combining two questions into one). Further, a continuum of professionalism was introduced in the follow-up survey instead of the simple yes-no scale from the baseline.

As figure 9 indicates, there is a relatively high level of professionalism in every department, although some variability exists (*not professional* ratings range from 0% to 18%). It appears, then, that the goal for these departments is not to act professionally, but to act *very* professional.

Figure 9. Rating of the Professionalism of each Department



PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

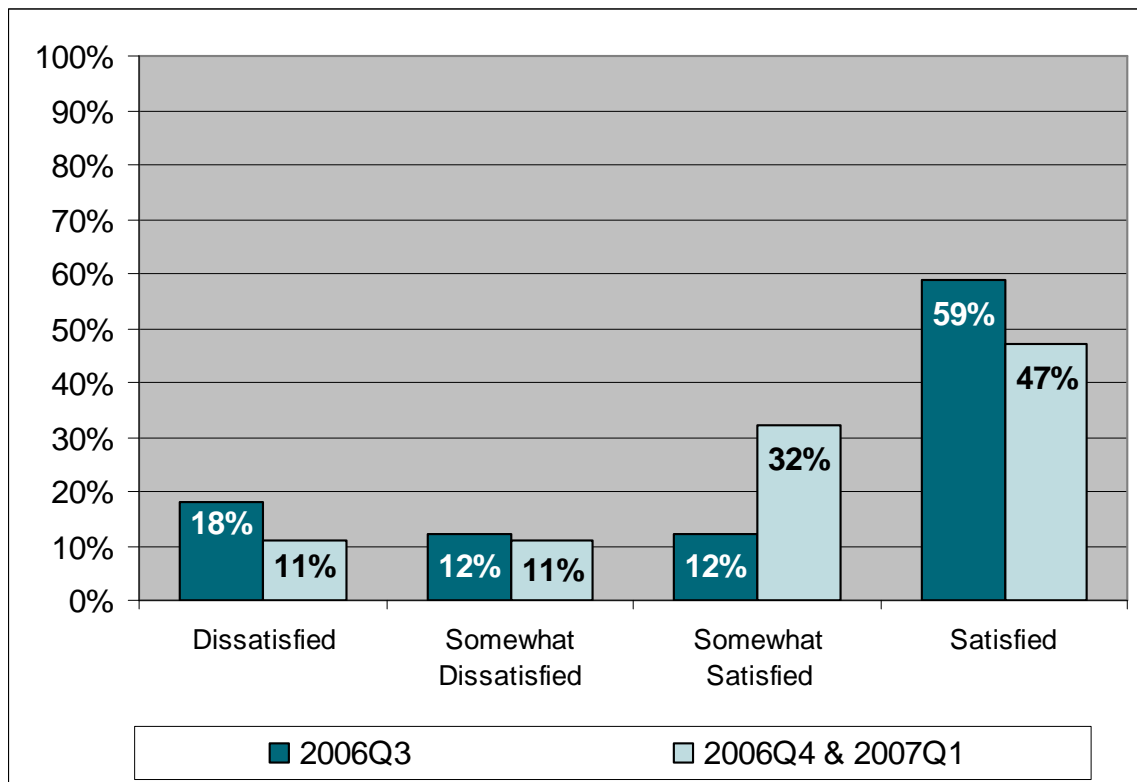
Respondents that had participated in a pre-application meeting (19) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, 79% were *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*, up slightly from 71% on the baseline survey.

Despite the increase in the combined *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied* percentages, there is a migration from the top box (47%, down from 59%) to the second level of satisfaction (32%, up from 12%). This change is not statistically significant, nor do two data points indicate a trend, but this is a change worth watching in subsequent studies.

