

REPORT

**Small Business Development Center  
City of Bellingham Permit Center  
2008 First Quarter Survey**

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

During the first quarter (January to March) of 2008, Western Washington University's College of Business and Economics' Small Business Development Center (SBDC) worked 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 2008.

This customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, so researchers first needed to obtain email addresses for the individuals that used Permit Center services. Seventy-eight (78) individuals completed the survey during this time period, resulting in a 23% response rate. This calculates to a 10% margin of error on the survey, which is the same as last quarter's report.

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. The opportunity for respondents to request a copy of the results of this study was again offered. Fifty four (54) respondents provided their email addresses at the end of the survey (69%) so that they could receive a memo of this study's key findings. The process for disseminating the results to survey participants needs to be discussed by the City.

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.

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.

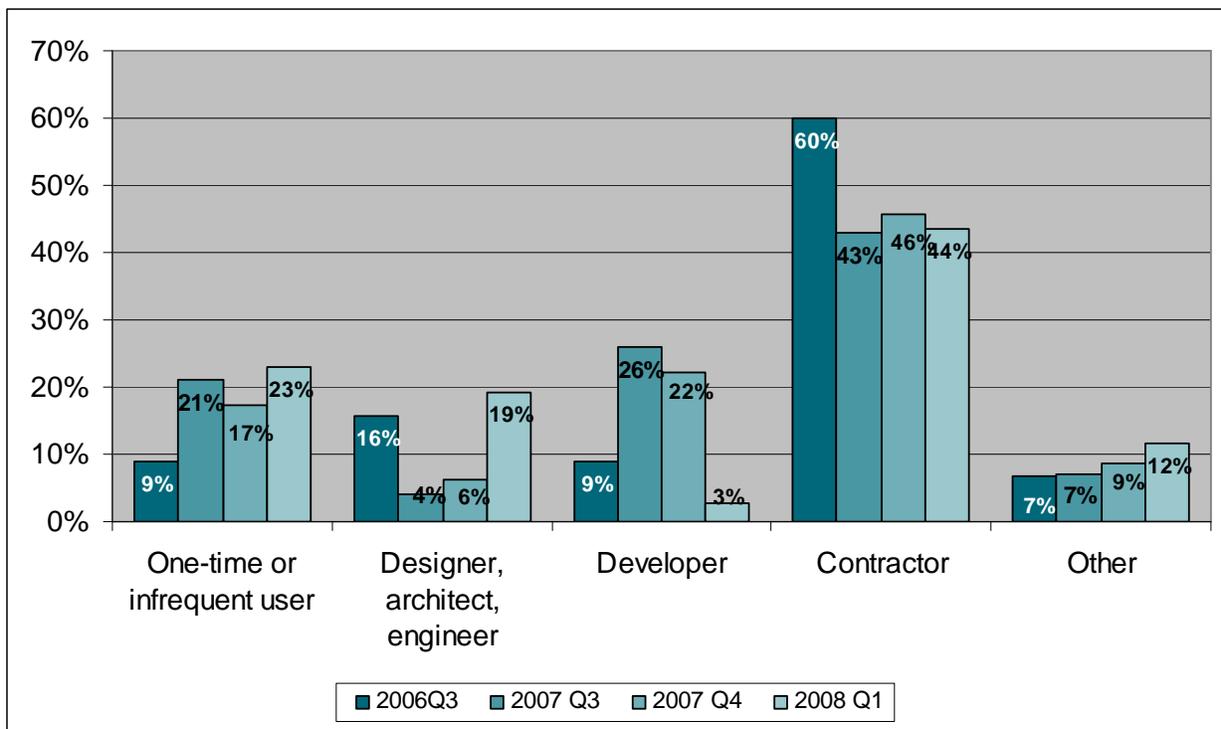
## TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

Customers of the Permit Center were first asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from January to March of 2008. As figure 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were contractors (44%) and one-time or infrequent users (23%).

There were several shifts since the last quarter: increases in the proportion of designers, architects and engineers (from 6% to 19%) and others (from 9% to 12%), and very significant drop in developers (from 22% to 3%), the latter previously being the second largest group of Permit Center users.

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

(N=78 for current time period; N=81 2007 Q4, N=86 in 2007 Q3, N=45 in 2006 Q3)



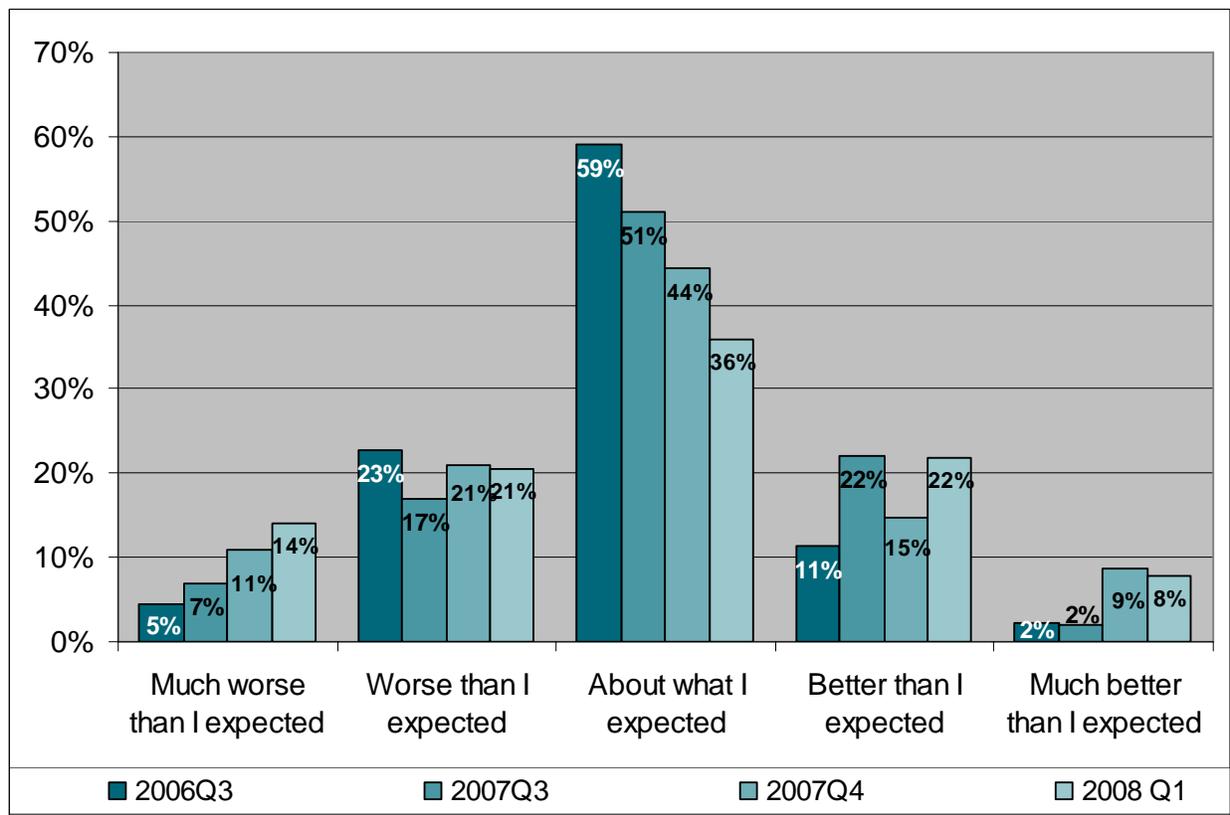
## OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were then asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents (66%, down slightly from 68%) said that their experience *what about what I expected* or better. This high proportion of respondents indicates that customer expectations are being met by the Permit Center. Note also that there was a relative increase in the percentage of customers responding with the second highest rating, *better than I expected* (22%, up from 15%).

Conversely, over one third of the respondents (35%) reported that their experience was *worse* or *much worse* than expected. While this is still the minority of customers, it remains a noticeable proportion that needs to be addressed through quality improvement efforts.

