

REPORT

City of Bellingham
Permit Center Customer Satisfaction Survey
2011 Quarter 1 and Quarter 2

August 2011

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at
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■ INTRODUCTION

During the first two quarters of 2011 (January to June), the Center for Economic Vitality at 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 comparisons to respondents that used the Permit Center's services from October 2006 to December 2010.

This customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, so researchers first needed to obtain email addresses for the individuals that used Permit Center services. A total of 765 email invitations were sent to take the survey during the first two quarters of 2011. Ninety six (96) email addresses either opted-out or resulted in a hard or soft bounce status. This resulted in 669 actual survey invites being delivered. Users that have opted-out or have a bounced email address will not receive future survey invites. As a result, 12.5% of users during the first half of 2011 have permanently removed themselves from future participation in the survey.

Seventy seven (77) individuals completed the survey during the first quarter of 2011 (January to March) and another eighty (80) completed the survey in the second quarter (April to June). This resulted in a total of 157 respondents for a 23.5% response rate. This calculates to a 6.85% margin of error on the survey.

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

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

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

TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

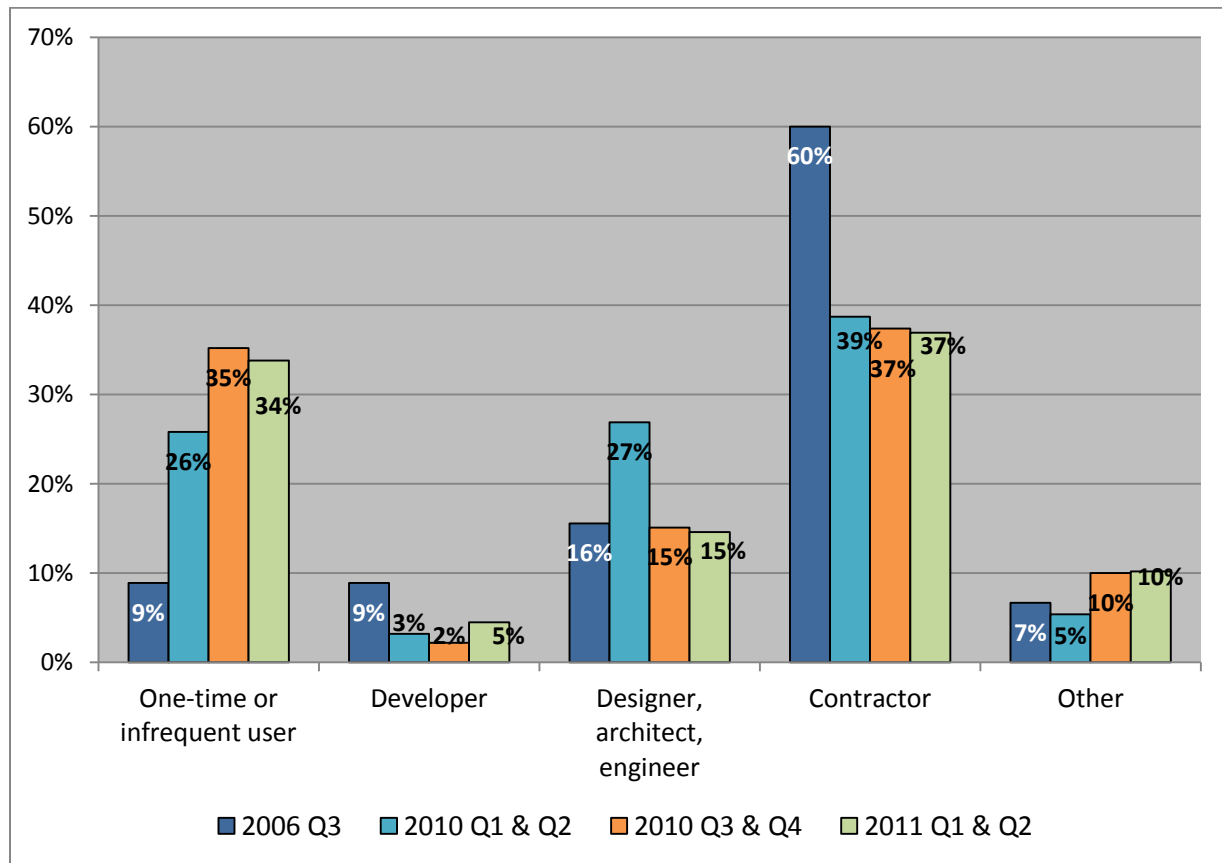
In order to understand the customers using the Permit Center, users were asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from January to June of 2011. As figure 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were contractors (37%) and one-time or infrequent users (34%).