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

Figure 10. Distribution of Satisfaction with Pre-Application Meetings

(N=19 for current time period, N=12 in 2006 Q3)



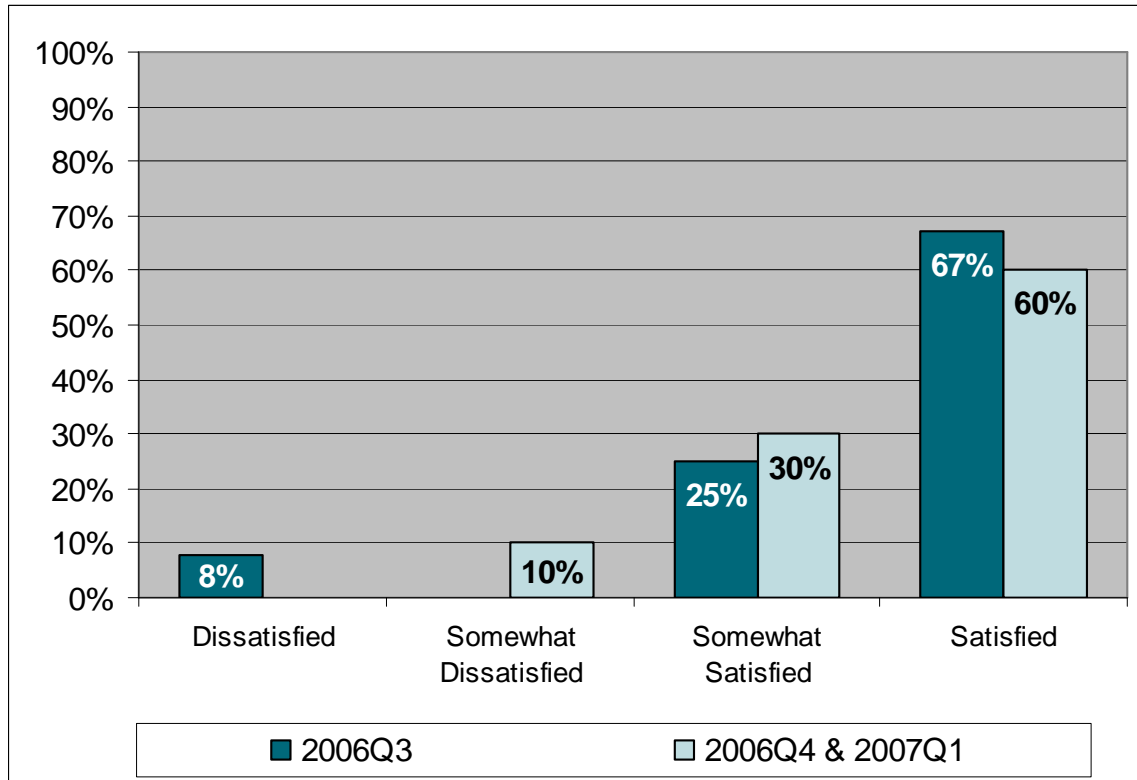
PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

Respondents that had participated in a pre-construction meeting (12) were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, 90% were *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied* with this aspect of the Permit Center (down insignificantly from 92% in the baseline survey).

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 B of this report.

Figure 11. Satisfaction with Pre-Construction Meetings

(N=10 for current time period, N=12 in 2006 Q3)



APPENDIX A: SURVEY SCRIPT

Thank you for participating in the City of Bellingham's Permit Center's listening 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.

In which quarter(s) did you interact with the Permit Center?

- 4th Quarter of 2006
- 1st Quarter of 2007
- Both Quarters

Q1. Which description best fits you as a user of City of Bellingham Permit Center during the 3rd quarter of 2006?

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

Q2. How have your recent experiences with the Permit Center compare 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

Q3. Which description best fits your project(s) from July 2006 - September 2006? (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.)

Q4. 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 October 2006 and March 2007.

Q5. General counter assistance including intake review (Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

Q6. 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

Q7. 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

Q8. 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 October 2006 and March 2007.

Q9 & Q10. 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

Q11. If you participated in a pre-application meeting, please describe your satisfaction with that process.

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

Q11a. If you participated in a pre-application meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective? (open-ended)

Q12. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, please describe your satisfaction with that process.

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

Q12a. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective? (open-ended)

Q13. Please provide any additional comments you would like to share with us regarding your experiences with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center. (Responses can be found in Appendix B)

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

APPENDIX B: VERBATIM CUSTOMER COMMENTS

Q11a. If you participated in a pre-application meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective?