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

(N=78 for current time period; N=81 2007 Q4, N=86 in 2007 Q3, N=45 in 2006 Q3)



## PROJECT TYPES

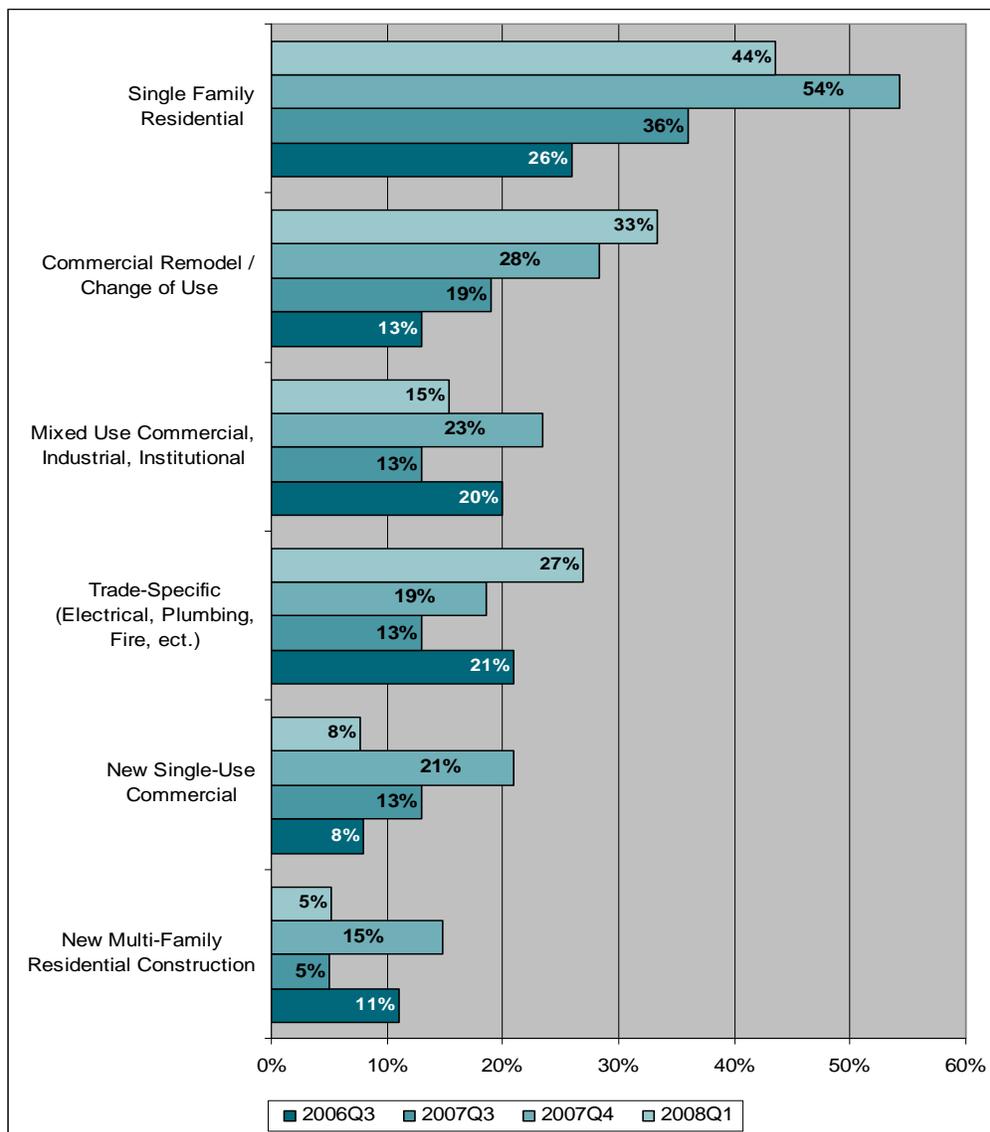
Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of project they were working on that brought them in contact with the Permit Center. As figure 3 shows, single family residential projects were again the most common, followed by commercial remodel and mixed-use commercial.

While single family residential projects have always been the most frequent, this proportion decreased by 10 percentage points since last quarter. In the first quarter of 2008, permits for single family residential projects represent 44% of all project types.

Please note that respondents could select more than one type of project, so the total number of projects (103) exceeds the total number of respondents (78).

**Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types**

(N=78 for current time period; N=81 in 2007 Q4, N=86 in 2007 Q3, N=45 in 2006 Q3)



## PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

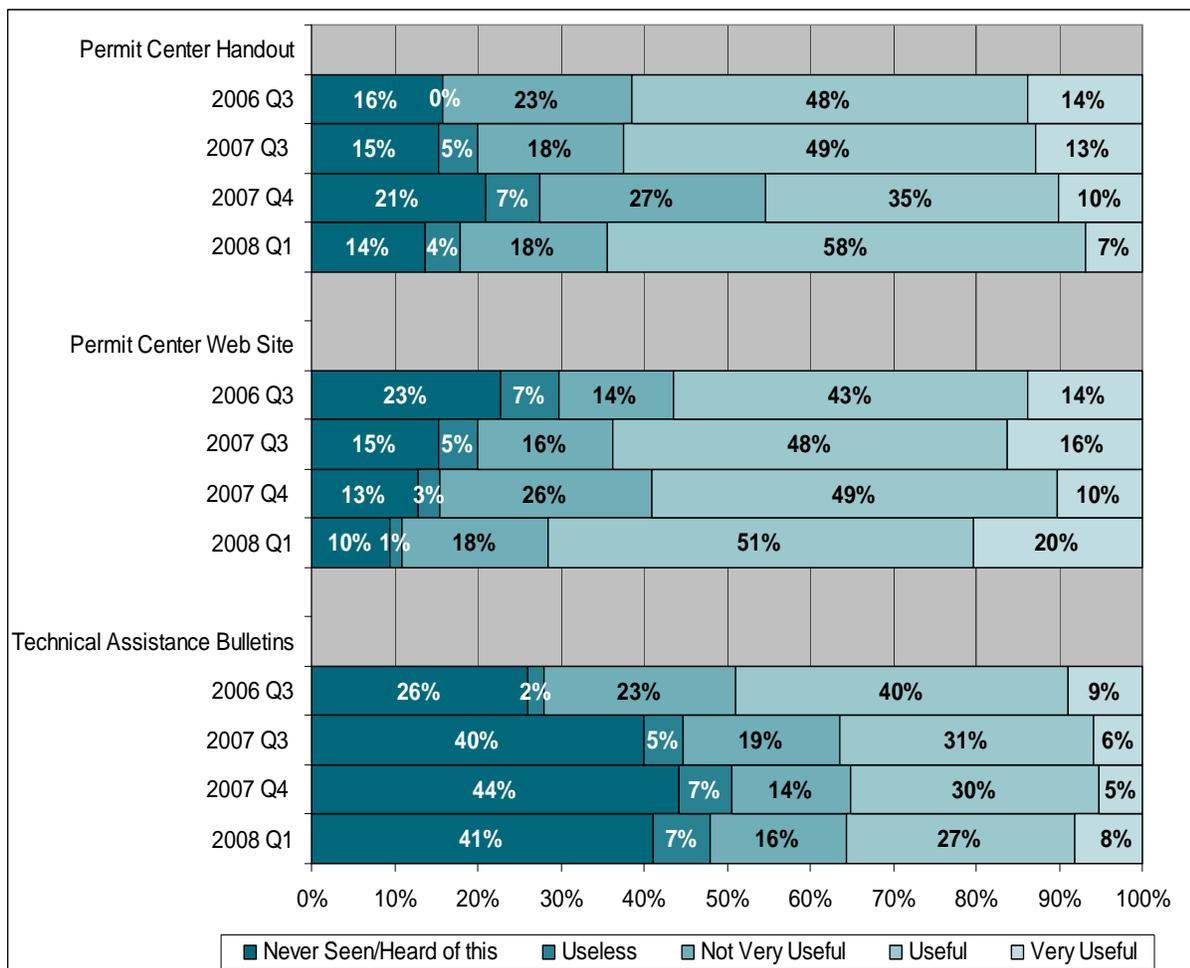
The first rating items on the survey asked respondents to indicate how useful the Permit Center materials were. This included the Center’s website, handouts, and assistance bulletins.

Figure 4 indicates that all three types of resources were found to be relatively useful to customers. The Permit Center handout and website saw significant increases in usefulness ratings provided by customers in the first quarter of 2008.

