

REPORT

**City of Bellingham  
Permit Center Customer Satisfaction Survey  
2009 Quarter 1 and Quarter 2**

**August 2009**

**Presented by the  
Center for Economic Vitality  
at  
Western Washington University**

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

During the first two quarters of 2009 (January to July), the Center for Economic Vitality in the College of Business and Economics at Western Washington University continued a satisfaction survey of recent customers of the City of Bellingham's Permit Center. This follow-up report includes respondents that used the Permit Center's services from October 2006 to July 2009.

This customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, so researchers first needed to obtain email addresses for the individuals that used Permit Center services. Sixty (60) individuals completed the survey during the first quarter of 2009 (January to March) and another seventy (70) completed the survey in the second quarter (April to June). This resulted in a total of 130 respondents for a 25.7% response rate. This calculates to a 7.41% margin of error on the survey.

Starting in January 2009 the survey is now conducted semi-annually instead of quarterly. 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 process for disseminating the results of this survey to 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 documents the verbatim comments made by respondents to various open-ended questions and Appendix B presents the full script of the online survey. Any staff identifiers were removed.

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

## TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

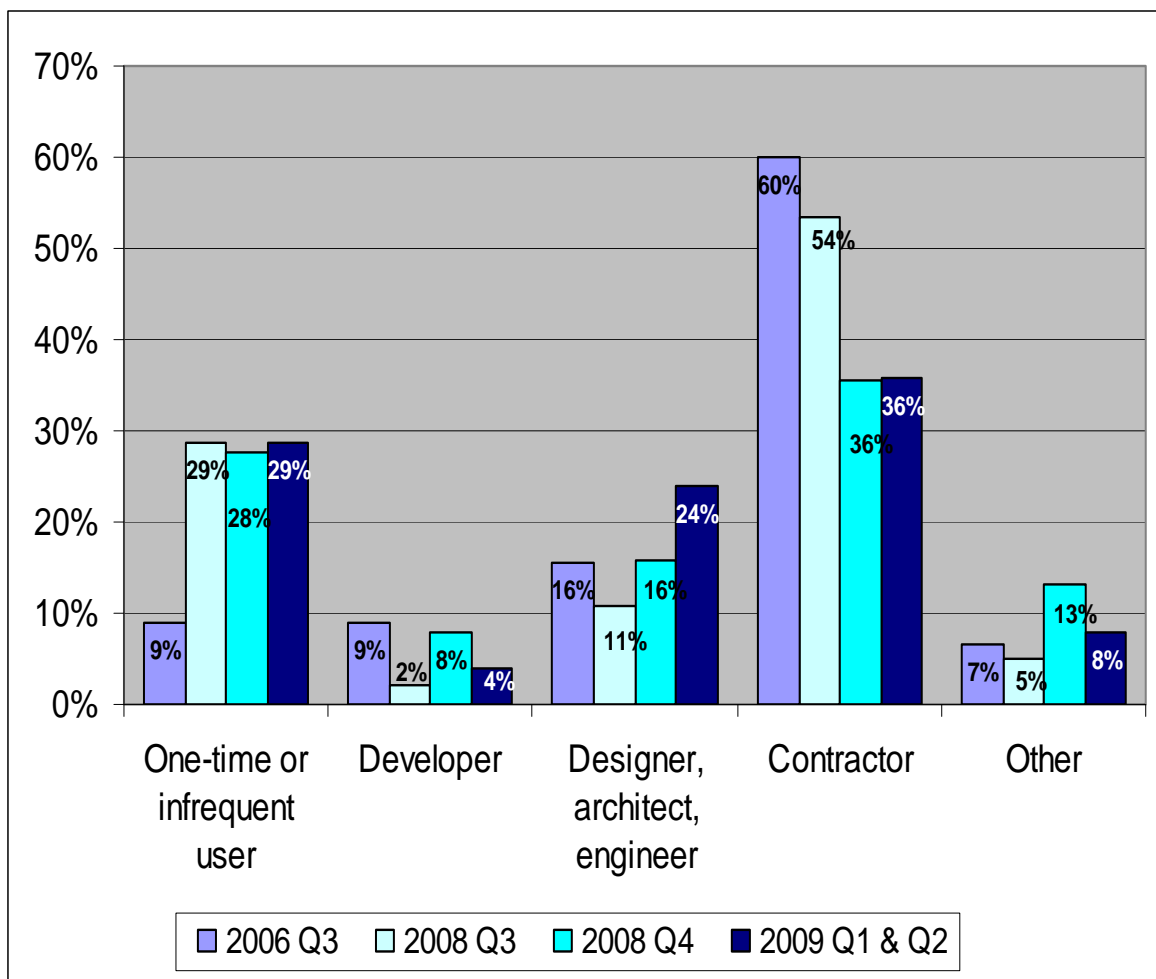
Customers of the Permit Center were first asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from January to July 2009. As figure 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were contractors (36%) and one-time or infrequent users (29%).

In the first half of 2009 there was a decrease in use by developers and other. However, designers, architects and engineers used the Permit Center more than in the previous quarter. Usage among one-time or infrequent users and contractors remained the same.

Customer types reported under other include: *asset manager and landlord representation, commercial real estate agent, development, consultant/developer, agent, facilities supervisor for WWU, homeowner new to the permit process, owner-wwu, owner's agent, permit agent, real estate agent.*

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

(N=129 for current time period)



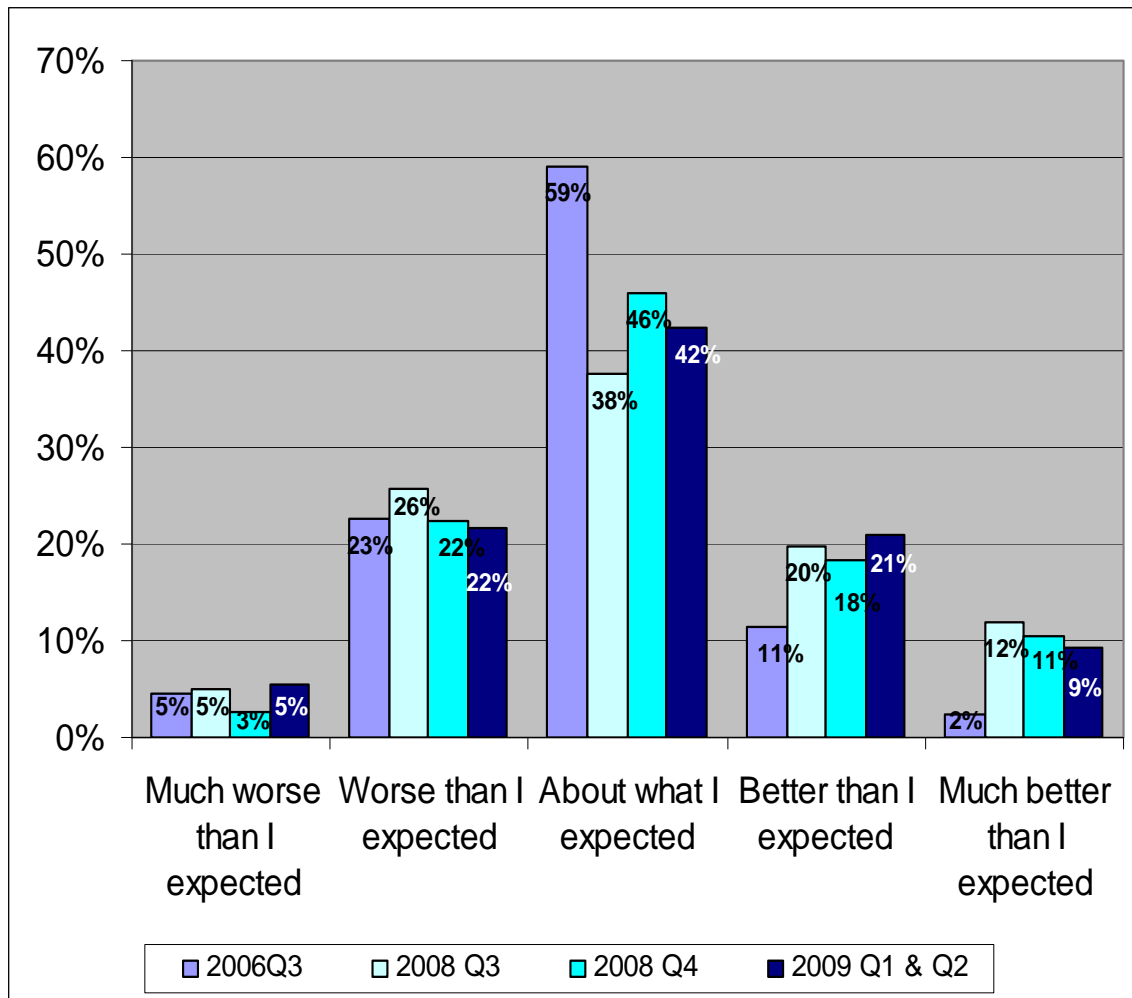
## OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were then asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that during January to June, 72% of respondents said that their experience was *about what I expected* or better. This has fallen slightly. In the previous survey 75% were satisfied; however, this relatively high proportion of respondents indicates that customer expectations are being met by the Permit Center.

Conversely, over one fourth of the respondents (27%) reported that their experience was *worse* or *much worse* than expected during the first half of 2009. In addition, those who felt their experience was *much worse than I expected* increased to 5% of respondents. While this is still the minority of customers, it remains a noticeable proportion that needs to be addressed through continued quality improvement efforts.

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

(N=129 for current time period)



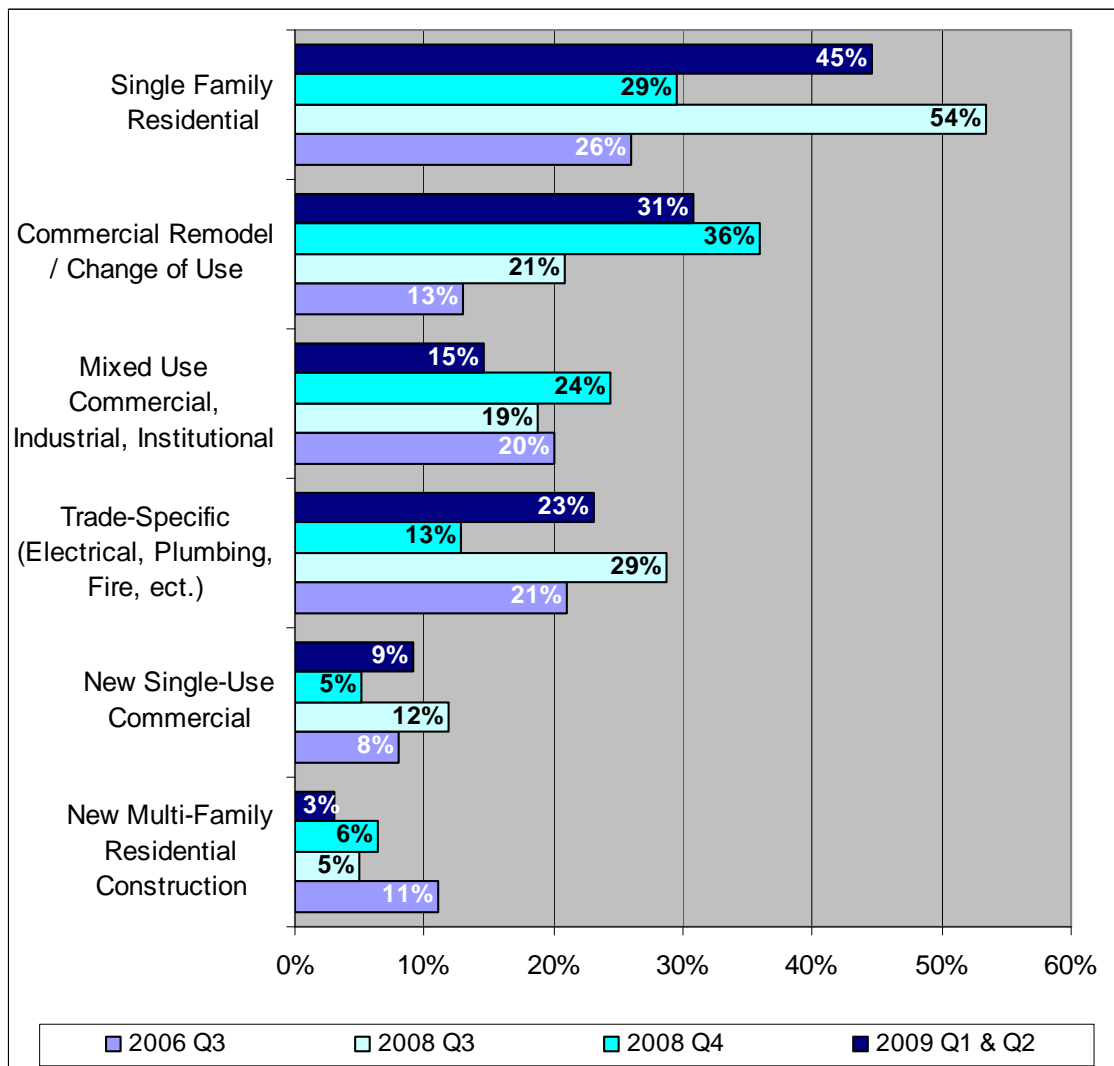
## PROJECT TYPES

Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of project brought them in contact with the Permit Center. As figure 3 shows, single family residential was the most common project type. Notable shifts in project types since last quarter include a decrease in the proportion of mixed use commercial, industrial, and institutional and commercial remodel/change of use permit applications. There was a relative increase in the proportion of trade specific and new single-use commercial permits.