- Code specifications should be spelled out by Planning Staff, not just opinion of code, or personal interpretations
- I am very much in favor of the pre-application meetings. I think that some city officials have a poor attitude about them. They think that this is where they try to get everything they can" on the city's behalf" out of the applicant. Twice all of the departments were not represented. That is what I paid for!
- Planners must be held accountable for their pre-application decisions!!!!
- Public works and storm water do not match up with what they require for documents and their requirements often conflict.
- Require city of Bellingham staff to be responsible for their decisions and the consequences of those decisions. It shouldn't be necessary to bring a tape recorder and lawyer to a pre-application meeting.
- Staff members were not prepared. No written report after meeting.
- Verify location of the meeting room. Basement , upstairs etc. All city staff members be on TIME. Get a hard copy of the minutes from the meetings from a staff member and everyone that was present agrees on the minutes.

Q21a. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective?

- Provide alternatives when design not excepted by building department.
- This was not a pre-construction meeting but a simple permit (\$500 value) to move a wall and install a door. No plumbing, no electrical, no mechanical. I made three trips to the permit counter and after the 3rd trip I was advised to come back in 1/2 hour and the permit would be ready. Giving them enough time I returned 1 hr 45 minutes later. Now they've lost the permit and 4 people and looking and it can't be found. Now we have to wait for the person who handled my application to come back from lunch. It was 2:35 when I finally had the permit in hand. My feeling is that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

Q13. Please provide any additional comments you would like to share with us regarding your experiences with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center.

- Please provide routine permit application & payment by credit card on line as soon as possible. Hours wasted standing in line and multiple trips for simple residential & small commercial electrical permits is crazy. 2) Find some way to narrow down the time span for inspector arrival. A 4 hour window of waiting costs me \$200 therefore I cannot afford to have a representative from our company wait on site for the inspector. I must either hand off to the general, if they're still on site or the homeowner must do it, which causes scheduling problems as well. 3) Cost of minimum permits and wait times are not logical for small projects. For example: I bid to add 4 outlets in a residence which takes 4 hours for about \$250.00, then \$75.00 for the permit, plus add 1-4 hours of waiting for the inspector \$50-200.00.....the homeowner price would now be \$375.00 - \$575.00. I would not get the job. Some unlicensed handy man would now get the job, do it poorly and perhaps illegally for \$200 - \$250.00 and he would never get an inspection.
- Amendments to the plans should be over the counter approved if it is a single departments request. Get rid of the I HAVE 15 DAYS to review the amendments that were submitted.
- Always helpful

- Building department is acceptable. The typically mail back our fire sprinkler permits, since we are located hours away. This is a nice feature. The fire department takes too long to review plans. They do not appear to be completely competent in the knowledge of fire sprinkler codes.
- By far the most glaring inadequacy is the poor technical expertise and lack of experience of the permit techs. Some construction and/or design experience is really necessary in order to interpret the code. (I really think it would be helpful for XXXXX to spend a day at the County Building Services, and see how that works -- at this point there is an embarrassing world of difference -- planners take in the plans, and plans examiners do a 10 minute review to catch any obvious inadequacy. It is a much, much more efficient operation in terms of supplying useful information to the applicant.) The plans examiners do a pretty good job, but there is still a need for consistency between examiners. There is a strong perception that no matter what the plans examiners and field inspectors call for, the Building Official will allow an exception. This is very detrimental to the entire design/build process, the integrity of plan review and field inspections, and (I assume) morale in the department.
- City of Bellingham's permit center could be one of the worst in the state. There is absolutely no consequences for the permit centers mistakes and indecisions. When you try to get a question answered, you get a different answer from every member of the staff. There is no accountability for their mistakes. The mistakes of the Permit Center filter down to everyone else involved in the projects.
- correct contact of parties for notification and punctual notification. Clear review of outstanding permits and expiration date of un finalized [sic] permits to be integrated with new permit. Same project path not separated.
- Difficult to communicate w/ inspectors, courtesy /attitude of some of the front desk staff needs major improvement.
- Friendly, personable and professional staff, however, sometimes codes are interpreted more by personal opinions rather than by letter of code.
- great to work with. They seem to want to help us achieve our desired goals.
- I believe the COB should offer, similar to Whatcom County, the ability to seek outside plan review. Also, projects that have all aspects of the design completed by a registered PE and Architect should be reviewed quicker since the liability falls on the professional. The COB planning department needs to make up their minds to whether or not they are going to create design guidelines (which includes style, materials, etc.) that designers and Architects need to follow. Nothing states that designs need to be traditional, however, contemporary designs are frowned upon and not accepted.
- I have been a electrical contractor for 15 years, In the past 4 or 5 years the permit center has done away with the ability for me to be at most of my inspections, thanks to MR. XXXXX changes to the system. In the 90's the permitting system was set-up to work with & for the contractors giving us a set time of our electrical inspections at the time we made our request. In the past couple of years I have made contact with XXXXX XXXXX about the change in the system and the cost to my business due to his changes, his reason for the changes is to made the system more user friendly for his staff and to be more cost effective for the city, yet the permit fees have gone up 100% from the 90's. Is this [customer service!] that the city has strived for?
- I have dealt with many municipalities and this is the worse one that I have dealt with by far. The wait time was over three months and every request for more information took 1 week at least for review - this was for a simple sign permit. If there was a way to let the applicant know what was necessary for approval and then get it to them and review the same day or at least within 24 hours, this would make the city much easier to work with and way less frustration on the applicant's part.
- I like the people in most of the departments, some are very over worked creating delay in the permitting process.
- I think that the permit center has made things appear to be orderly and user friendly. The web site check for permit status does not always show the full info that the in-house one does. The biggest thing is the attitude of the plans examiners. They have missed the whole reason for