All three resources showed an increase in awareness during the past quarter. Continuing to focus on 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**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



## COUNTER ASSISTANCE

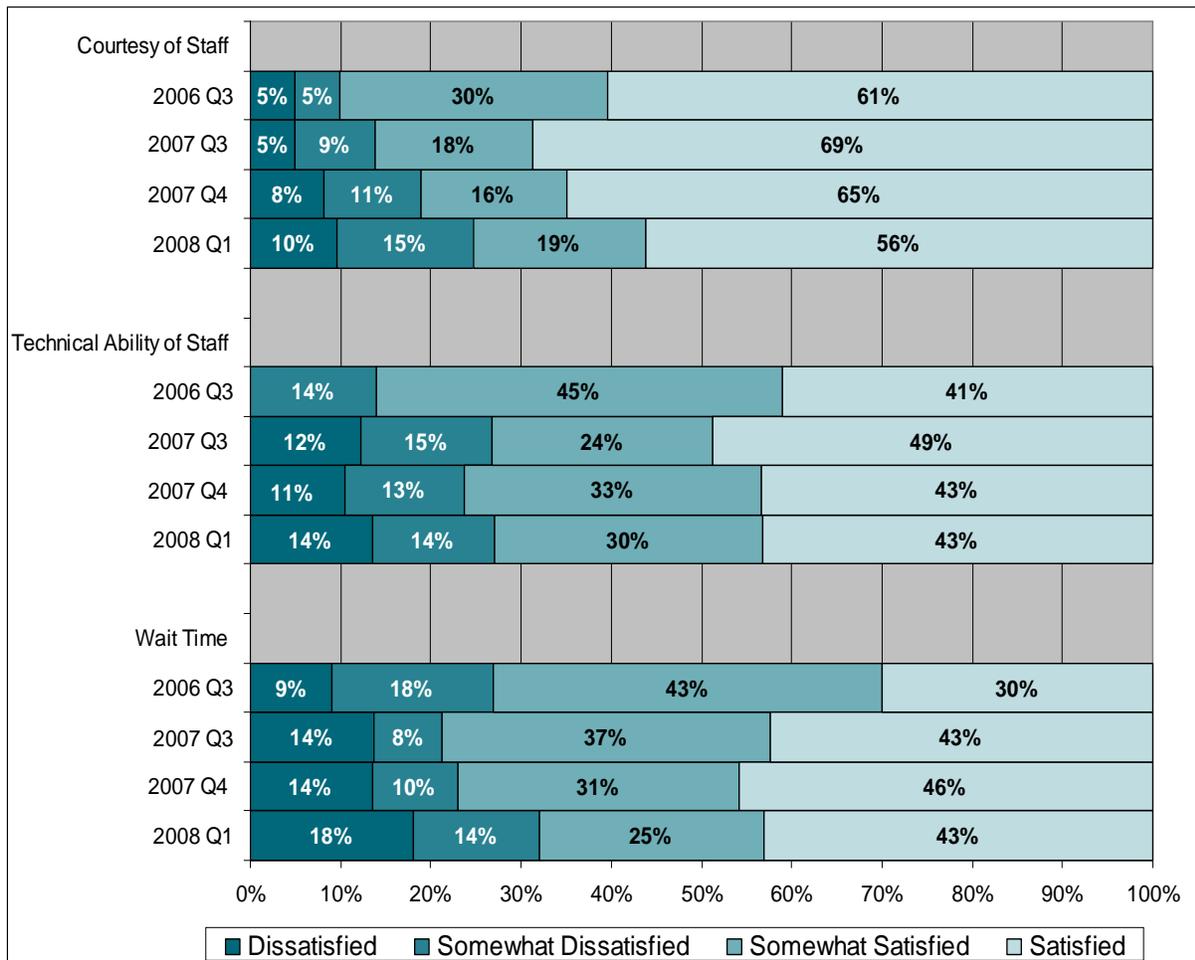
Respondents were then asked to indicate their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the Permit Center’s counter staff. Overall satisfaction with the counter staff was still relatively high, although changes were seen in this quarter’s findings.

Customer satisfaction with the courtesy of the staff showed a decline, dropping from 81% to 75% since last quarter. Customer satisfaction with the counter staff’s technical ability also showed a slight decline, decreasing from 76% to 73% in the past quarter.

The customer satisfaction with the wait time remained high; however this service component experienced a significant decrease this quarter from 77% to 68%. Almost one in three participants were dissatisfied with this component of service.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



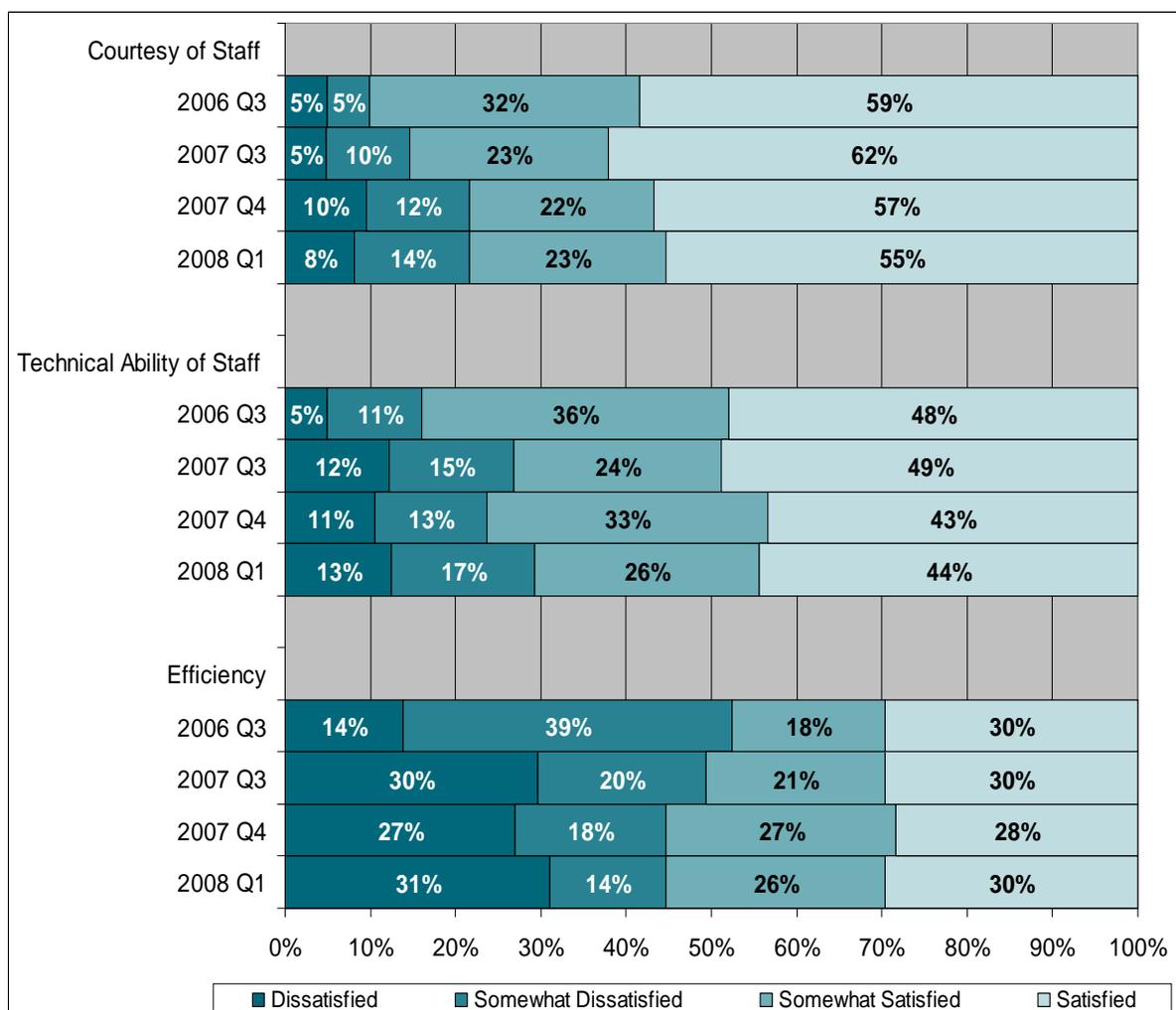
## PROCESSING APPLICATION

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 and the combined percentage of *satisfied* and *somewhat satisfied* remained constant, although there was 2% migration down from the highest rating in the first quarter of 2008.

Satisfaction with the efficiency of processing the applications also remained unchanged at 55% in the first quarter. Contrastingly, there was a slight decrease in technical ability in the last quarter, declining from 76% to 70%.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