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 (130).

**Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types**

(Ns vary for each project type)



## PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

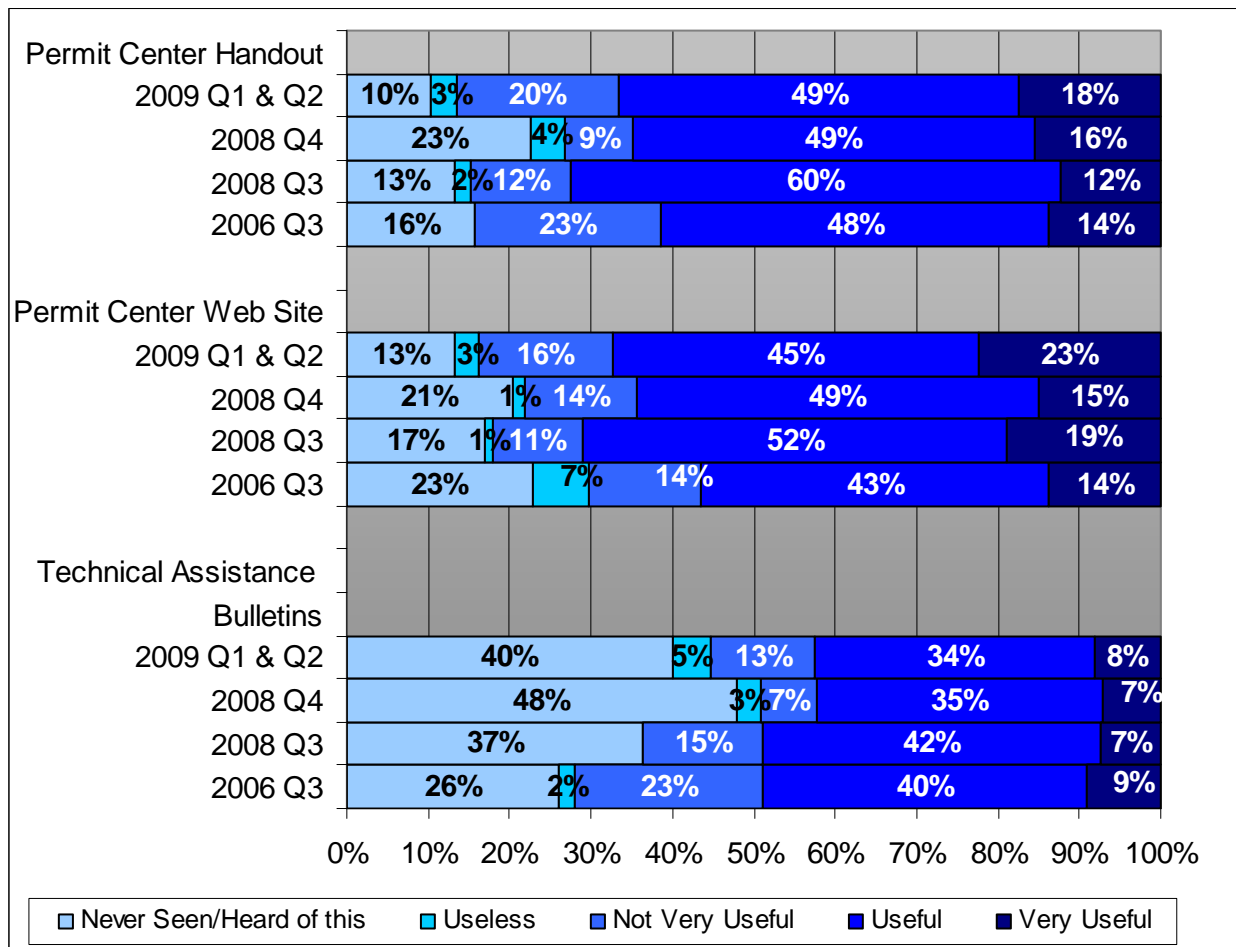
The first rating items on the survey asked respondents to indicate how useful the Permit Center support materials were. This included the Center’s website, handouts, and assistance bulletins.

Figure 4 shows that there was an increase in the percentage of customers that found the website, handouts, and assistance bulletins useful in the first half of 2009.

Awareness remains relatively low for each of these resources, but appears to be increasing. However, awareness remains especially low for technical assistance bulletins. Continuing to focus on increasing the awareness of the well 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)



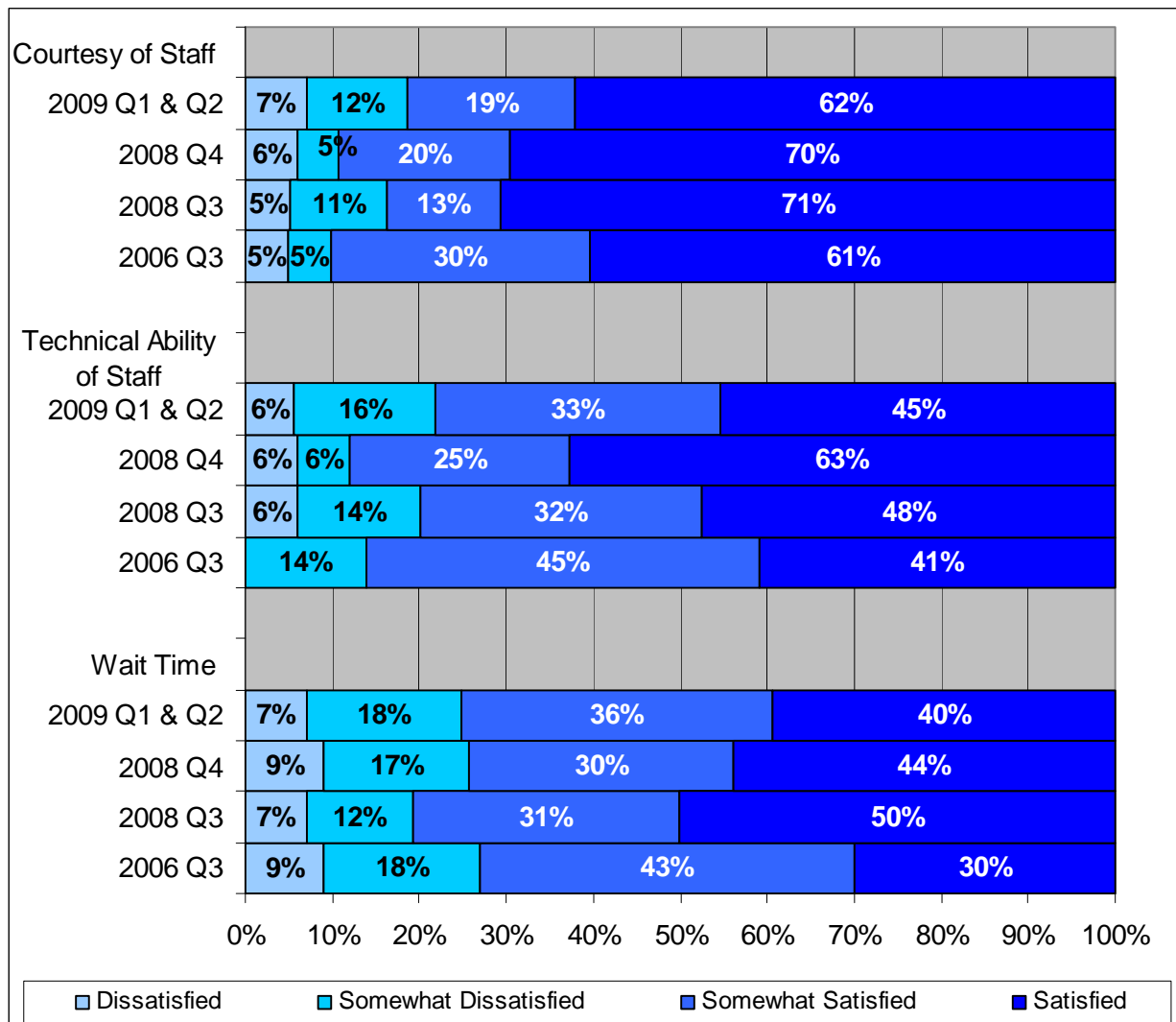
## COUNTER ASSISTANCE

Respondents were 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 high (81%), but it has decreased slightly over the fourth quarter of 2008 (90%).

Technical ability of the staff showed the greatest decrease with 78% of respondents either *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* (down from 88%). Wait time satisfaction remained close to the same (74% in 2008 Q4 vs. 76% in the first half of 2009).

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



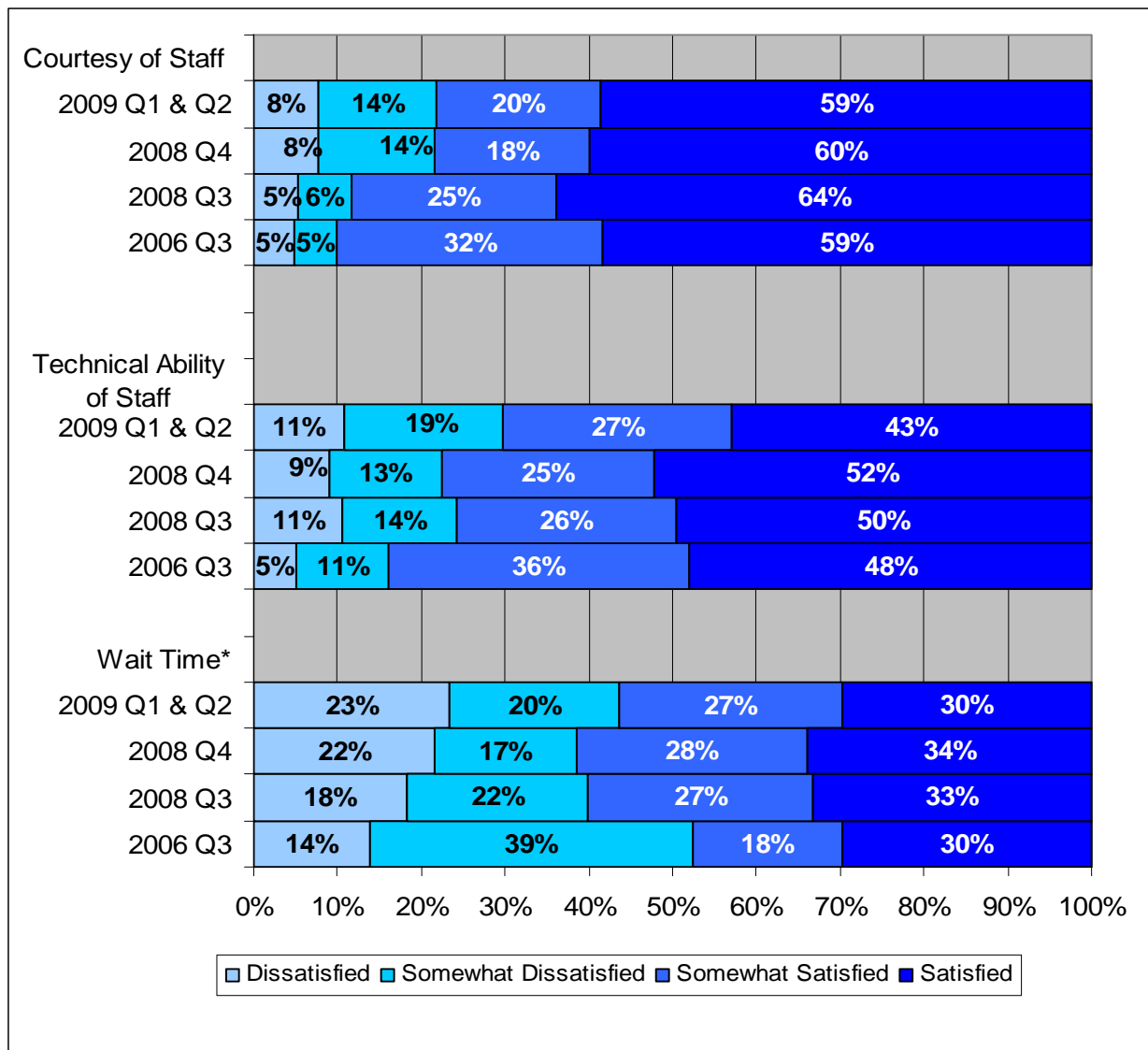
## PROCESSING APPLICATION

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

Customer satisfaction with the wait time and technical ability of staff decreased between the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first two quarters of 2009. Wait time remains the lowest rated aspect of the processing procedure.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