permits in the first place. To build structurally sound, safe, competent buildings. These people will hold up projects for the nit pickiest most insignificant, irrelevant reasons possible. This creates more work for them, more cost, time delays, more frustration for us. For no benefit to the city or the project. The plans examiners end up reviewing the plans over and over. Not because they needed to!

- I think the biggest thing for me is this question: Why does the relationship with the counter staff seem to me to be more confrontational instead of just working towards the common goal of a code compliant and safe installation. It seems the counter staff, have "agenda's" that they are trying to implement. The way that the system works as far as the "call-back" to let us know when inspections will happen is no good. It does not allow enough time to notify people of importance...homeowners etc...On one note I would like to say that the inspectors are great to work with. Thanks...
- I think the permit center and planning department need to get on the same page as to what on forms to the current codes. It seems to me that one department will say one thing and the other something completely different. I've had the experience of being told to make certain changes or modifications to plans and then having someone else in the department give me completely different change orders once corrections have already been made. This is not only time consuming but also adds more cost to the project. It's my understanding that you're there to help people get their permits through the planning stages and not make it into a frustrating process and or power trip.
- I was told by the permit office that a TI permit would take two weeks. It ended up being 3 months. Tell the truth.
- I was very pleased with the demeanor of the staff - outstanding. That being said, the sub-division process is severely and unnecessarily slow. Due diligence is one thing, but the turn around time at every stage is nonsensically slow and frankly wouldn't be acceptable if this were run in a free market environment. Email responses take about 1-2 weeks, when they should take about 1 hour. Application processing seems to take forever, when it should take a day or two. There is a great deal of ambiguity in what is really a very straight-forward process. The permit fees are a joke, really. It cost say \$65 or \$200 for the fee, but costs you several thousand dollars (or tens of thousands of dollars) in time (both assets sitting around and personal man hours spent running around filling out forms and asking questions) to get things pushed thru. The city gets virtually no money, while the permit recipient has huge expenses due to the time delay. There should be a crack team, or "Express Submit" sub-section of the department that would easily be fully self-funded. Have one of each of the necessary individuals (bonds people, planner, permit writer, inspector, whatever) on call waiting for paid express submissions which would get fully pushed thru the system in a week and charge like \$2000 - \$5000 for the service. So instead of doing a sub-division in 9 months, it takes a week. The developer is spending the money anyways. Now, it's just the city that gets the funds instead of being wasted. And you can get top talent working for the department because there's significant revenue coming in. Everyone's happier, and everything works more efficiently. And there's still the option for those where time is not an issue - the \$65 fee and spend 9 months of your life going back and forth.
- In making a few inquiries amongst my fellow contractors I find my complaints are valid. One contractor told me that I should have 'walked out'
- Inspectors are great, always treated very fairly by all of them. Helpful in problem solving.
- it would be nice if we could use adobe to type in our information instead of having to hand write out every application.
- It would be nice to have a quicker turn around on permits.
- Most of my contact has been with the Building Official and Plans Examiners. The Building Services Division lacks sufficient management and leadership. Employees make their own rules and several have their own agenda. Management (Building Official) appears to have little impact on their activities. The Building Official and Senior Plans Examiner do not share mutual respect and it undermines the Building Officials standing with other employees within the Division. Some type of re-assignment of personnel is needed to change this historically poisoned culture. Anything less will not work as evidenced by the current restructuring effort.