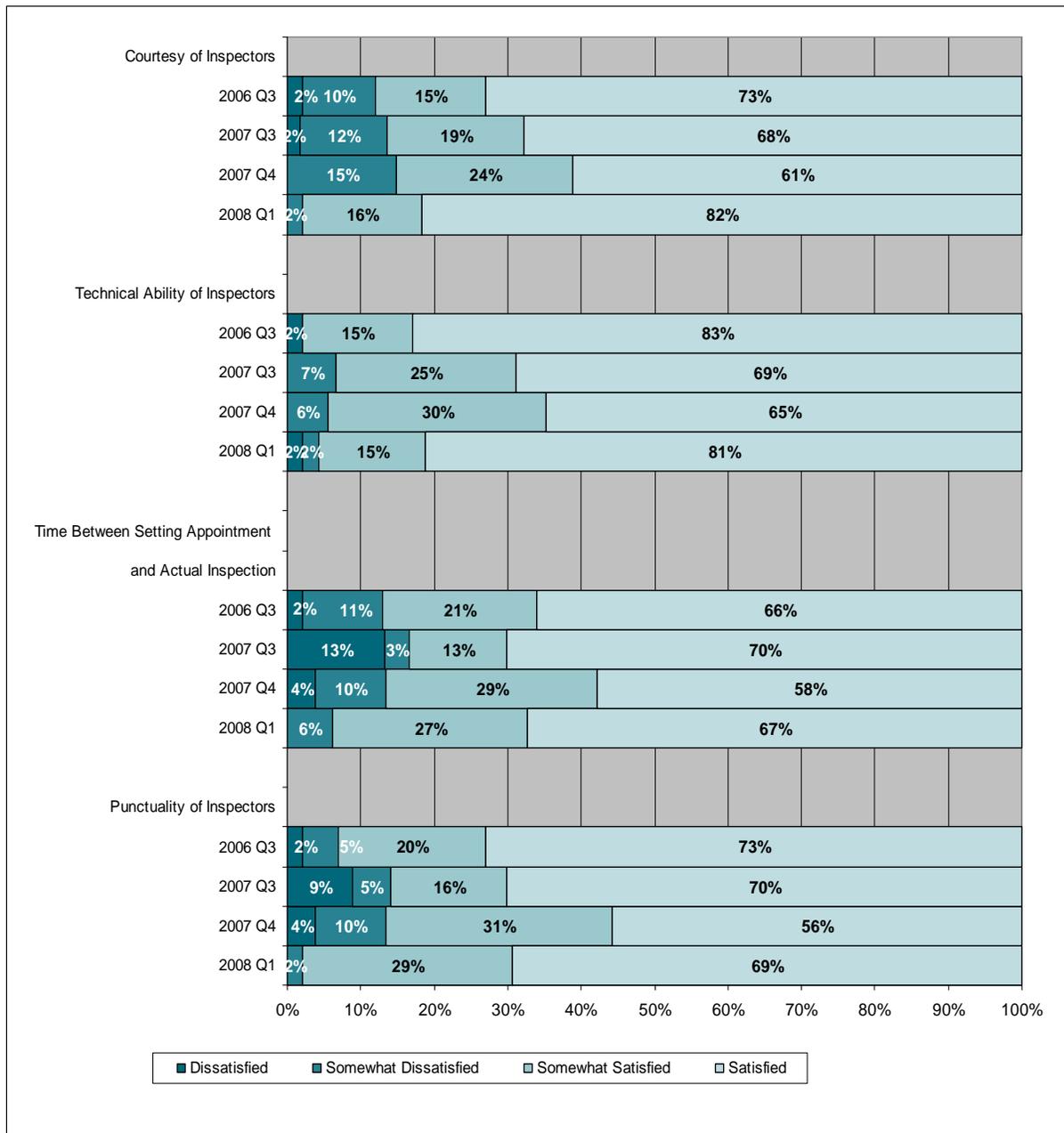
## INSPECTORS

The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Figure 7 shows that, while the inspectors are still highly rated by customers, the ratings for this quarter have significantly improved since past three quarters.

There were notable increases in the four aspects of service. Largest changes were an improvement in the punctuality (87% to 98%) and courtesy of inspectors (85% to 98%), both changes statistically significant.

**Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



## CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

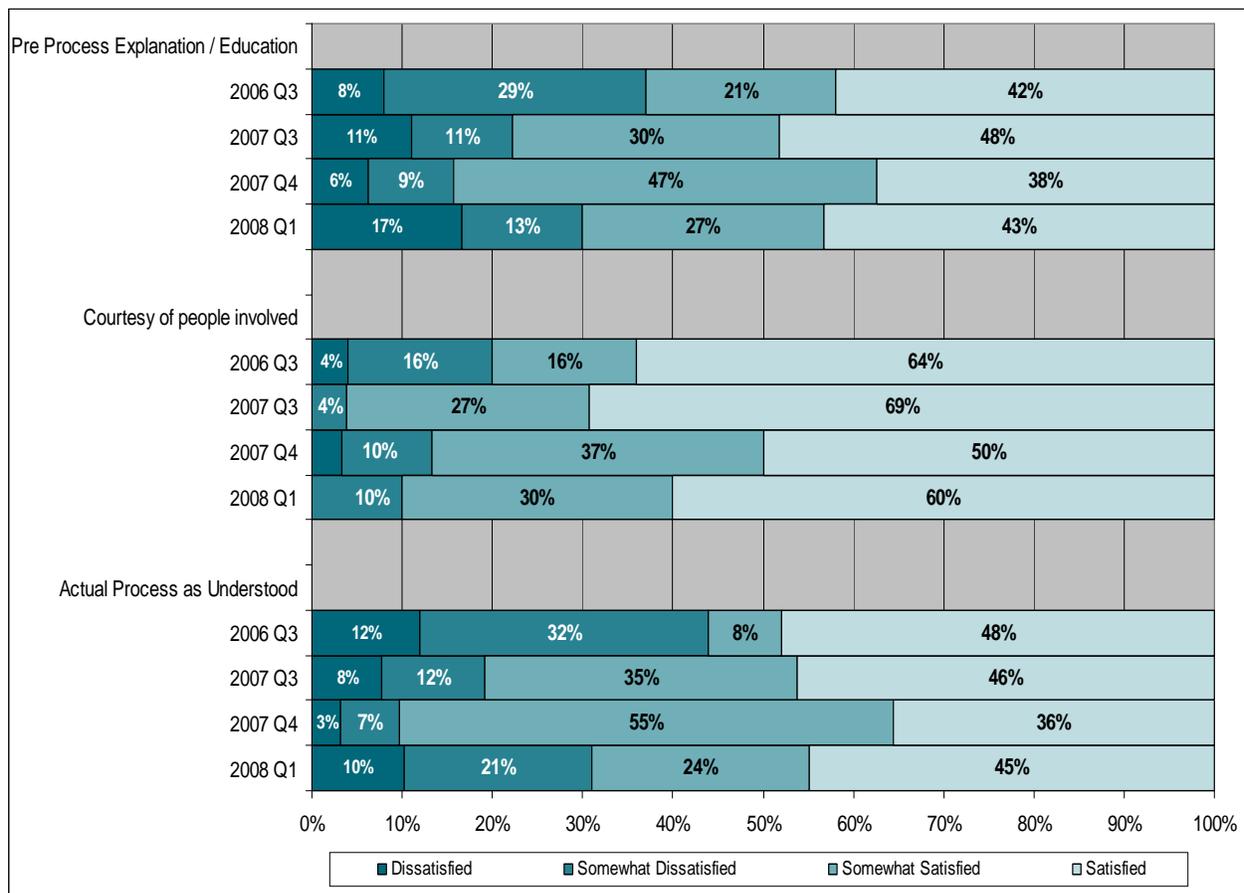
The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, there are mixed results and emerging trends in this area of the Permit Center's service.

For instance, after three straight quarters of increasing customer satisfaction with the pre-process education, there was a notable drop in the first quarter of 2008 from 85% to 70%.

Conversely, the combined percentage of *satisfied* and *somewhat satisfied* responses increased from 87% to 90% for courtesy of people involved in this process. The rating of customer understanding of the process dropped from the highest rating of 91% to lowest rating of 69%. While there was actually an increase in the highest rating category, there was a very large decline in the *somewhat satisfied* category.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