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



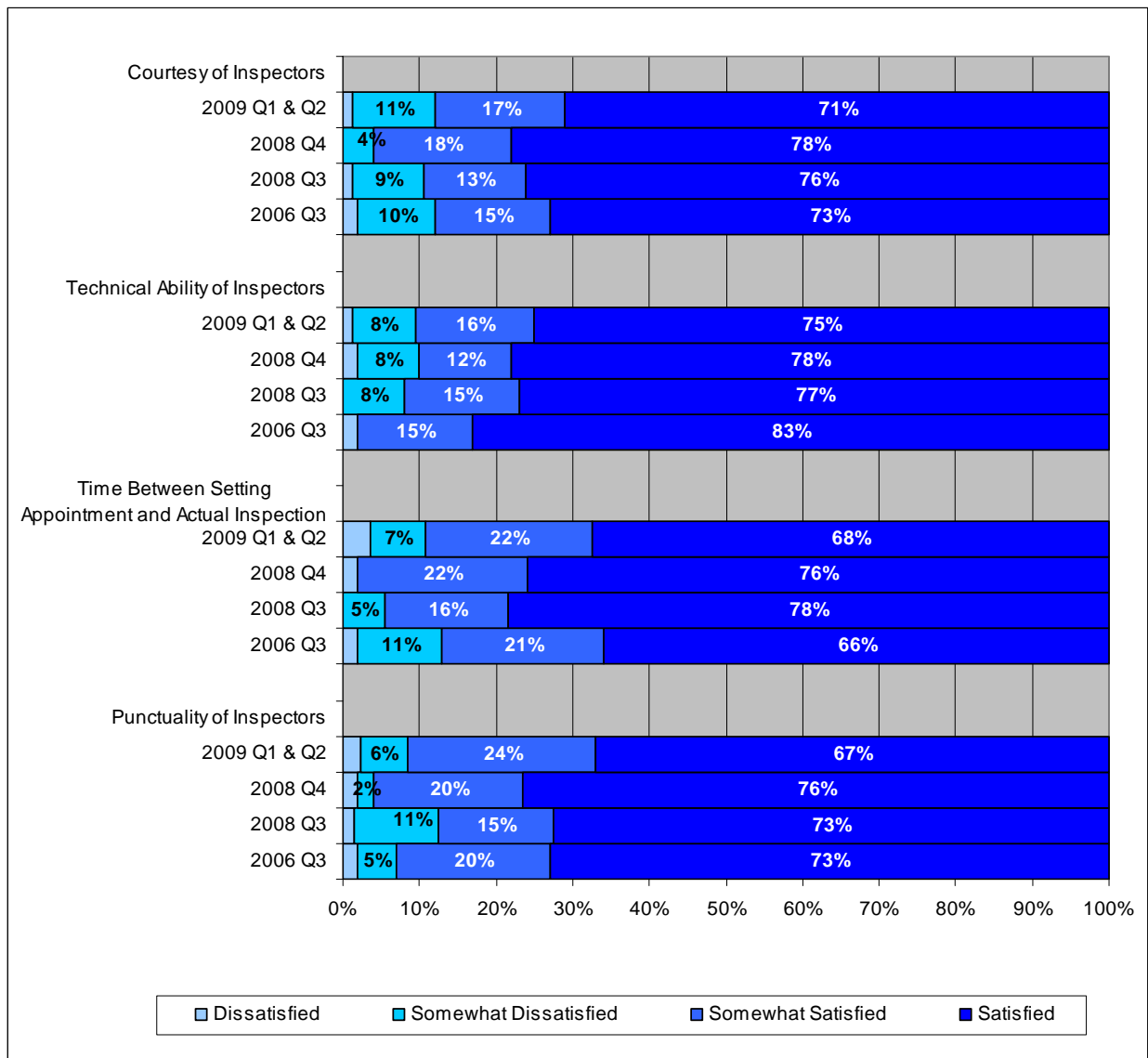
## INSPECTORS

The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Figure 7 shows that while satisfaction with inspectors is still rated highly, there are a couple notable shifts since last quarter.

The percentage of people reporting *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* for courtesy of inspectors and time between setting appointment and actual inspection decreased by 8%. Punctuality of Inspectors decreased from 96% to 91% reporting *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*. Customer satisfaction with the technical ability of inspectors increased slightly in the first half of 2009 (91% either *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*, up from 90%). Overall, inspectors still received the highest satisfaction rating by customers.

**Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



## CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

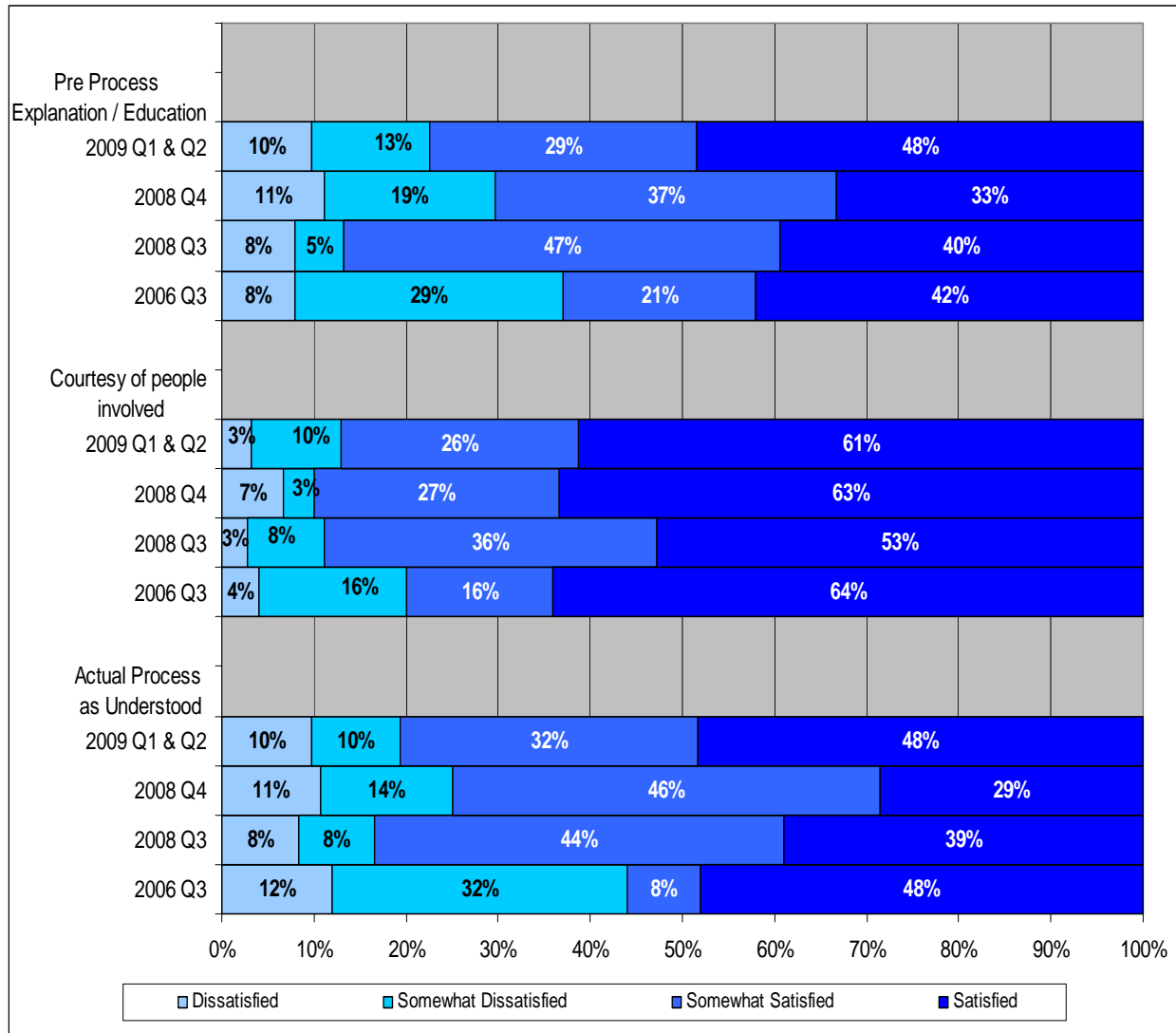
The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, there are mixed results and emerging trends in this area of the Permit Center's service.

The rating of the preprocess explanation increased from the fourth quarter of 2008 (77% either *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*, up from 70%). The process actually being understood also increased during this time period, with a 5% increase in the number reporting *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*. These two categories had previously shown declines in satisfaction.

There was a slight decrease in the satisfaction with the courtesy of people involved (87%, down from 90%). This remains the strongest area for the Certificate of Occupancy process.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