Bellingham is the most difficult jurisdiction to do work in northwest Washington. It is mostly due to the attitude of a few individuals.

- needs work!!!!
- only concerned with the long review time.
- Out side plans examination needed. Commercial permit time much to long. Need accountability for time delay.
- Permit applications should be available to fill out on-line.
- Phone calls and emails for the most part are not responded to or even acknowledged. No reply.
- Plan check is still taking too long. It is a short time compared to Whatcom Co. but it still takes too long. If it would be poss. to add one or two plan checkers it would really make the process easy and efficient. I know the plan check application fees would pay for this. I do see the City making improvement all the time to this process, but we still really do need more plan checkers.
- Please ensure all professional engineers and architects stamp to RCW requirements! All documents are saved and archived for the big earthquake!
- PUBLIC WORKS REALLY NEEDS TO GET ORGANIZED AND QUIT LOSING PAPERWORK. IT HAS COST OUR CUSTOMERS 3 MONTHS OF TIME IN DELAYS OVER THE LAST 6 MONTHS
- Simple Inspections such as Sign Building and/or Sign Electrical should not require Contractor to be on site. In most cases these inspections can be done without assistance to the inspectors. This would save the City and the Contractor unnecessary expenses in time and labor cost for these personnel to be on site. Another cost/time savings would be to allow contractors to pull electrical permits through the State of Washington Labor & Industries Electrical Division. For us specialty contractors the total cost would be \$36.40 and the State Inspectors do not require us to be on site for inspections. That compares to an average cost of approximately \$150.00+ charge for an electrical permit through the City of Bellingham. And then you have to pay an employee to sit and wait for a City of Bellingham employee to show up so you can both go see that the wire nuts have been fastened correctly. This in my opinion is a huge waste of resources. The inspectors and permit personnel for the City of Bellingham are great at their jobs and should be commended on a job well done. But some of the processes that the City of Bellingham currently have in place wastes these talented peoples time. And in doing so waste our cities resources in expenses and lost opportunities to focus on revenue producing work. But understanding that the electrical permit process is a revenue producer for the City and that it will not relinquish that process to the State. I believe it must address the policy of doubling charges on permit applications. As an example, currently when submitting a Building Permit for a sign you must state the value of the sign to calculate the permit fee. This is standard and acceptable. You must also submit for a Electrical Permit and the fee is also calculated on the total value of the sign. This is not standard and not acceptable, electrical permit fees should be calculated on the value of electrical work performed, not the value of the entire sign. This is like double taxation. I suggest a flat fee for existing single circuit extensions, the State of Washington has adopted these standards and it would benefit all concerned if the City of Bellingham would consider adopting a simplified system also.
- Staff has no concept of the cost of their dawdling and delays.
- Storm water staff is extremely non-responsive and they typically have conflicting requirements for submittals and technical issues that are not on the same page as public works and planning. no a direct reflection on XXXXX XXXXX but review times for fire are extremely slow. he is wonderful to work with but he needs some help for review. why does public works, and storm have to review applications for basic tenant improvements where all site work for the building is in place and complete?
- The City of Bellingham Permit Center employee's don't consistently apply the IRC and IBC codes to all buildings. There needs to be more accountability for what they approve in all stages of the design process, rather than approving designs and later disapproving the same