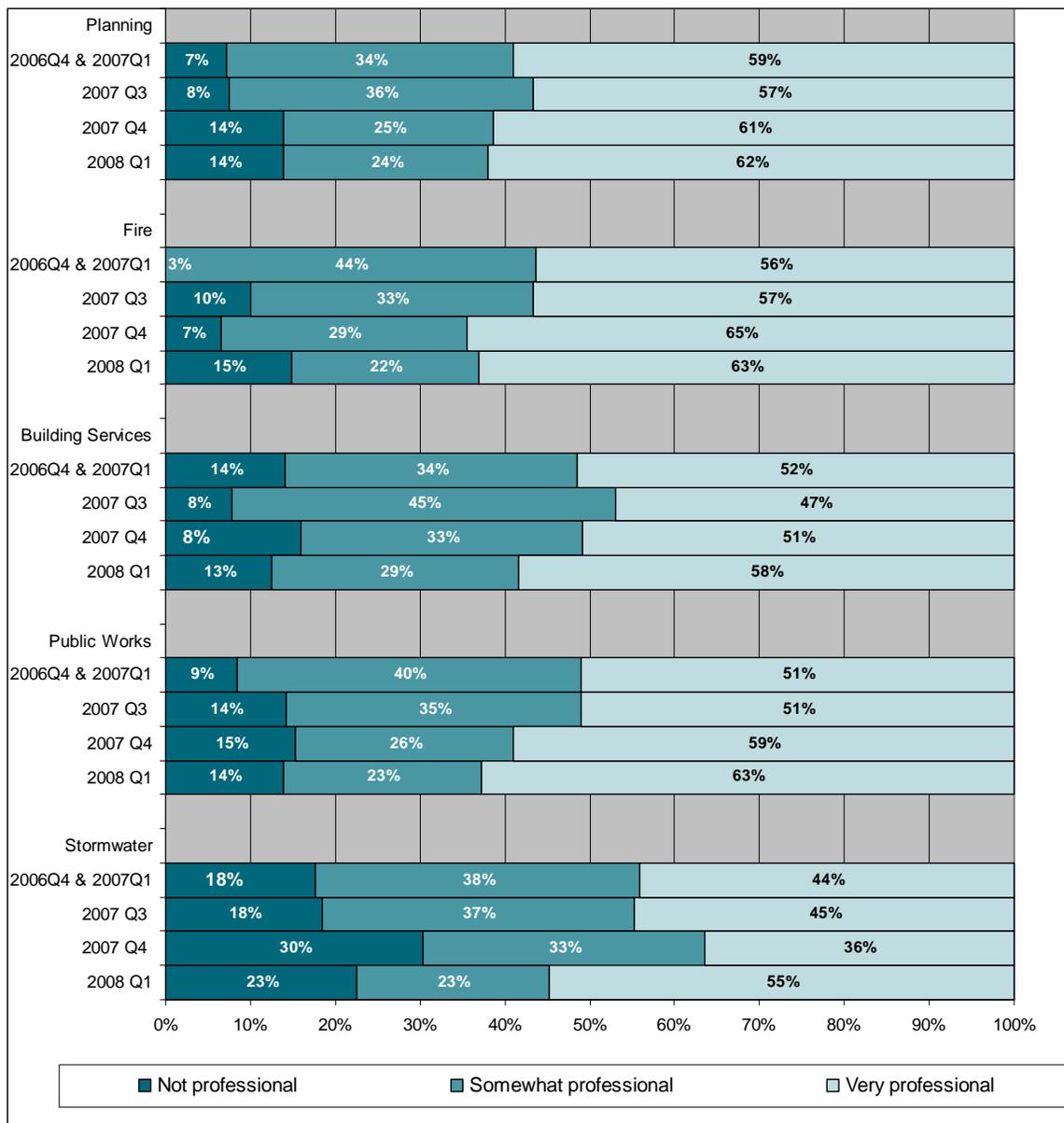
## PROFESSIONALISM

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, there is still a relatively high level of professionalism in every department, although some variability exists (*not professional* ratings in the first quarter of 2008 range from 13% to 23%). It appears, then, that the goal for these departments is again not to act merely professionally, but to act *very* professionally.

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

(Ns vary by year and department)



## PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

Respondents that had participated in a pre-application meeting (13) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, the percentage of *satisfied* customers (from 35% to 54%) increased in last quarter after declining for five straight quarter while the percentage of *somewhat satisfied* customers (23%) also decreased in the past quarter.

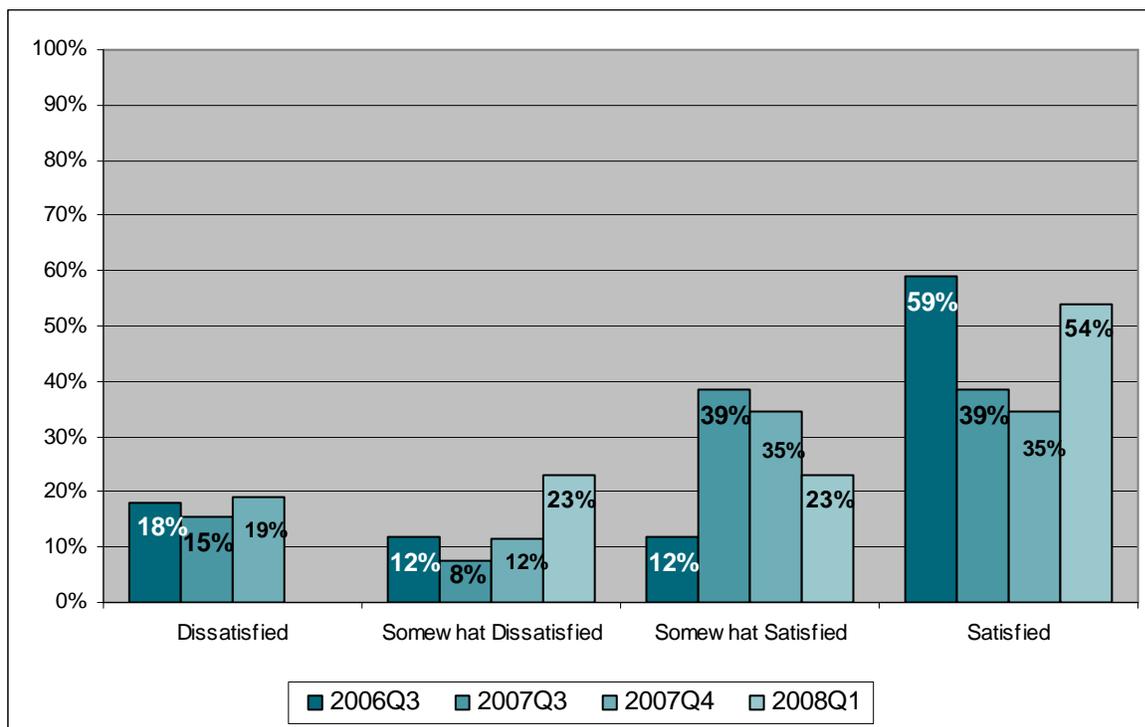
The notable change in this quarter is that there was not any people who were *dissatisfied*. In essence, then, customers are migrating toward higher levels of satisfaction. Also, at issue is the fact that the total number of people participated in the pre-application declined and that those that did participate were reported increasing levels of satisfaction.

Evaluating the changing needs or expectations of customers in the pre-application meetings would be a good first step in regaining the higher levels of satisfaction reported by customers in the previous time periods.

Respondents that participated in a pre-application meeting were again 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=13 for current time period, N=26 in 2007 Q4, N=26 in 2007 Q3, N=12 in 2006 Q3)



## PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

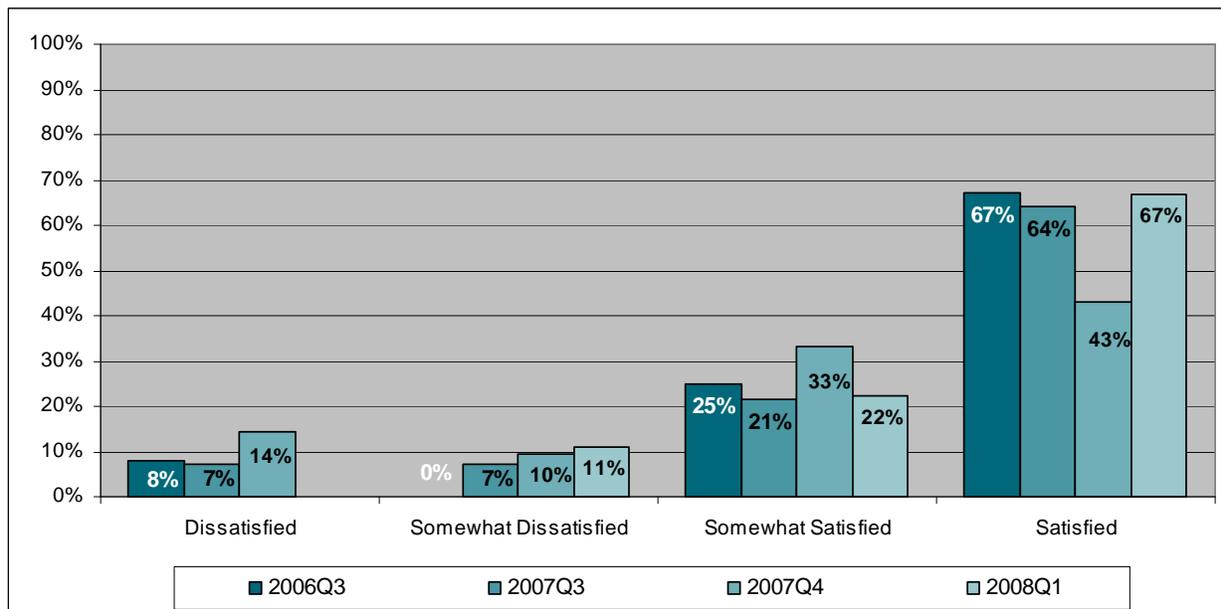
Respondents that had participated in a pre-construction meeting (9) were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, there is a clear shift of customers from the *dissatisfied* category to the *satisfied* category in first quarter of 2008.

Overall, the number of dissatisfied customers (11%) is significantly less than the satisfied customers (89%); however, customers are migrating toward higher levels of satisfaction compared to fourth quarter of 2007, where the dissatisfied to satisfied split was 11% vs. 89%.

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=9 for current time period, N=21 in 2007 Q4, N=14 in 2007 Q3, N=12 in 2006 Q3)



## ■ CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated by survey results from the first quarter of 2008, customer satisfaction with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center has remained relatively high but flat, and in a few instances decreased notably in the last quarter. As mentioned in the previous report, internal discussions should try to identify what processes, procedures, or personnel have changed that would lead to the stagnant and sometimes decreasing ratings by customers.