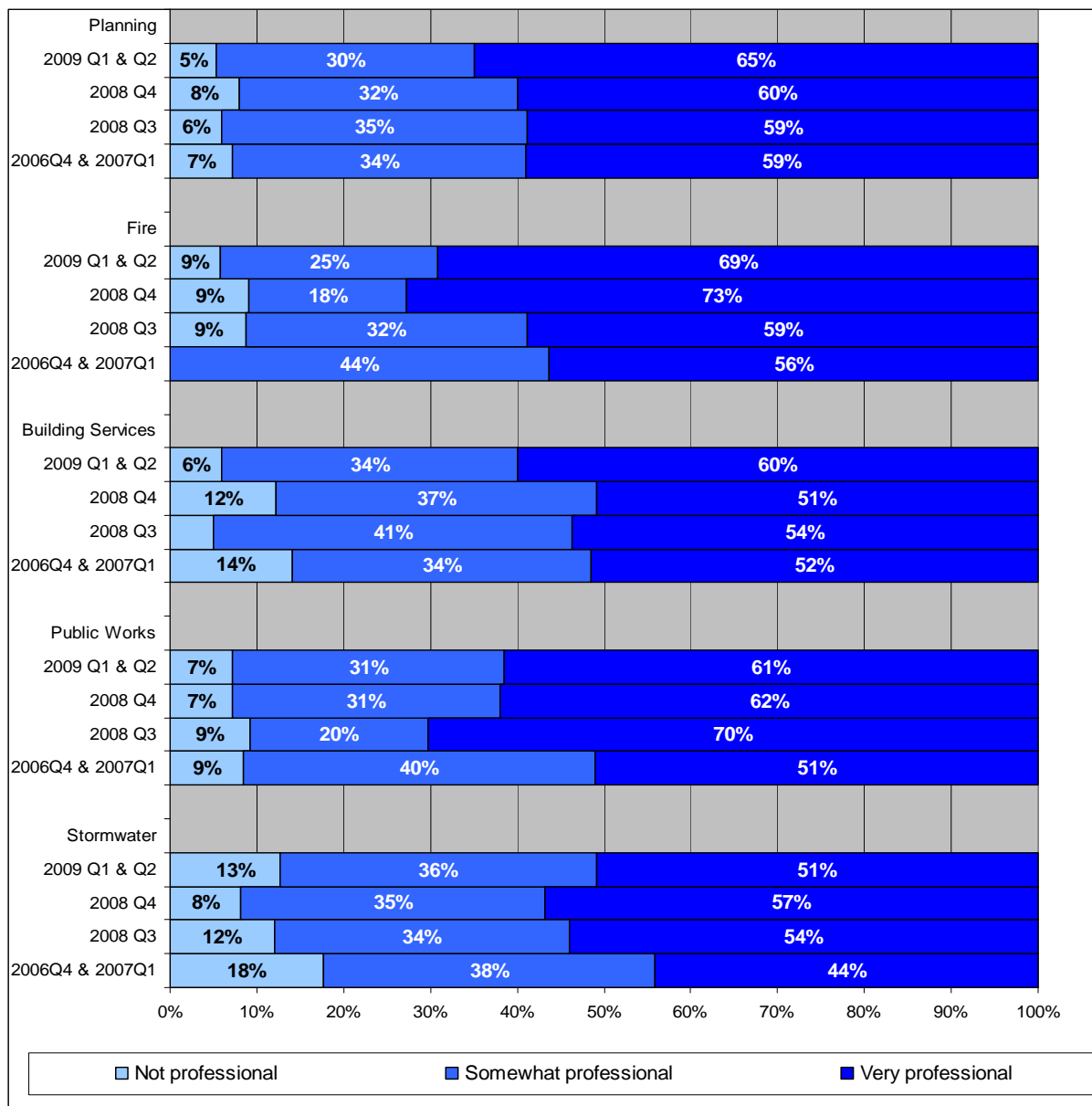
## PROFESSIONALISM

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, Public Works and Stormwater departments decreased slightly in the percentage of respondents selecting *somewhat professional* or *very professional* during the first two quarters of 2009. Planning, Building Services and Fire departments saw an increase in the percentage of people who reported *somewhat professional* or *very professional*.

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

(Ns vary by year and department)



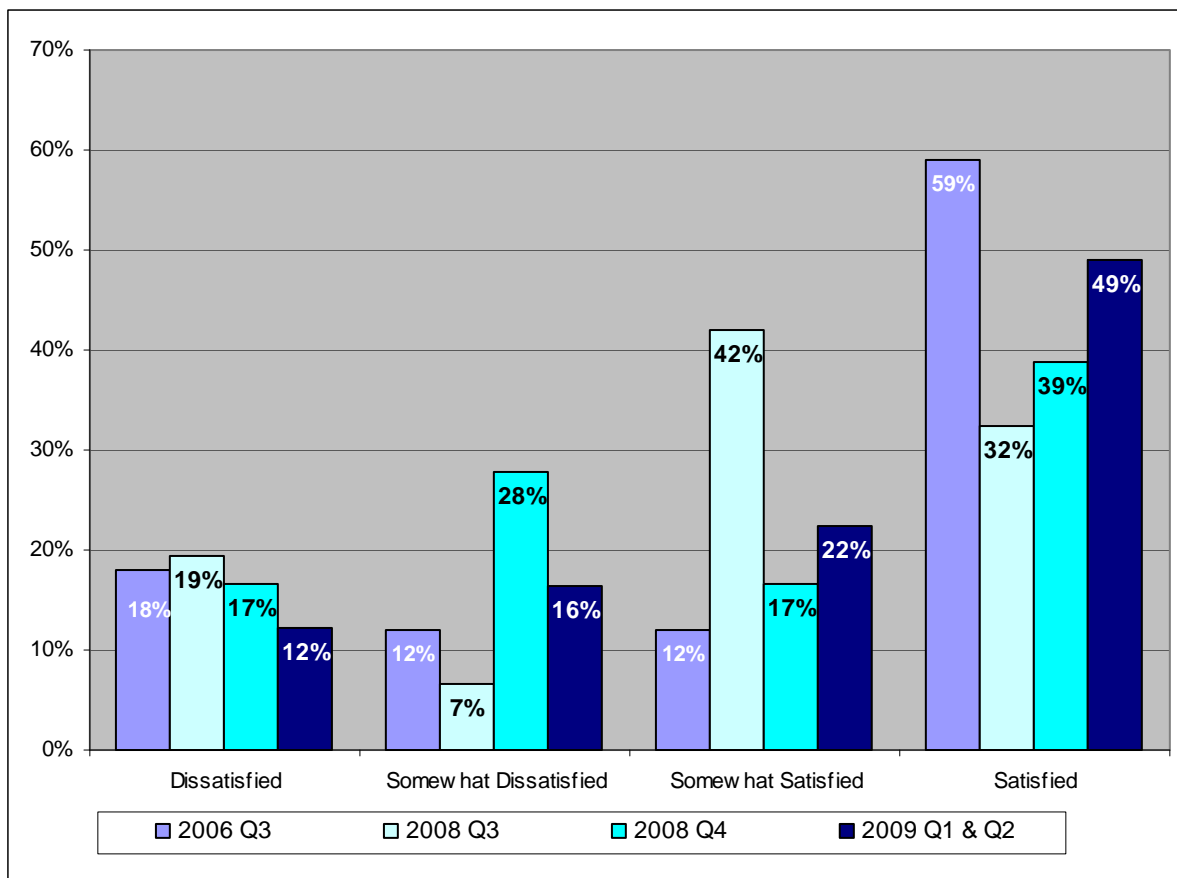
## PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-application meeting (n=81) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, the percentage of *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* customers increased in the first half of 2009, but still doesn't match the highest satisfaction level reported in quarter 3 of 2008. There were fewer respondents in the first two quarters of 2009 that reported being either *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied*.

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 A of this report.

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

(N=81 for current time period)



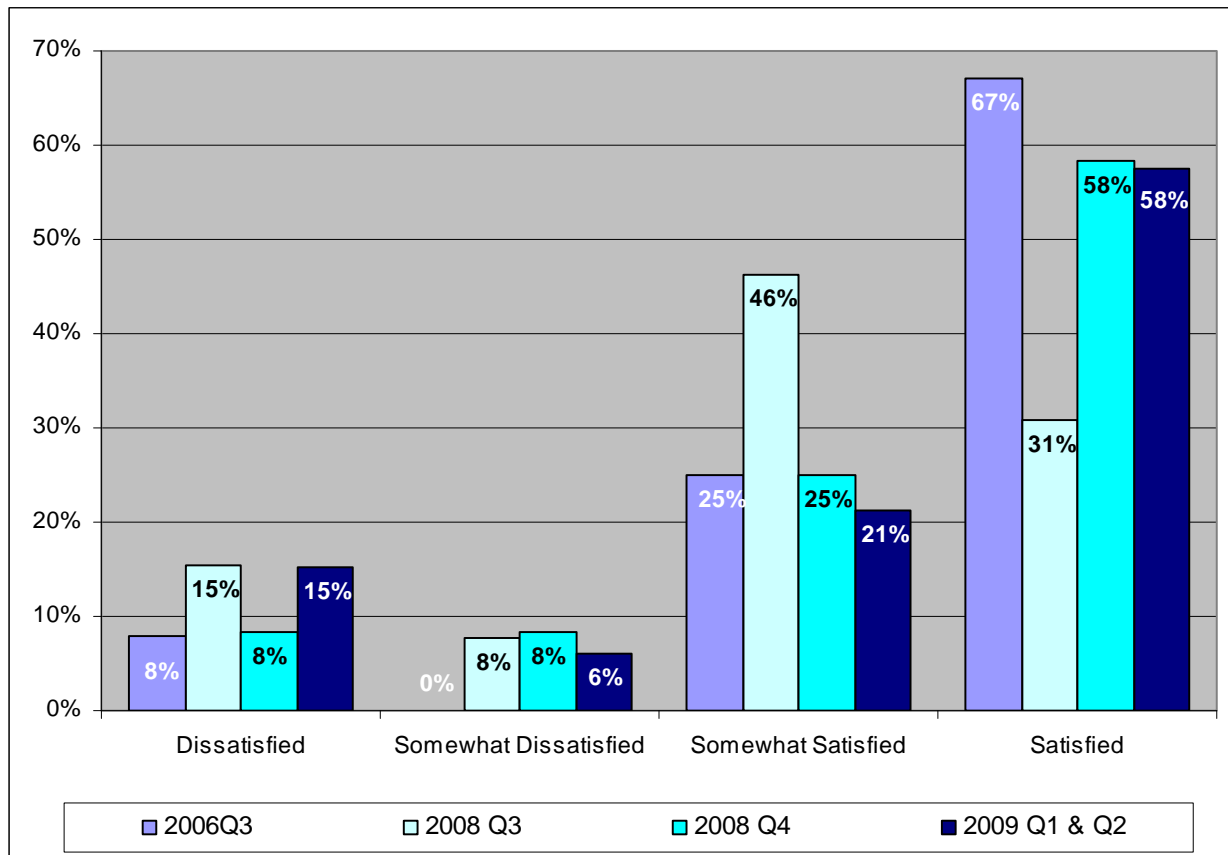
## PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-construction meeting were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, there is quite a bit of variability in customers' satisfaction from quarter to quarter. The percentage of respondents that were *satisfied* remained the same between the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first half of 2009. However, respondents that reported being *dissatisfied* with the process increased to 15%.

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

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

(N=97 for current time period)



## SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the Permit Center’s ‘single point of contact’ approach. This question was new in the second quarter of 2008.

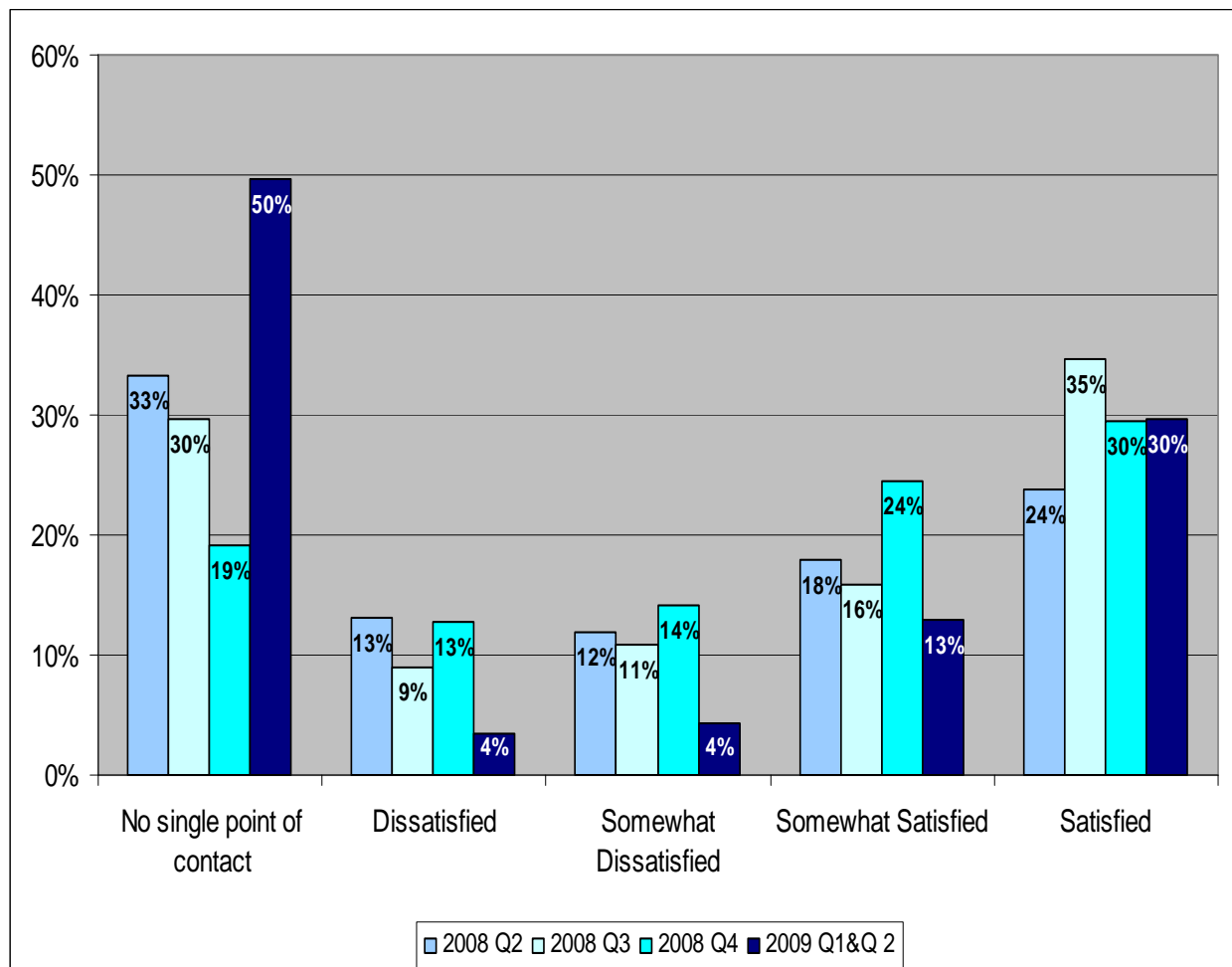
As figure 12 indicates, respondents who were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* decreased in the first half of 2009 (43% vs. 54%). The number of dissatisfied clients also decreased.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they did not have a single point of contact increased dramatically in the first half of 2009 (50%, up from 19%) indicating that fewer people are aware of this service.