There was very little change in the types of users between the last half of 2010 and the first half of 2011. There were slightly more developers who reported using the Permit Center in the first half of 2011 as compared to the last half of 2010 (5% vs. 2%, respectively).

Customer types reported under other include: *College maintenance personal, contractor but infrequent user, electrical contractor, event organizer, general, homeowner, land use and design, multiple house builds and remodels, owner, owner for several fixer properties, permit coordinator, permit specialist, special event – annual, sub contractor, third party building inspector, university architect owner – builder.*

Figure 1. Distribution of Permit Center Customer Type

(N=157 for current time period)



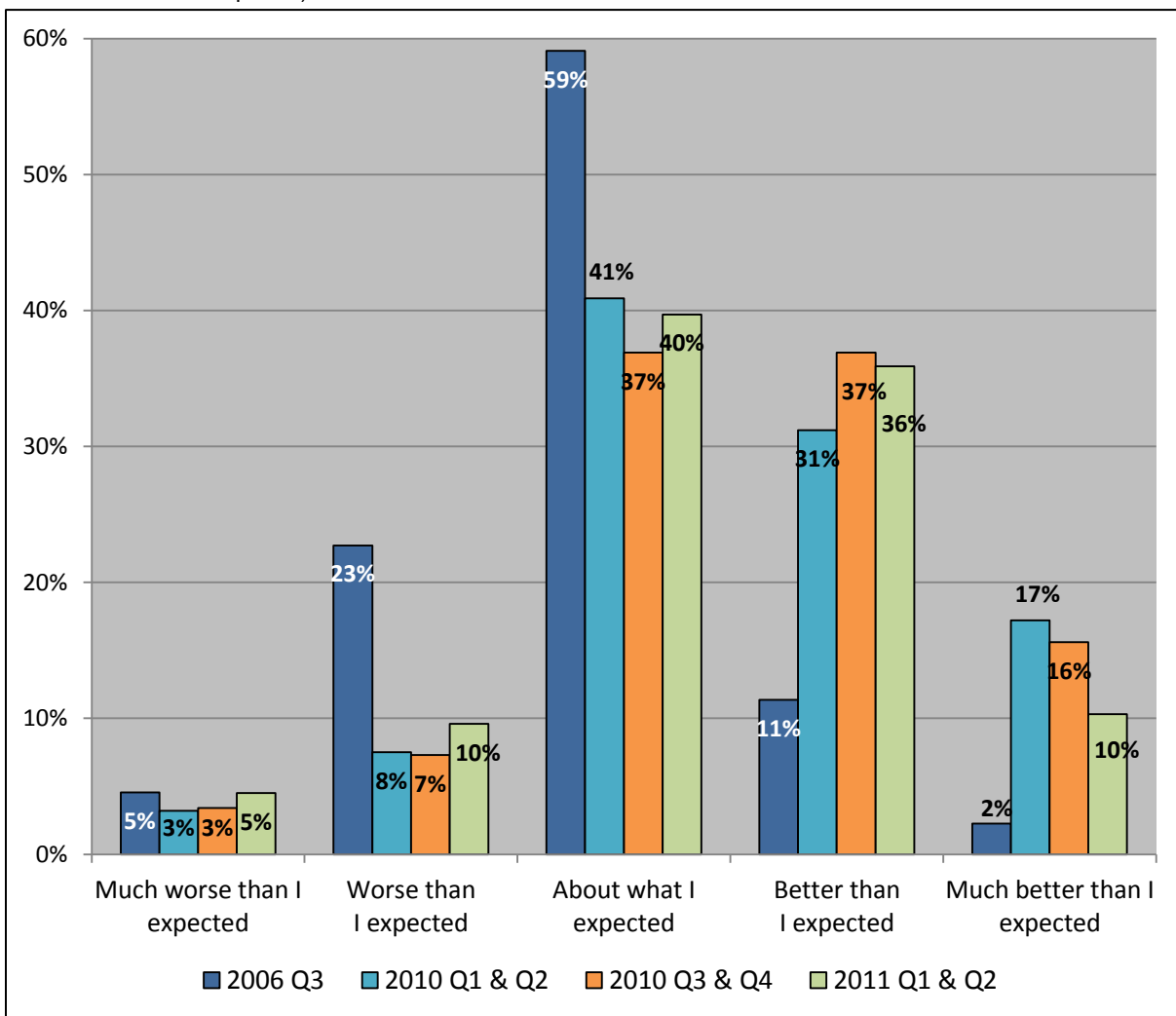
OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that during January to June, 46% of respondents said that their experience was *better than or much better than I expected*. This is a decrease from 53% reporting the same level of satisfaction in the last half of 2010. This is the lowest satisfaction reported since the last half of 2009.