Customers' expectations might have changed in regards to the timeliness, quality of service, and professionalism of the Permit Center staff. It is also possible that the same customers have responded to this survey in multiple quarters, hoping that their feedback would result in noticeable improvements for the upcoming periods. However, if no significant changes are seen, expectations are raised--but not met--which might have contributed to the largely unchanged ratings reported in the current quarter. Another aspect to consider would be the declining number of participants who filled the online survey and the number of people who participated in pre-application and pre-construction meetings. Also, there has been significant difference in Permit Center users profile compared to the fourth quarter of 2007.

Ultimately, customer satisfaction with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center is still relatively positive, although the opportunities for improvement are readily available. The ratings of the inspectors, in particular, showed a significant improvement since the last quarter.

The improvement efforts could focus first on the notably decreased customer ratings in areas such as satisfaction with counter assistance. It is imperative that the Permit Center actively and strategically address the comments and concerns made by its customers. Strong effort is obviously being made by staff; it now seems that a more focused approach would most benefit staff and customers alike.

## 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.

Q1. Which description best fits you as a user of City of Bellingham Permit Center during the 1st quarter of 2008?

- 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 January to March of 2008? (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 January to March of 2008.

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: Courtesies 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 January to March of 2008.

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?**

- The pre-application meeting needs to establish the conditions necessary for the permit to be issued. A responsible person (department head) from each office needs to attend and all conditions necessary for the completion of the permit documents need to be discussed, recorded and agreed upon by all involved so that no secondary, incremental, not what we meant, we really need another driveway and fire hydrant comment appears once the final drawings are complete. We need you to have the authority to commit at the pre-app meeting and agree on what the full extent of work needs to be included in the final drawings for a project.
- We need a better list of ALL requirements pertaining to the success of issuance of a timely building permit. We need to know that the City officials will remain in their position and if they leave that they will pass on the necessary information.
- Staff (in particular engineering) should assist with solutions, not find ways to encumber project.
- Staff at the pre-application meeting should be fully qualified to make on the spot decisions and not have to seek upper staff approval. In other words, be able to support what is being communicated to the public, client, applicant, etc.
- Have everyone there and on time. Have a staff person take minutes and distribute within two working days. Have the staff look at the drawings carefully before the meeting.
- Have departments at the table that are willing to make concrete statements not just throw out possible hang-ups and give no reasonable way to remedy them
- You should be assigned one person to deal with for your whole project. Phone calls and e-mails were never returned. Every visit resulted in someone new to deal with and consistent answers were few and far between. You should be assigned a person and then have a way of contacting them. Perhaps part of their day could be reserved for making appointments.
- Went well....
- A flow chart of the departments and an expected time line would be nice.
- I have to sit and wait quite a long time to meet with someone on commercial permits just to hand it to the person and have them tell me ok I'll get it to a plans examiner. It seems like a waste of time. I don't see why I can't just drop it off if all they are going to do is look at it briefly and tell me they will forward it to someone else. That's the same result I could get from just dropping it off at the counter. Think about it.
- We bought our AS IS fixer upper as first time home buyers. There was no information passed to us from our realtor, no welcome to the city packet telling us about the permit process, and nothing from our mortgage lenders. The pre-application meeting was never mentioned to us or presented after the fact. This is the first time I have heard of it. We wished to do well, but the process never gave us clear guidelines.
- More ability/willingness of City staff to provide definitive information/decisions on matters that should be known by them. They never want to commit to anything.
- Not all staff participants had reviewed project adequately in advance to offer specific advice. Proponents can help by providing advance questions for staff and then receiving specific answers.
- No one can seem to tell you anything definitive. You get general information.

### **Q12a. If you participated in a pre-construction meeting, do you have any suggestions to make these meetings more effective?**

- These meetings work and are necessary to some degree.
- Would have been nice if Public Works attended.
- The meeting itself is fine. The length of time to get something done that is pretty much basic and previous on record is appalling.
- We had so many meetings, I'm not sure if this sure if this was one of them.

- Went ok, need hand out with very specific out line would help.
- Meeting minutes/issues need to be created for applicants more promptly. County hand writes on the spot and copies to everyone at end of meeting. Perhaps it could be done on a laptop at end of day. Require applicants to document key issues to discuss and staff should be prepared to respond at meeting. It seems that staff is responding on-the-spot, and with vague answers, esp. from PW.
- I would have liked a pre-construction meeting.
- same comment as above

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

- It would be helpful to be able to access as built drawings and permits without needing assistance from a person behind the counter.
- Most cities are not as nice and as efficient at the permit counter, they seem to lose their ability to perform work and accomplish their duty to the public. But I was totally happy with the City of Bellingham.
- Overall my experience was positive, I expected some inefficiency because these are issues that are usually complicated and need some runaround to solve, but it wasn't too bad. Thanks.
- There are no set guidelines to go by as far as what is required with ea. permit. It is confusing a lot of the time to know if I have everything the permit center is going to need w/ my app. so often times I end up needing more or give more than is needed. When I call to ask questions no one can ever answer them and they give me a plan inspector's voice mail and then my call is either never returned or returned days later when often times I need to get my permit processed promptly.
- it as OK
- I do mostly Tenant Improvements that are quite simple and have always felt that because they take so little time to review they should be put on top of the stack. The turn around has been a lot better in recent months though and I appreciate it.
- Plans reviewer said an electrical permit was required. Electrical inspector said it was not. Waste of my time and your staff's time.
- IT TAKES 10 TIMES THE PAPERWORK THAT IT TAKES WITH L&I TO GET A SIMPLE ELECTRICAL PERMIT
- I have found the lady at the counter to be rude and impatient.
- I took me 5 times to get my plans correct. 5 different people reviewed my plans and each one missed things that needed to be on there. The permit process took to long. If someone goes on vacation then someone else should take over. Its call teamwork. My over all experience was good but a little frustrating with the trips back a forth.
- As an electrical contractor who has done business with the COB for nearly 20 years, I can honestly say that things have NEVER been worse. Too many things to detail here. Feel free to contact me: XXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX@XXXX
- As a XXXX applicant, I found that the XXXX staffers in the permitting office were very condescending to me when I asked questions (XXXX and XXXX). Since I am a homeowner and not a contractor, I would have appreciated feedback and answers in everyday terms rather than technical industry speak. Many times I found that I would have to redo a step in the permitting process because information was not relayed clearly to me from the onset. Not only did the lack of user-friendly service cost me time but money. Note that our home project was a "simple" improvement of an existing detached garage (no heat or plumbing) ---one would have thought we were building the Taj Mahal. Our project ran 3mos and \$15,000 over... we will now think twice about doing any other improvement to our 1906 Craftsman home. The final straw in our project was the error the Center made in placing our home number on a list for all Whatcom County projects (commercial and residential). During the month of October and November, we received daily calls from contractors, builders, inspectors, etc. We called the Permit Center countless times to inform them of this glitch, and again, we were treated rudely. Finally, I must give credit to XXXX and XXXX who were always respectful, helpful, and kind.
- The desk staff needs to be consistent with/and know what they are looking for on the plans. I had to go back 5 times with different things each time just to try and submit the plans.