When the *no single point of contact* responses are removed from the analysis, 84% of the remaining respondents were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* (up from 67%). Sixteen percent (16%) were *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied*, which is a decrease from 33% in the fourth quarter of 2008.

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

(N=115 for current time period)



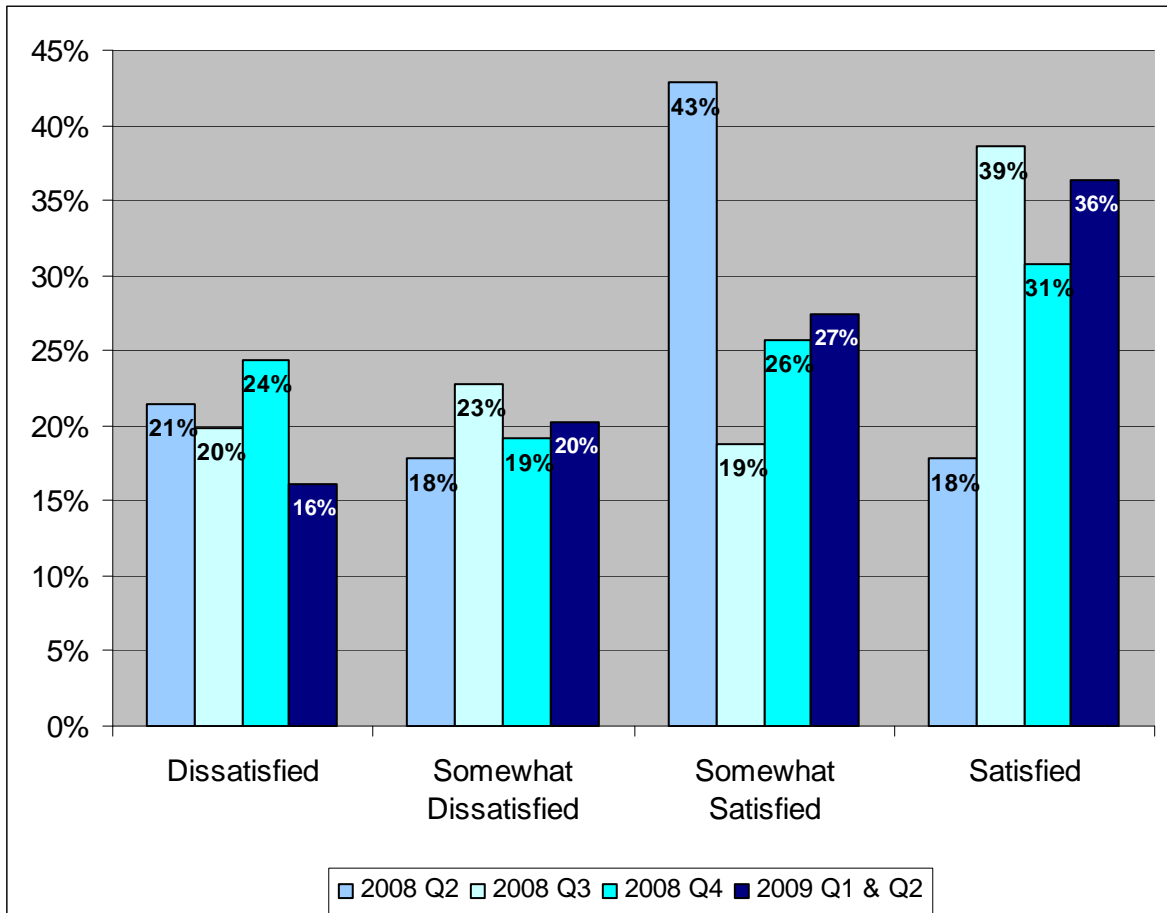
## TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS AND TIMELINES

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

As figure 13 indicates, almost two thirds (63%) of respondents were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with this emphasis. The remaining proportion (37%) was dissatisfied with the level of transparency in the Permit Center.

**Figure 13. Satisfaction with Transparency**

(N=124 for current time period)



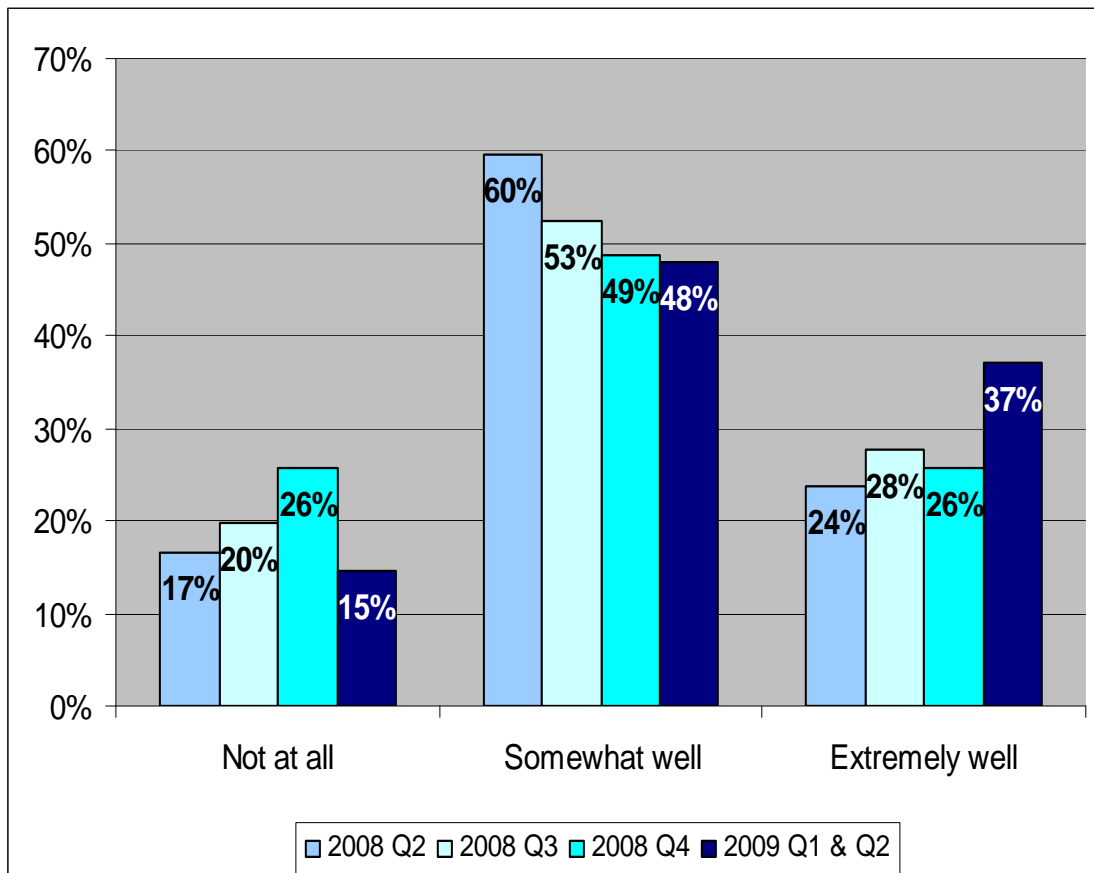
## COMMUNICATION ABOUT DELAYS

Customers were asked about how well they were kept informed by the Permit Center about any delays in their application process.

As figure 14 indicates, the majority of respondents (85%) were either *extremely* or *somewhat well* informed by the Permit Center staff. The first half of 2009 showed improvement in those who reported not being informed at all (15%, down from 26%).

**Figure 14. Communication about Delays**

(N=129 for current time period)





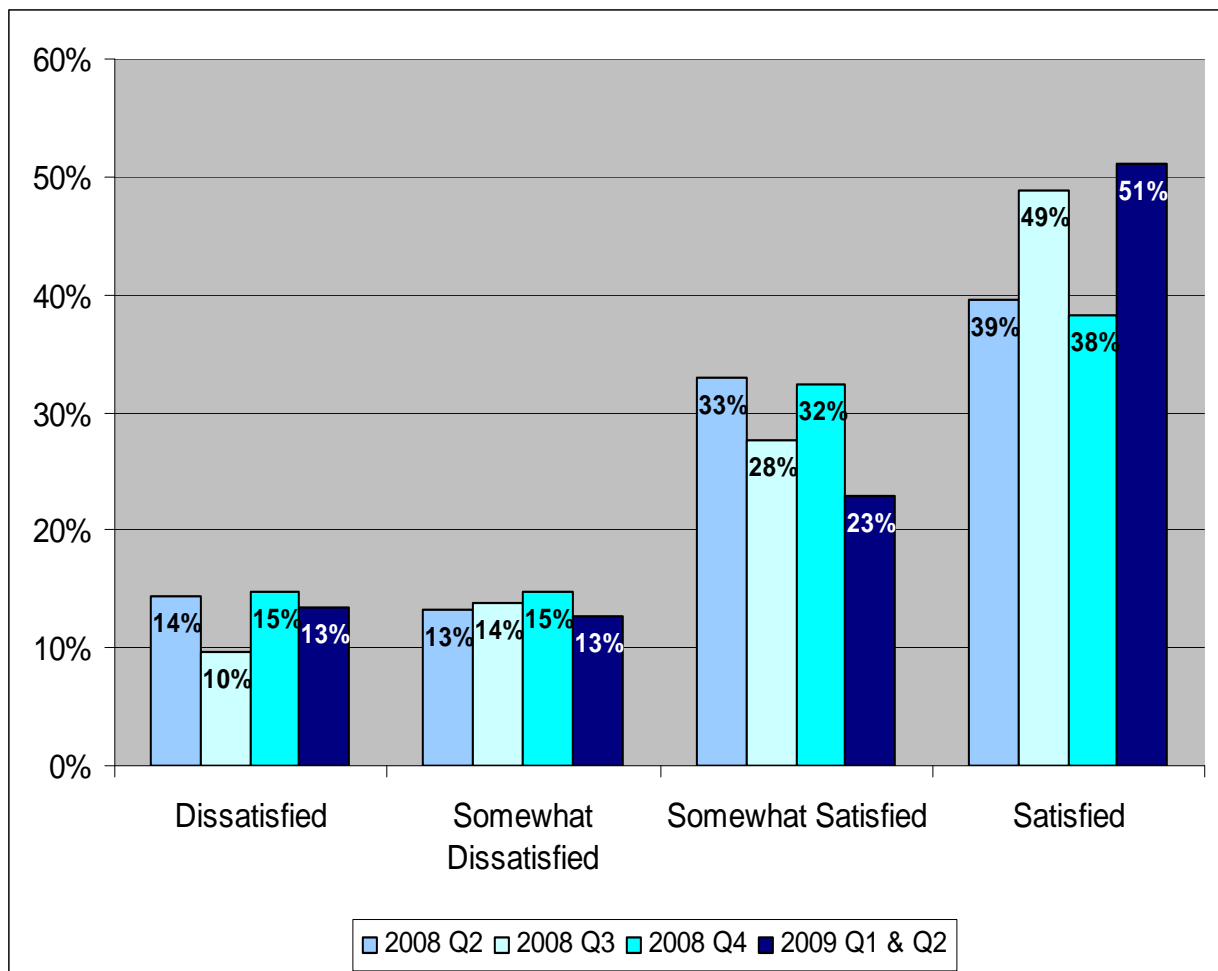
## COMPLETENESS OF APPLICATION REVIEW

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

As figure 15 indicates, the vast majority (74%) were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with the level of review completeness by Permit Center staff. Fewer (26%, down from 30%) respondents were *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* with this process.