- designs. They need to be held responsible for their "code" decisions. Stop being the designer and start applying the codes consistently.
- The coordination between departments is still a problem, ESPECIALLY the fact that Public Works does not seem to really be part of the process. Bert in the Permit Center doesn't really know what's going to be asked for by the guys upstairs. They have FREQUENTLY caused major problems on my projects (and I've heard similar stories from many others) by approving plans, then coming out in the field and rescinding or changing what was approved - costing clients thousands of dollars. As far as Building Services getting a clear review with all of the concerns identified at once is sometimes a problem. The old, "Oh, one more thing..." ends up taking weeks and weeks sometimes.
 - The planners at the front desk are very inconsistent. You usually get a different response from one person to the next on the same issue. So I know if one planner doesn't sign me off I can come back another time and get another planner to sign me off. So now my plans are signed off and I think I'm golden and the plan reviewer calls what the planners should have caught. One would think that all planners would have to follow the same guidelines. So, to sum it up I don't look forward to my visit to the permit center because I have to deal with these problems which in the end cost me my time and money.
 - The procedure to place plan check responses on the bottom of the pile, to slowly rise to the top to be reviewed is counter-productive. If all that stands in the way of permit issuance is the answer to a couple of questions, why delay until the response finds its way to the head of the queue? It seems that the plan checkers, in any department, should have an hour or so a day reserved to review plan check responses so they are dealt with in a timely manner.
 - the staff need to work on customer service. If there were any competition I would go elsewhere because the staff is rude and could care less how much time you spend waiting for someone. The people in the back are apparently "above" helping people at the counter, and this is not based on 1 visit, I go to the permit center 2-3 times per month and dread it every time.
 - The time frame for the permit process is completely out of line. Some of the permits submitted by us have been stuck at the permit center for a year or more, mainly by Building Services. Planning and Public Works will sign off and then three or four months may go by before Building Services will. There needs to be a clearly defined, reasonable time table for the permit process. The State of Washington allows for 2 months. This is a very reasonable time for the permit process. In other municipalities, a project gets one plan review letter with 5 or 8 review items. One Plans Examiner in Bellingham will issue 3 or 4 letters with 30 or more review items. This costs EVERYONE time and a lot of money, including the tax payers who pay the salaries of the City employees. We all must see the forest through the trees. Further more, the head of Building Services seems to be ineffectual as a leader. He is unresponsive and lets issues slide with no resolution, apparently to appease both parties and avoid conflict.
 - The time line of the permitting process is quite shocking. It is understandable that there are numerous departments that need to review a given permit and that time lines will inherently be extended. Please consider any way possible to achieve quicker permitting turn around times on applications.
 - The web site is difficult to navigate.
 - There is lack of continuity in how each department responds. Not all departments respond in a reasonable period of time. We find it unacceptable when city staff takes a holiday and our file waits for them to get back. We have noticed that this is more of a problem in the summer months.
 - There should always be somebody available from each department during permit center hours. There should not be meeting during the day where a whole department is unavailable. Some people travel for over 1/2 hour just to get to the City Hall to find out that there is nobody available to speak with, which is ridiculous.
 - Time is money - you have to figure out a way to process permits more quickly, especially for housing. Get Public Works to commit to timely review. All departments should do reviews concurrently - as it is PW won't review until all others are complete. Assign "Liaisons" to follow permits and ensure they are being processed appropriately.

- We applied for sign permits. They were not complicated. The project took 1 month before there was an initial review. The initial reviewer has some questions. We answered those and were told to wait again for review of our answers. This took 3 weeks. The application was passed onto someone else. They had questions. We answered those questions and were told to wait again for our answers to be reviewed. It seemed like the standard procedure was to put off action on a permit application if there was any way to do so.
- We need an easy way to be informed of the status of our permits either on line or from staff when we call in and ask. Since the majority of our work is in occupied locations and we only call for our final inspection after we have completed our work, there is rarely a need for us to go to the site or contact the owner for them to check the report. Quite often when we do they do not understand the document or have the skill to interpret the written information.
- Your permitting environment (people, facilities, materials) is very friendly and I am looking forward to working more in Bellingham.