- Simple remodel permits simply take too long.
- We are a small audio video contractor. Its a waste of time and clients money to drive in for an 85.00 permit on a 150.00 surround sound prewired. Which cost the client an extra 85.00 for the permit and 75.00 in extra labor for getting the permit. There should be a minimum. The county charges us 10.00 and we get booklets of 10.00 stickers to put our work so they know we did the job. No inspection and we don't have to drive anywhere. We pay for the booklets on line.
- We need to narrow the scope of review of the plans examiners to life safety and accessibility issues. And hire more of them. They should not have the scope nor authority to question professional engineering calculations, professional building design, etc., as they assume no liability or accountability. The staff review time MUST be shortened, as it just costs money to everyone, including the tax payers who foot the bill for the plans examiners' salaries.
- The building, planning and public works departments are staffed by some excellent people with years of experience. Due to a lack of constructive leadership, there are a number of answers to each question depending on which staff person you are dealing with. The lack of adequate staffing and the work load takes away the time necessary to train and the lack of strong leadership allows the flock to wander.
- When meeting the inspectors on site they will not give us a time or an approximate time of inspection. Then we miss each other and have to try another day wasting time for both of us. We need to work together toward a happy customer and TAX PAYER.
- The permit center has been a great improvement over the previous situation a few years ago. I have no problems with the permit center as it is now, although the inspection call-in system is clumsy and could be streamlined. Our commercial projects require that we meet with each inspector at each inspection and I would prefer a system better designed to accommodate that need. When we are busy we have numerous inspections per week and each one needs to be a personal encounter to ensure that projects can proceed without problems.
- City should be able to review in-coming plans on a quicker turnaround or even include us in the time of their review analysis. We are waiting far too long to get the department feed backs, which delays building permit approval.
- I wish All the Jurisdictions Bellingham, Whatcom County, Ferndale, Lynden, Blaine would have the same standards since we're all in the same County.
- PLEASE, PLEASE, OH PLEASE CAN YOU MAKE ONLINE PERMITS AVAILABLE? IT IS SO MUCH EASIER TO GET A PERMIT THROUGH L&I BECAUSE THEY HAVE AN ONLINE SYSTEM. IT WOULD SAVE MY COMPANY ALOT OF HASSLE WITH TRAFFIC, LINES, AND TIME THAT IT TAKES TO PURCHASE A PERMIT. THANKS FOR THE CHANCE OF LETTING YOU KNOW MY OPINION!
- I have spent the last 17 years in my field of design and provided the same medical gas detail on every project (with code updates of course as they are released) and was asked to provide the pickiest of information to satisfy the plans examiner such as the type of nails used, spacing of the nails, etc...This is ridiculous! This was one of two corrections we were required to make and I think this plans examiner was trying to find something to justify being employed there. I'm very dissatisfied I have to jump through his hoops - what a waste of time!
- Be more proactive in resolving problems. If items will not work what will.
- I could not believe how rude and incompetent the counter staff was on my visit. The counter staff (reception) could not supply a SEPA application upon waiting for XXXX to help me for about 15 minutes. XXXX told me I had to wait for a SEPA official. As a GC I just needed the form and attempted to explain that to here. I ended up waiting for over a half hour for a SEPA XXX to show. I just left in frustration. Second and more concerning, XXXX was extremely rude to my XXXX and I on two different occasions. There was no adversarial air XXXX just came up to us rolling XXXX eyes and speaking in a very patronizing way. After waiting a while and trying to get in touch with XXXX I ended up asking to speak with XXX supervisor via voicemail. Several calls ensued and were never responded to. Eventually XXXX called me and started the conversation. VERBATIM and very loudly on a phone call initiated by XXXX "WHAT DO YOU WANT". After responding calmly and quietly XXXX settled down but I must tell you how absolutely floored XXXX and I were by XXXX actions. XXXX could here the call because XXXX was yelling! So, our experience was simply horrible. I never did get to speak to a superior and am very concerned about our future need to interact with this office.

I wish to offer permit facilitation to my clients but will not deal with the city again until something changes. This is a very abed thing and if you believe only half of this I think you would see that it warrants a meeting between his supervisor and me. This is not a rant or a joke. I can be reached at: XXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX@XXXX

- Overall, the staff's attitude in the Permit Center is horrifying. The phone reception is rude and lacks any ability to satisfy the public. XXX XXXX lacks any qualifications and people skills to be a plans examiner. For years, the general consensus has been to fire XXXX. People, especially ones who are paying the salaries of the COB staff, need to be treated as people - this is NOT the case with the COB Planning Department.
- There needs to be a more timely review process. Also, the reviewer should sit down with the applicant to go over concerns in order to fully address the issues. Once the initial review is complete there should not be a re-review of the plans but just reviewing the responses to the initial Review Letter.
- It appears the general attitude in the Building Services dept has improved over the past year or 2. Please keep up the good work.
- The process was acceptable to me.
- You really need to focus on customer service and an attitude of CAN DO not how do we stop these people from building. Please remember time IS money!!!
- I have submitted to jurisdictions where they have a "consistently prepared applicant" status for firms that submit projects. This creates an incentive for architects to be prepared... its good business, saves time and may be used in marketing etc. The city benefits by creating an incentive for applicants to come prepared with complete and accurate documents... less review time, fewer corrections.
- I have had several permit applications get miss placed and that delayed the process. When it was discovered, the staff tried to fast track the permit through for me.
- After being in construction twenty years. And a contractor now in this area for two years I was pleased with the help I received. thank you XXXX XXXXX XXXX XXXXX XXX XXXX XXXXX
- Permit Center has improved over the last 3 years. Planning is totally ridiculous. Public works is generally been helpful and service oriented but seems to be staying away from that aspect the last few years.
- The permit center/planning needs to either be more educated to current codes or get the inspectors involved in the permit process to eliminate having the inspectors in the field create cause to go back into plan review over items that were approved or possibly missed thus creating additional expenses and project delays as a result of the lack of training or communication between the field and the office. Generally everyone was great to work with they just need to talk to each other.
- Our inspection requirements were difficult inasmuch as the customers were living in the home being remodeled. The building inspectors were most helpful and accommodating. The electrical inspections were snaffos - no communication.
- Things need to improve. If you set up an oversight or advisory citizens group, I'd love to serve on it to help improve service.
- I have only worked with the city for about a year and it has been going very well. Thanks, XXXX
- Fantastic improvement compared with systems past. The one-stop center is very helpful and well-ran. It seems like permit processing could benefit from a "charette" style meeting/review that would gather all the parties at one time. This would eliminate or at least identify when the departments have competing priorities and give the applicant a clear understanding of what is needed for the application to receive its permit. Again, really great improvement and overall a very good system.
- I wish that all departments would be on the same page, concerning the entire permitting process. I would like to get a hand-out, or showing on the web site, which permits are required for different typical jobs, so that it is clear at permit application time, which permits are required, and how to estimate the permit fees. Some fees came as a big surprise to the owner, and it made me look like I didn't know what I was doing. During a small commercial job, near the completion of work, I did not get the same answer, or a clear answer from anyone about what I needed to do, when I tried to make sure we would arrange for all needed inspections. Neither was it hard for anyone to completely explain what I needed before getting 'Occupancy'. It was a surprise to me that the "End of Construction Inspection" for on-street parking needed a two day notice, while all other inspections require only 24 hours. We just about missed the opening date. I have no problem with a longer notice for inspections, but when I called to

make sure that I involved every department necessary for finals, nobody mentioned this part. All people have been very nice and professional, but I wish all departments would globally know more about other department's process, as well as the preferred order of inspections during 'final' time. Thanks.

- Despite all the changes, the permitting process is cumbersome and slow. The City is now even slower than the County. The whole situation is inefficient. It is all very frustrating.
- Require all applicants to complete a plan cover sheet responding to all bldg. code & zoning issues, to save staff time in review. Pre-print a sheet for all applicants to respond to all issues or be N/A. Similar to Seattle. All non-structural Commercial T.I.'s should be completed on-the-spot at counter. If they conform to newly created checklist of qualifications. Any new code interpretations or new staff policies MUST be issued to all local construction professionals asap. have an email sign-up and do an easy broadcast email. Better enforcement of the State law regarding non-licensed building designers limit of 4000sf commercial or 4 units. Many are skirting the issue by not printing their names on plans and having them submitted as design-build by owner. WABO has solved this issue by having each jurisdiction pass an ordinance, specific to the intent, i.e. 4000sf or greater REQUIRES an Architect stamp. An engineer cannot stamp plan issues that are not under their survey of expertise, i.e. life safety, etc. Contact past pres. of WABO. Provide incentives for LEED projects. Applicants must call out specific LEED items on plan that aligns with a USGBC application. (i.e. expedited processing)
- The first time I brought my drawings from the architect in, I have told they would work by XXXX XXXX. So I had them completed, and engineered. Today I tried to submit the completed sets, to a different reviewer, and there was a bunch of stuff that XXXX wanted redrawn and reengineered. That is going to cost me more money and time. Which I don't have, thanks.
- The plans examiners are always acting as though they are overworked and defensive towards the customers. They put allot of extra work on themselves by the way they check plans. They should just check them once, and then pass them off when the corrections are made. They act like they have to go back over and over the plans. They miss the whole point of plans examination in the first place. "To create safe sound structures for the public use. Not to use the codes to beat people up with. The newer codes are bad enough. Bellingham's interpretation of the code is even worse. What's with that!!!!!!!!!!
- The scope of review of the Building Services Plans examiners needs to be re-evaluated and cut back drastically. I've heard that they are now even requiring waterproofing details and specifications. Ironic considering they assume no liability and it is none of their concern.
- Too long for permit process. Complicated system. Excellent front end staff! Needs to be a place where there can be immediate interaction to overcome problems/corrections.
- Kudos to you for taking the initiative and producing this survey.
- I was treated in a completely unprofessional, aggressive and threatening manner by one of the Permit Center staff which included XXXX approaching me on my property without identifying XXXX, accusing me of actions which I had not done, telling me that my every move would be watched, threatening me numerous time with calling the police, threatening me with a delayed permit process, conducting a plan review that was punitive and went beyond the requirements of the building code and lying about what XXXX observed at my property. I had been told by the inspector that I could begin framing construction on my property once I had submitted the permit application. I did as I was told was admissible and received this behavior when a neighbor called the city, I assume to complain about my doing construction without a posted permit. While this is the most grievous complaint I have, I also had several instances where I was told one thing by the permit tech staff and then something else the next time I went in, so it was difficult to get clear what was actually needed from me for a complete permit application package. Resolving the issues took repeated trips to the permit center.
- It would be better if they could keep in mind that many of the applicants are supporting the development of the city. We felt like they are trying too hard staying in the very tight rail (rule/code) and not treating us as people working in the same city, do not realize it was costing so much for everybody involved in. They seem very stressed and felt like we were treated as enemy.
- In general the process is smooth and painless. My complaint is with the inconsistency with requirements. Twice I was misled and asked to put information on the plans that was wrong, only to find out through the mail that I needed to come in and change it. In the letter it is not disclosed what has stopped the permit process. Since this happened twice my permit was delayed and my time

wasted. Add insult to injury, they offered to make the changes for me at an outrageous hourly rate. In their attempt to "streamline the process" a rigidity and inefficiency has taken place. The inspectors are much easier and helpful to deal with.