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

(N=129 for current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

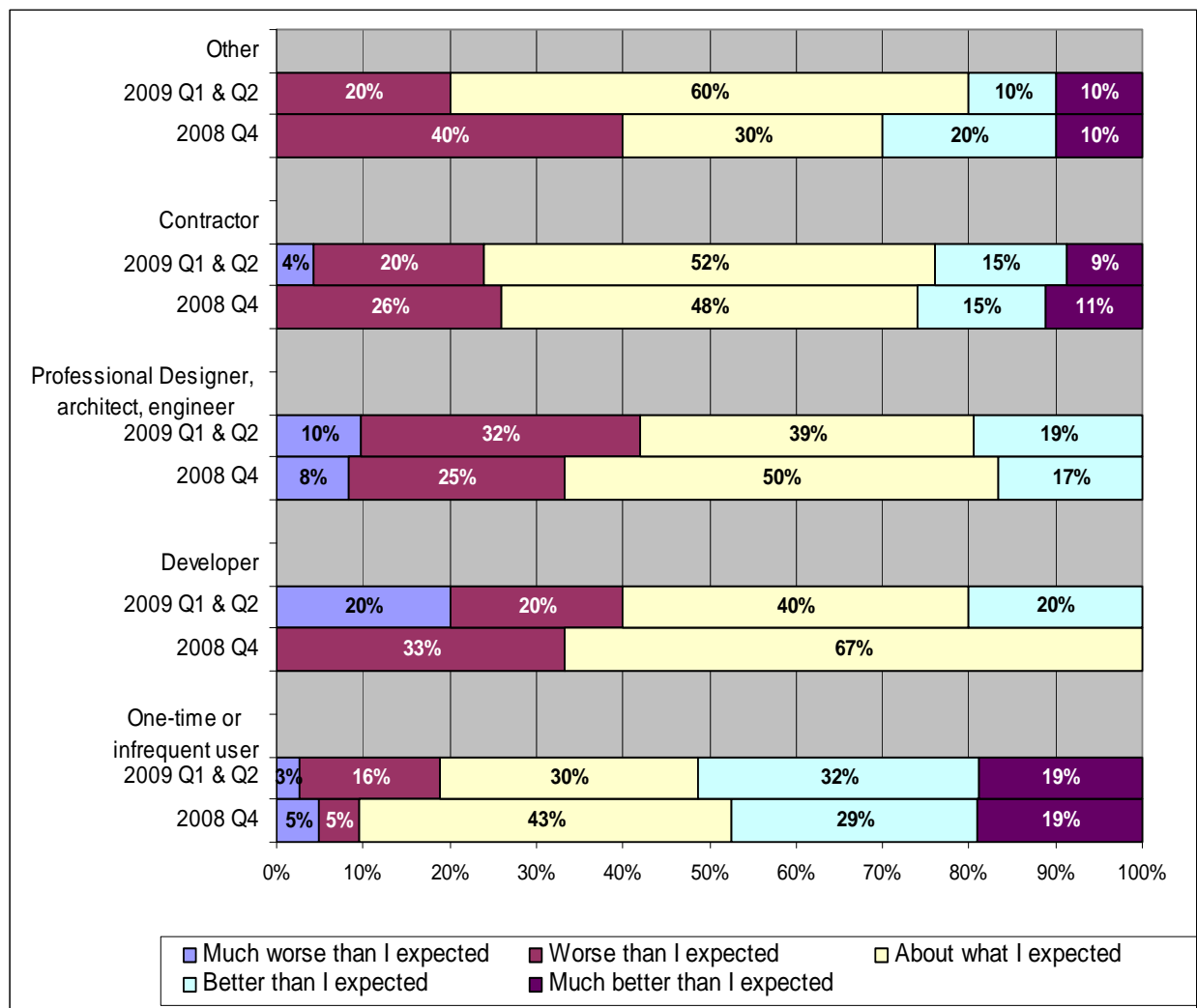
By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 2, it is possible to match the customer type with the overall experience they had with the permit center.

As figure 16 indicates, one-time or infrequent users have the highest percentage of respondents selecting *better than I expected* or *much better than I expected* (51%).

Professional designers, architects, engineers and developers had the highest percentage of respondents who selected *worse than I expected* or *much worse than I expected* (42% and 40% respectively). One-time or infrequent users had the lowest percentage of users who selected *worse than I expected* or *much worse than I expected* (19%).

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

(N=129 for the current time period)



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

By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 12, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the Permit Center’s new ‘single point of contact’ approach with your project manager?”

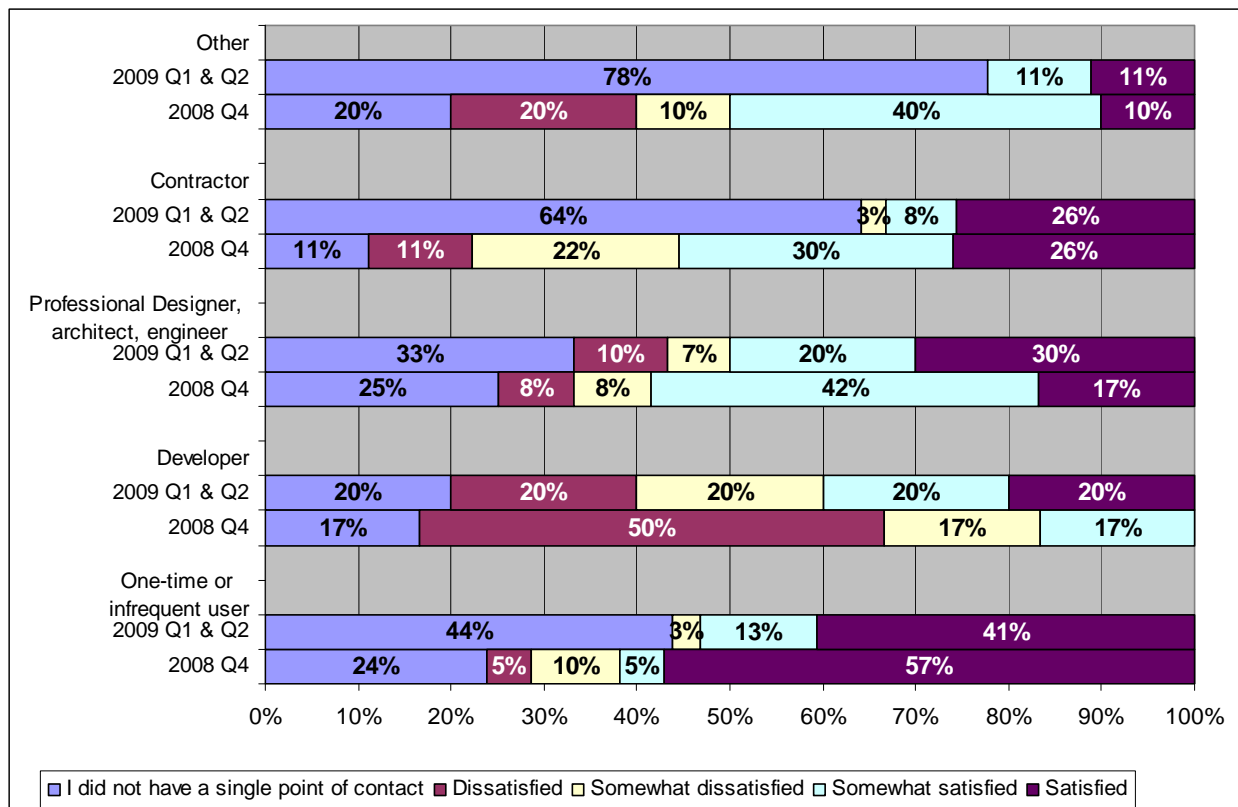
As figure 17 indicates, one-time or infrequent users have the highest satisfaction rate with the single point of contact (41% *satisfied*). Developers showed the greatest decrease in respondents who were *dissatisfied*, 20% down from 50%.

Awareness of the single point of contact amongst user types continues to be an area for improvement. Every category of user showed an increase in the number of respondents reporting that they didn’t have a single point of contact. Contractors and other users are more likely than other uses to not know about this service (64% and 78% respectively).

When the single point of contact is removed from the data, 71% of contractors were *satisfied*, whereas only 25% of developers experienced the same level of satisfaction.

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

(N=115 for the current time period)



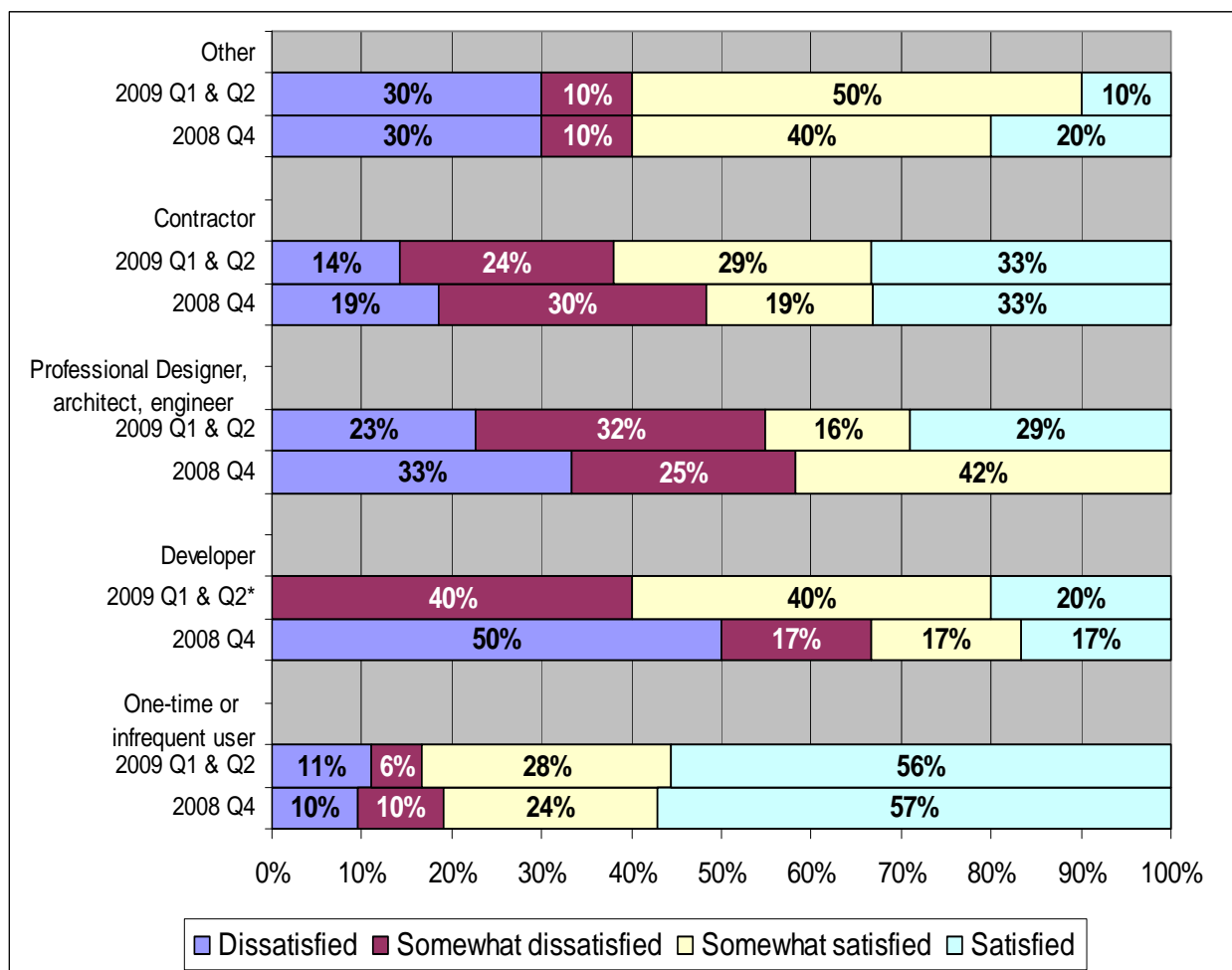
## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND TRANSPARENCY

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

As figure 18 indicates, one-time or infrequent users have the highest satisfaction rate with the transparency of the process and timelines (84% *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*). Professional designers, architects and engineers reported the lowest satisfaction with 55% responding that they were either *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied* with transparency.