- THE ELECTRICAL PERMIT CENTER IS OUT OF CONTROL, NO ONE IS REALLY IN CHARGE THEY DON'T TALK WITH EACH OTHER, THEY DON'T CARE IF THEY ARE DOING A GOOD JOB OR NOT, IT'S LIKE A DAY CARE CENTER WITH NO ADULTS AROUND
- Counter staff was exceptionally friendly and helpful!
- The requirement for a plan submittal for small (single appliance) gas plumbing is unnecessary and causes delays. Bellingham is the only code authority in Whatcom County that is unable to grant a mechanical permit involving gas plumbing in one day. When the requirement was instituted, the staff promised same-day service. It has never taken less than two days and two visits. This is especially irksome since the staff has repeatedly said that the plan requirement really only applies to large commercial jobs. The policy needs to be examined and changed to exempt small jobs.
- I came in to schedule a mechanical inspection. I brought in the factory installation guide to show the staff so I would schedule the right inspection. I showed them exactly what I was going to do. When I came in to pick up the permit I was told that I also needed an electrical permit which effectively doubled my permit fees and delayed issuance. Staff was not only unapologetic but could not understand why I was upset. I followed the rules and was very clear about what I was doing. They made a mistake but because of the prevalent attitude among building services staff they could not understand my concerns. You can change the system all you want but until you change the attitude where staff thinks they are doing the public a favor you will not change the experience. I had to remind the staff not to get defensive since they were the ones who made the mistake. I also had to remind them that the city needs people to want to get permits especially for something that could have been done with out the city ever knowing. Staff needs to be reminded that they are in customer service and their attitude should reflect it. I worked behind the counter at a local jurisdiction for many years so I truly understand the position they are in...Still have to keep a good attitude and not change things on people at a whim.
- It would be useful if I worked with one person instead of 5 or 6 different people. I got mixed signals which caused me much frustration, time and work.
- Time from application to permit is too long compared to other cities
- The staff does not know what they are doing and are not knowledgeable of the city's rules or how they apply to any situation out of the ordinary. Their decisions are inconsistent and hang on principle more than on reason or simplicity. They do not communicate with each other or other city departments. Jobs will be hung up for weeks because the paperwork is sitting on someone's desk and have to be called to be reminded to process it.
- XXXX and XXXX are incredible assets to the Permit Center.
- If they would tell you everything required right up front at the initial plan review, before the inspectors get to the job and say code says this, the prints showed it a different way. There should be no surprises after a stamped, approved set of prints!!!
- These people have got to learn what customer service means. I had a simple zoning question that took two months to answer. And the answer was a copy of a letter written to someone else last year. Most of the staff seems to think it is ok to leave their phone in a "do not answer" mode. All you ever get is voicemail. This is not acceptable. If people call they deserve a timely answer. I have never seen a worse situation than what currently exists. My understanding is that the union protects these people, and the administration is powerless to make change. These people cannot be fired without commission of a felony. Absolutely unacceptable.
- Takes forever to get anything DONE!!!!
- The newer girls in the permit center are great. The ones that have been there a number of years are sometimes difficult and not very friendly.
- I have been doing business w' the COB for over 15 years and the electrical permit process has never been worse! I am happy to discuss my experiences! XXXXX XXXXXX XXXX
- Scheduling inspections -- Staff gives am or pm only. On the day of the inspection, if you can get past the staff to the actual inspector, you can get a time frame that is workable. It is not practical to have

one of our employees loitering on the job, waiting for the inspector for up to half a day. There should be a better way.

- Customer service over the telephone is Horrible. I have experienced rude, curt, and unprofessional behavior. A stark contrast from any face to face experience. A.M. inspections should be blocked into 2 hour windows. Not 8am to noon. There needs to be a line of communication established between customers and inspectors during the course of the day. Maybe a liaison. The new automated system creates too much of disconnect, causing frustration for contractors and inspectors. Hiring a person who could act in the capacity of inspector and liaison might be a good idea. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard
- It would be nice to be able to access the status of the permit on line by address, name, or permit number.
- I had several past heard horror stories about the permit process and dealing with staff. However, my experience was just the opposite. Permit was just issued, so I have no additional experience on which to comment at this time. Demo and construction are scheduled in the next couple of weeks.
- It is very unsettling when people are standing around waiting for help and the staff behind the counter acts as if their coffee breaks and lunch breaks are more important than the customers. Also poor use of time by helping only one customer at a time even if that means waiting for paperwork to print before writing the next persons name on the list. Why can't they write down a name while they are waiting for the printer?
- I speak with XXXX XXXXX on a regular basis. XXXX is very courteous and professional and always answers my questions or makes sure XXXX has someone contact me who can. I am very impressed with XXX and I appreciate all XXX hard work.
- It is too fragmented. We are told by one person to do something while the form the city tells us that aren't necessary. We had too many things come to us from people who never came to the house to see what it is we need to do. This system is NOT set up for the homeowner to maneuver in.
- I have found that general knowledge of codes and regulations is lacking. I also still find staff very inconsistent from one to the next. I will get the okay from one and the next will say that wrong you can't do that.
- The building services staff is courteous and professional, but it was painstakingly slow and I don't understand why.
- 1) staff unable or unwilling to make decisions without consensus that is next to impossible to get 2) staff unwillingness to provide commitments to anything in writing. Allows them to reverse positions later when it is very expensive after you have relied on earlier verbal information 3) unrealistic fear and misunderstanding of the City's legal liability position on new construction
- General process was good. Fees are totally outrageous! Most of the people at the counter were great minus on heavy set XXXX who was really short, rude, and encourageable! The rest were great...I mean really nice to deal with. Public works was the same way...most everyone was wonderful except I think it's XXXX...who is impossible to deal with and doesn't have common sense ability customize application of the code to specific circumstances.
- the system seems to be getting more streamlined, there is less conflicting information from the different departments-they are almost 'on the same page' wait time vary with the time of day
- Have worked primarily with XXXX XXXX and XXXX XXXX, both have been very helpful and professional, If my projected permit issue date of May 19 materializes, it will be almost 4 months since I submitted on Jan 25, and resubmitted with additional city requested info in mid Feb. Being in a city special study area contributed to the long plan check time, but apparently everything is resolved now. Hope to get my permit pretty soon, process seems slow, but your people have been great.
- The question about handouts in this survey should include an option of "haven't used"
- admin staff need to lighten up and loose the negative attitudes, every time i get into the permit center my experience is night and day between the technical staff and the admin staff
- Holding a permit application (for a very minor plumbing remodel) for three days (and which would probably take all of five minutes to review) because there was a "large" project needing attention and was applied for earlier is UNACCEPTABLE! Here's what happens: Why even apply for a permit, even though it is not legal to not do so? Why hold up a project for three days because no one is available to

plan-check a minor project? Folks, it's happening, and if the process isn't corrected, it will become rampant! Get a clue!

- When I went to the counter to inquire about plans on file I was told they were not available as the permit was pulled in 1999. After my second meeting with the review intake person, I found out the plans were in the archive. So I spent 2 weeks having plans drawn up that I did not need. I was working on a small kitchen remodel involving 1 wall. The process took far too long to get a permit. My plans were even sent to storm water review for an interior kitchen remodel. After my experience, I'm not surprised that permits are not obtained for small projects like the one I worked on.
- Compared to my past YEARS experience my 2008 permit was fairly easy and agreeable. So far nice improvement.
- Clearly, the latest attempt to appear to expedite the permit review process by receiving 100% (Not 99.9%) complete applications is taking longer and only expediting the process in the City's eyes for when the clock starts, not in the proponent's eyes. The required pre-app needs to be very, very specific on a checklist of application materials and completeness. It is inconsistent now, and becomes frustrating at the counter. Non-professionals, and professionals-alike, need a consistent, clear cover sheet checklist for ALL aspects of the project in a consistent manner to help staff review. Non-structural T.I.s, consistent us, should be across the counter, if everyone reviews it anyway at intake.