**Figure 18. User Type and Transparency**

(N=124 for the current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT DELAYS

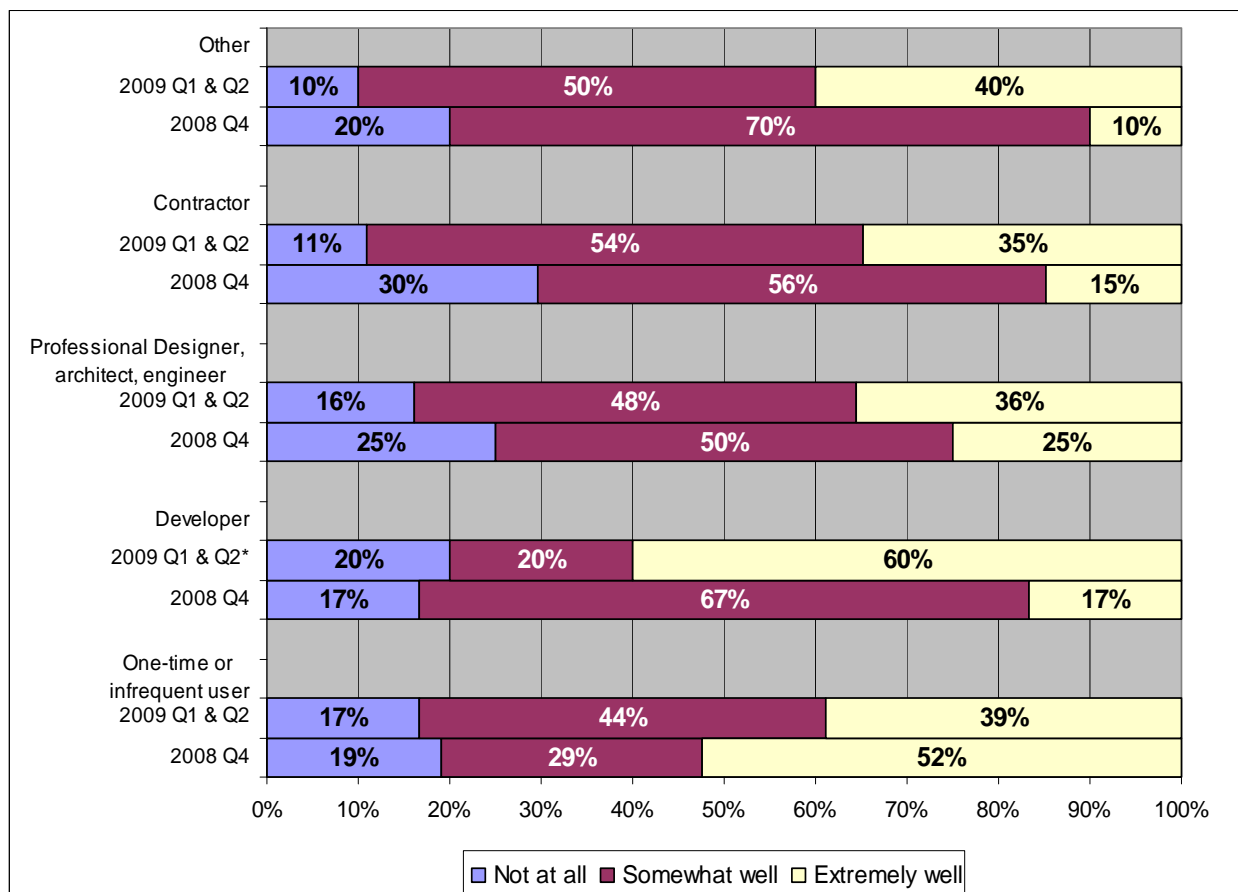
By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 14, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How well were you informed about what kind of permit review was needed for your application and how long it would take?”

As figure 19 indicates, developers felt the most informed about which type of permit they needed and how long it would take. Sixty percent (60%) were *extremely well* informed versus 17% in the fourth quarter of 2008. Contractors had the lowest proportion of respondents who felt *extremely well* informed (35%).

‘Other’ users appear to feel the most well informed. Only 10% reported that they were *not at all* informed about the type of permit or delays.

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

(N=128 for the current time period)



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated by survey results from the first two quarters of 2009, customer satisfaction with the City of Bellingham's Permit Center has remained relatively high but did decrease over past quarters, although there are some exceptions to this. For instance, the technical ability of the staff has the lowest satisfaction rating, while the satisfaction with the inspectors remains high.

Internal discussions should try to identify what processes, procedures, or personnel have changed that would lead to the decreasing ratings by customers. The introduction of the single point of contact approach and the emphasis on transparency seem to be a positive step in the right direction from the perspective of the customers. However, awareness of the single point of contact remains low as 50% of respondents reported not having a single point of contact. Satisfaction with transparency did increase in the first half on 2009.

Of particular note is the varying satisfaction levels amongst the different types of customers. One-time or infrequent users' expectations are frequently met or exceeded, while professional designers, architects and engineers report much lower satisfaction with their overall experience. In particular, they cite lower satisfaction with the process transparency. Contractors, who are the largest percentage of respondents, typically have moderate to high levels of satisfaction. However, it is worth noting that 64% of contractors reported that they did not have a single point of contact.

The improvement efforts should focus first on the notably decreased customer ratings. It is imperative that the Permit Center actively and strategically address the comments and concerns made by its customers (Appendix A). Strong effort is obviously being made by staff; it now seems that a more targeted approach would most benefit customers and staff alike.

## APPENDIX A: VERBATIM CUSTOMER COMMENTS

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

- I felt that I had covered all the "show stopper" type issues with this project by speaking to all the departments before spending alot of my clients money. To be told the city sewer couldn't handle the extra load of a studio apartment at that meeting was embarassing to me the contractor, and a shock to the property owner. It seems to me this information could have been shared with me across the counter beforehand. Public Works pulled up the drawings for the sewer very early in our planning process. There was no mention of a problem. We don't understand why we had to spend the pre-app money before being told this. Obviously the project would not go forward if we knew an additional \$30,000 had to be spent to upgrade the cities sewer system.
- We find that the information from these meetings is different then given to us prior to the meetings. Thus, most of our drawings needed revised because of the descrepancy of information transmitted to us by various planners.
- Don't assume I'm a moron!
- Make every effort to have staff participating be the responsible reviewers for their respective departments.  
A positive, proactive, solution-oriented attitude is very much appreciated. Public Works leadership should work on this. PW staff are very helpful and understand the value of a solution-oriented approach.
- It depends on who you talk to on the pre-app meeting. There is always something missing when you do to turn in the application that was not mentioned previously. If you ask the same question to two people you'll get two different answers. You just plan on a painful process.
- need consistency between staff
- I would appreciate it if anybody from COB would, instead of telling me what I can't do, tell me what I can do, or help to come up with a solution to the problems being faced. Every time I have gone in lately it seems all of the staff is trained to say "no" instead of using their heads to come oup with actual solutions. After submitting an application I haven't heard back for two weeks now. I have called and/or emailed asking for the status of the permit and have heard nothing back!
- COMMON SENSE
- Faster turn around of minutes has improved a lot. PW usually unprepared.
- I like the newer process where all departments are represented.
- Make sure that someone from each department is in attendance, and that all departments have discussed the project together in advance so that conflicting feedback is not provided.
- If staff is supposed to be there-ensure they are.
- All issues and concerns need to be held to by city staff. All to often inconsistencies and mis-informed interpretations lead to lengthy review times and poor behavior and judgment by city staff.
- Need to be more fact based and specific to the actual project. City should do some home work before the meeting.
- Continue with providing positive solution oriented comments, this has been a strong improvement, though some Stormwater staff could be more proactive.

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

- No, I think they are well thought out.
- Communicate the scheduling of these meetings with owner (or owner's rep) as well as contractor.
- N/A I Haven't gotten that far on this project yet.
- COMMON SENSE
- When you hire (*staff name removed*) replacements, please make sure that they have common sense like these two do. They come prepared with plans on file, and understand the remodel process. Thank you.
- We were treated like we were being called to the Principal office for misconduct. The attitude at the meeting was particularly hostile by the Public Works representative.
- No.
- Did not participate
- All too often is a waste of time and is trumped by on-site building inspector rulings.

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

- There needs to be clear job descriptions for each employee/inspector and what they can or cannot enforce.  
City ordinances need to be updated to provide clarity and provide less "on a whim" decisions.  
Please stop raising permit and review fees, unless you plan to hire more staff. For a city of Bellingham's size and how much involvement the reviewers decide to be, there are certain departments that seem understaffed.  
Any required addenda to submitted plans should take priority. We should not have to wait another 30+ (not 21 as advertised) for a re-review of code compliant drawings.  
Bellingham as a whole: really hard to deal with. Some people are really friendly, others have agendas. Some people also seem to act like they're forced to be happy to be working on the government's payroll.
- Always seems to be an us vs them mentality whenever I go in for permits. Process and costs get more and more expensive. I am losing jobs because clients don't want to deal with the headaches and costs to get permits. They would rather go with someone who will do it without getting the required permits. I have also run into too many projects where existing permits have not been finalized (some many years old) and we have to get involved in closing them out before the new project can start. Again this has caused me to lose jobs as well.
- Not happy with the person at the permit counter- found them to be rude.
- Just a policy question - I am trying to figure out what the point is of a plan review for a commercial burglar alarm - does the planner know how to do burglar alarms better than a professional alarm company? - is he going to change it? - disapprove it? - I would really like to know the answer to that
- The person who first reviewed my plans was laid off the following week. He tagged one 3' doorway opening through a load-bearing wall for rejection and required engineer-approval. Nobody in the office was able to tell me why this was necessary. I resubmitted plans and had to wait a full week longer than I was told would be necessary. The excuse I got was that "the department made cuts and was understaffed." Many people are



understaffed in this economy including us. I don't need a city employee complaining to me when they get to keep their jobs. If they knew that they were understaffed they should have known about the delay.

- Need to make web site much easier to use - make it very basic. While I know you are going thru transition new person should not redo work of prior checker.
- MECHANICAL PERMITS APPLICATIONS ARE ABSURDLY COMPLEX, SLOW, AND EXPENSIVE COMPARED TO ALL OTHER CODE JURISDICTIONS IN WHATCOM COUNTY. MAKEWORK FOR USELESS DRONES.
- The permit process went very smoothly. There were some additional forms and fees that I was not told about until after I turned in my application, but other than that, the experience was great. I was working within a set timeline and the City met my timeline. I had to purchase a sign from the City to post on the property and now I have this leftover sign. I would suggest taking a deposit for the sign that the applicant could get back if they return the sign, rather than creating something that most people will throw away. Reuse, recycle!
- My building permit will expire before PW will let me have it. This is extremely frustrating and expensive. Also, resistance to LID still runs prohibitively deep in COB culture.
- The building inspectors/advisors should cross check with electrical permits to see that the electrical is done properly prior to signing off on a building permit.
- The electrical permit fees are extreme. Design review fees for jobs that do not get a 3rd party design review should be refunded, or evidence of a 3rd party review should be provided. In this market the inspectors should be able to review the plans like they have for dozens of years. Adjust the fees.
- Front counter (*identifier removed*) is not knowledgeable and therefore the beginning of permit application is frustrating. Definitely needs to be more courteous. (*name removed*) is great as are the inspectors
- Reviews of applicant responses to staff review comments should not take the same amount of time as the original review. Requested plan amendments should not require 20 working days to review.
- Over all the permit center is satisfactory how ever I have a problem when plan reviewers interject their own view of how something should be done to achive their own ajenda. We are working with fixed dollars and clients that most of the time do not receive this type of input and unnessasary cost burdens and or frivilus time delays. Lets get everthing out and up front so the requirments or corrections can be made once and timely and not over and over for no solid reason.
- For our small electrical permits, the price is way high in comparison with the state L&I charges.
- A personal telephone conversation revealed to the reviewer several critical situations outlined in the application but initially and quickly denied. ( didn't appear to have actually been read)Thank You though- a load lifted off my shoulders.
- The reputation of working with Bellingham Planning and Permitting drives business away from this county. They will go to Burlington or Ferndale if they can over this single issue. There is a very big problem in this department. I wish you luck in fixing it.
- One of my major problems or complaints is the process and execution of getting a correction notice. More than once I've received a correction notice in the mail about things missing on a plan and I've corrected what is requested, but then I receive another one a week later not relating to any of the previous requests or requirements. I feel very frustrated trying to explain to a client that we have to hold the start of a project up because the City didn't give us the all changes or requests needed the first time. So one request would be that there only be one time allowed to request changes. I feel that it's a

delay tactic that delays the Review Cycle Time given by the City. Other than that I enjoy visiting the City Permit Center.

- there needs to be consistency on the use of backyard units as in size of second floor space and square footage allowed
- Web site could provide better self help information as to land use, codes and storm water.  
Nice people all but have had a couple of bum leads.
- Out of 5 different permits I have worked on with the City of Bellingham in the past year every one of them has been a problem. Every time they say simply "you can't do that". I have to literally pry out of them what I can do. Pretty much all of the people there are personifying the typical stupid, unintelligent government worker who doesn't really care about the customer. The only thing COB has over the county is their access to permits online and the county is even finally getting on board with that. I have worked with other contractors, engineers, and architects and the one place they hate to work in most is City of Bellingham. Try an experiment. Ask contractors at random which city in Whatcom County they dislike working in the most and I will bet you they will say Bellingham. I don't normally rant this much but I am tired of inaction at COB.
- The Permit Center continues it's downhill slide. My sense is that there are so few permits being applied for now that every staff member is making a major project out of the simplest permits in order to appear busy and valuable, thereby avoiding a potential layoff. A sad state of affairs.
- The staff at the permit center were VERY helpful, pleasant, courteous and patient. Excellent experience
- with regard to the plan review process: displeased with the amount of time it took and the number of times new requirements were introduced. after first waiting for the design review, a small number of comments were returned; when responses were provided, a wait period was again experienced and more comments returned; this was repeated a third time until finally all comment responses were argued and accepted. This delayed the start of construction, posed additional costs and caused failure for a government agency to expend reappropriated funds in a timely fashion.
- I appreciated the help I received from (*names removed*). (*name removed*) appeared to go out her way to help me temper my submittal in order to expedite her review. Thank you
- The planner was great, but it took way too long to turn around our permit given the lack of complexity.
- Would be nice to see reports of permit durations, responses etc.. You have some very helpful people working there!
- Better triaging of projects w/ quicker timelines for less involved.  
Correction notices should always be emailed with a follow up phone call....mailing as a last follow up.  
Correction notices should be first reviewed...ie. a beam re-engineered should not be put into a 20 day review...or even a 7 day review. It should be same day for small corrections.  
Less emphasis on "S" pages for smaller projects.....not as much info to convolute drawings.....understandable for larger projects.  
Consider reduction of impact/building fees for Built Green and/or LEED projects.  
Similarly, consider reduction in transportation fees, etc. with infill projects.  
Most department staff are pleasant to work with and have patience and understanding regarding a timely and costly process!  
Thank you

- The ladies that helped me plan my fence and map it out (*names removed*) were very professional and knowledgeable. The counter person was friendly, courteous and directed me to the correct paperwork. I had talked to a (*name removed*) the day before and she had given me misinformation, but overheard my conversation with. She came right up, asked the supervisor about the rules, questioned a few of them, but got the correct information so that she would not guide anyone else wrong in the same way. The permit guy however, was a terrible grump and must hate his job or had a really bad day before I came in at 11am, since he was a real asshole about looking over my plans/photos and reasoning. He didn't just say no (which would have been fine), he really had to make a stink about it and had a very negative and unprofessional attitude about it. I hope that permit guy who helped me was a temporary staff because I will never again go through the permitting system if I have to deal with him. I would prefer to take my chances and just do whatever I need to do. He was THAT much of a difficult person to deal with. Good luck. I hope my responses to this survey help the dept.
- Unfortunately, different staff give different answers many times. Many small permits can reviewed and approved/denied at the counter buy all departments to save time. for everyone. A Cover sheet should be issued to all permit applicants to make sure everyone has all code and zoning info required for all projects to save staff time.
- Some at the Permit Center desk were more helpful and friendly than others, and that was appreciated. I didn't see the benefit of providing all the "required" information on my kitchen remodel drawings, and one individual at the desk agreed and helped get the needed information on the pages, and in for processing...that was great.
- The (*identifier removed*) at the permit department seems to have a chip on here shoulder. I didn't look forward to dealing with here snotty attitude.
- Please install a commercial fastrack division, where an inspector can meet with the contractor @ a commercial site, issue a 20.00dollar scope of work permit, and the contractor can begin non-structural work while the plans are being reviewed and the real permit is being issued. The twenty dollars wouldn't subtract from the cost of the permit it would help work get started a week or so earlier, when people are thinking about leasing property, a week or two in the build out makes a world of difference, ask your local property management companies. thank you
- Does the management know what the inspectors do on a normal day? Try walking in their shoes and than try to do your job better.
- Frustrating that even simple revisions submitted after the consolidated letter require an additional 20 days for review.
- Having to deal with different people each time we came in with our plans was a huge hassle. Even though I had carefully recorded the names of the staff I spoke with each time, and requested these people on subsequent visits, I was told, "You usually see someone different each time." I think each staff person should give the customer his or her business card and customers should be encouraged to deal with the same people, if they want to. Otherwise, a customer has to go over everything all over again with a new person. Very frustrating!!! The new person would invariably ask different questions from the previous staff person and I sensed I was on the defensive in answering questions, even when I had absolutely nothing to hide. The dress code of staff should be addressed. Most staff I have delath with do not project a professional demeanor by their dress. For instance, being greeted at the front desk by a woman in a track suit each time reflects poorly on the whole department.
- They need to get quicker review times. They are taking way too long to process applications.

- Permit process seems overly complicated and seems to change significantly without notice
- Permit requirements seem to change with each visit and applications are not processed within the time lines laid out. Some counter staff are very courteous and helpful - others not as much.
- Larger lettering on permit regarding pre-construction meeting (i.e. stormwater management). Easily overlooked, but an important aspect in every job, (*names removed*) are informative and easy to get along with.
- We were told at the submission of the application that we would probably not be given the hookup we requested. A very neagative attitude. When we finally got the permit, we were told verbally of 11 steps we had to take from that time on until the hookup would be complete. Why we were not given written instuctions, i cannot understand. The whold process was not a constructive, professional experience.
- Other municipalities issue a permit number and allow proceeding at risk prior to review completion. Even though it is the contractors risk, it is percieved as criminal activity in Bellingham.
- My experience was inconsistent..Some employees seem to know alot more then others..and there was one that was quite condesending and rude.
- as a professional design/build entity for 30 plus years, having dealt with other other jurisdictions, I find the COB to be the most frustrating. We are typically involved with custom residential/remodelling projects. These projects should be permittable in 2 weeks based upon experience from other counties/cities. One recent (very small) residential deck addition/alteration (approxiamtely 150 sq. ft.) took 2 mos. because of unnecessary engineering requirements demanded by COB. The COB should have professional people on staff that can make decisions that would not require outside verification for projects of this scope. Another very frustrating aspect to this process that I have experienced a number of times is the delay of permitting due to COB requireing outside engineering which results a total disruption of the sequence, I.E. Starting all over. Quite often in the past, the first response received has been "NO", rather than "How may we be of assistance to you". Typically I have received the former response from other jurisdictions. Regarding on-site inspections, the staff has been knowledgeable and courteuous and not a hinderance to timely progression of projects. We have had a good working relationship with the inspectors. Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this survey, should you want additional input please contact. Regards
- Staff was very considerate and helpful
- Please work with people to get them time frames of inspector arrival prior to the actual day of inspection. It can be problematic to employers when they can't count on their employees for an entire day, for two minutes worth of inspection. I will say that when I finally did get a time when the inspector would be there, he was very prompt and timely.
- the permit center is the "land of no" no no no no you cant no state law no sorry no you need an engineer.....
- The staff drag out the process of getting a building permit, asking for more info. than they used to, sometimes overlooking whats already been provided. It seems to be a ploy to keep plans on their schedule in order to show that they have work to do. This costs the permit seeker both time and money.
- It's taken a few applications to get used to the new system but overall I think it's an improvement.
- Since the inception of the tiered review (quick, medium and long) the building services staff have been very good at sticking to timelines on building permits. However, Planning, Public Works and Stormwater are horrible. They typically complete their

review on the very last day available, and request revisions, which drag out the process (if they had asked for the revisions earlier the applicant could respond within the original review timeframe). In addition, I have a high level of frustration with the Planning Departments ability to respond to simple permit requests in a timely fashion.

Applications for permits such as lot of record, director's interpretation, critical areas exemptions, etc... take weeks to get a response on, with no communication from Planning. These permits realistically take less than one hour of review time. If I had to name a department that provides the worst level of service (from a timing and communication standpoint) it would be Planning.

- I had difficulty getting timely responses to phone inquiries. "Phone tag" seemed to terminate after I returned permit center calls and got an answering machine. It took a visit by my builder to the permit center to resolve a question that had been holding up the issuing of our remodeling permit. I was becoming frustrated by the lack of response from the center and wasn't sure how to proceed since there was no recontact by the center. Had it not been for the initiative of our builder, I suspect I would still be waiting for a return call from the center.
- Staff has the ability to "hide" behind voice mail from the public. E-mail responses are not adequate. Sometimes I have had to wait several days for a response. Skagit permit department should be a model. They are responsive.
- The single-point of contact does not work. The staff is under qualified and exhibits poor communications. The dress code and culture in the permit center is some of the worst I have ever experienced in a public department. It is the opinion of many professionals in the B'ham community the only way to fix the problems with the permit center is to start over with new staff and leadership.
- Unacceptable timeline regarding fire alarm plan review.
- The *person* who usually sits at the front desk is very crabby--not a good first impression for your services.
- Having electrical on line permitting and receiving electronic funds would be a nice addition.
- I thought it didn't make sense to make the payment for the permit at a different office than the application.
- some of the old shortcomings of the system are being treated like someone was trying to cheat the system while all that happened was that inspections were not made because of lack of access and no one in the inspection office followed through to try and get access. Consequently permits were closed without regard to the status of the project even with a request for final being made.
- I had not dealt with Bellingham permit center for a couple of years and found it much improved. The people were not rude like in the past and were eager to help. That being said it would be easier to do business in your city if you had a system to purchase Electrical Permits on line like L&I. The other issue I have is with the cost of your permits being as much as 500% higher than most other jurisdictions.
- I'm frustrated with the 21 day wait to response and then being put at the bottom of the pile for another 21 day wait. It seems like there must be some way to expedite this process. I'm also frustrated that there are no 'green building' incentives as well as the difficulties in working with roof installations of solar panels.
- The staff needs to be more prepared and factual and willing to do some of the research instead of just saying no until you provide ...xyz.
- I appreciate the efforts made during this tough time to keep things cohesive and moving forward.

- My main concern was with department personnel not returning phone calls in a timely manner. I realize that they might not like doing this, but it is a part of the job and something any professional is expected to do.

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY SCRIPT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Extremely well
- Somewhat well
- Not at all

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. General counter assistance

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

8. Processing your application including review and corrections

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

9. Construction Inspections (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

10. Certificate of Occupancy Process (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

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

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

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

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



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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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

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

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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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