Fifteen percent of users reported that their experience was *worse or much worse than expected* during the first half of 2011. That is up from 10% in the last half of 2010.

Figure 2. Overall Experience with the Permit Center

(N=157 for current time period)



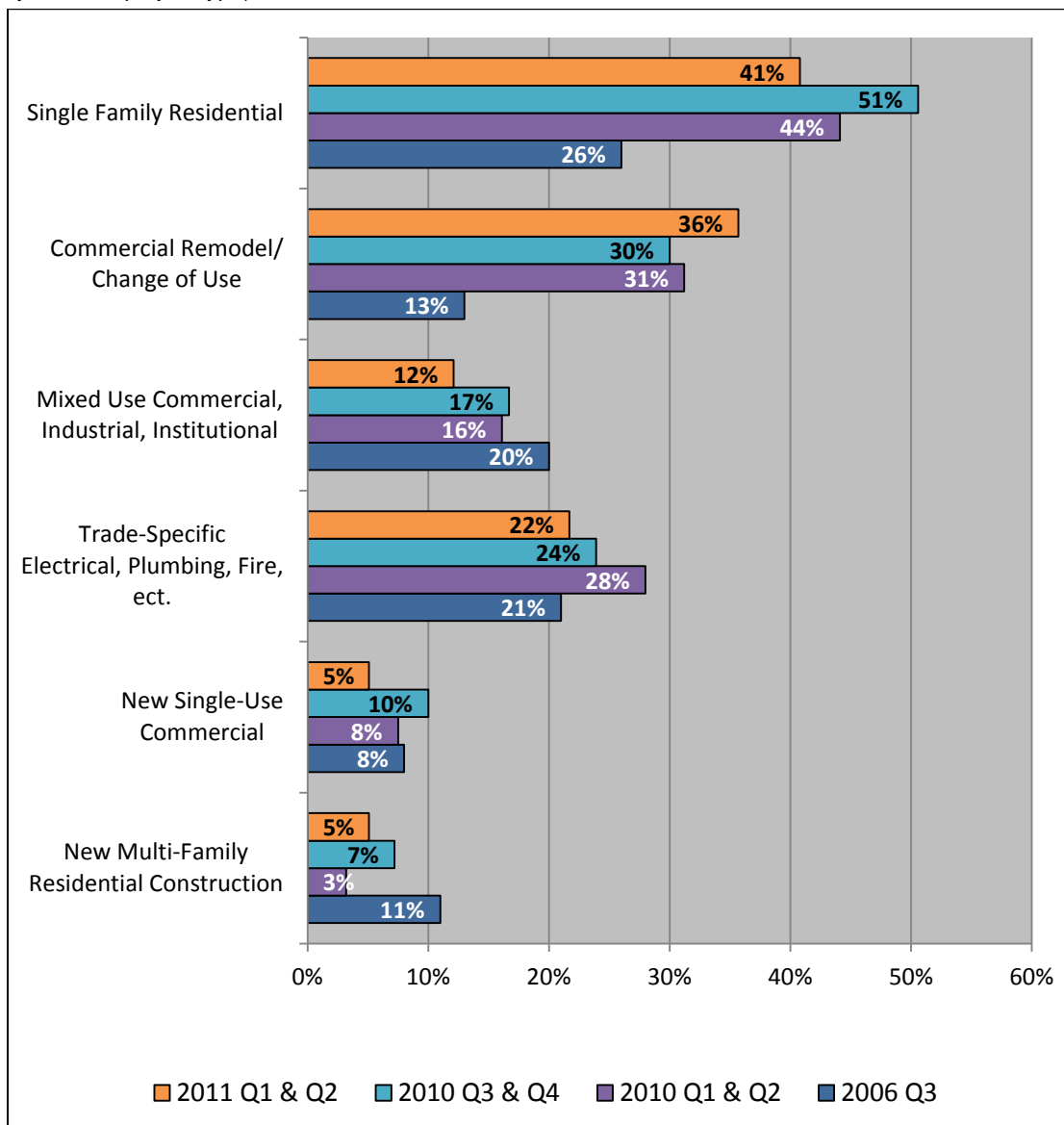
PROJECT TYPES

Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of project brought them in to the Permit Center. As figure 3 shows, single-family residential remains the most common project type, accounting for over 40% of the reported projects. However, this is a decrease of 10% from the last half of 2010. Notable shifts in project types since the last half of 2010 include decreases in the number of mixed use commercial and single-use commercial projects.

Please note that respondents could select more than one type of project, so the total number of projects (189) exceeds the total number of respondents (n=157).

Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types

(Ns vary for each project type)



PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

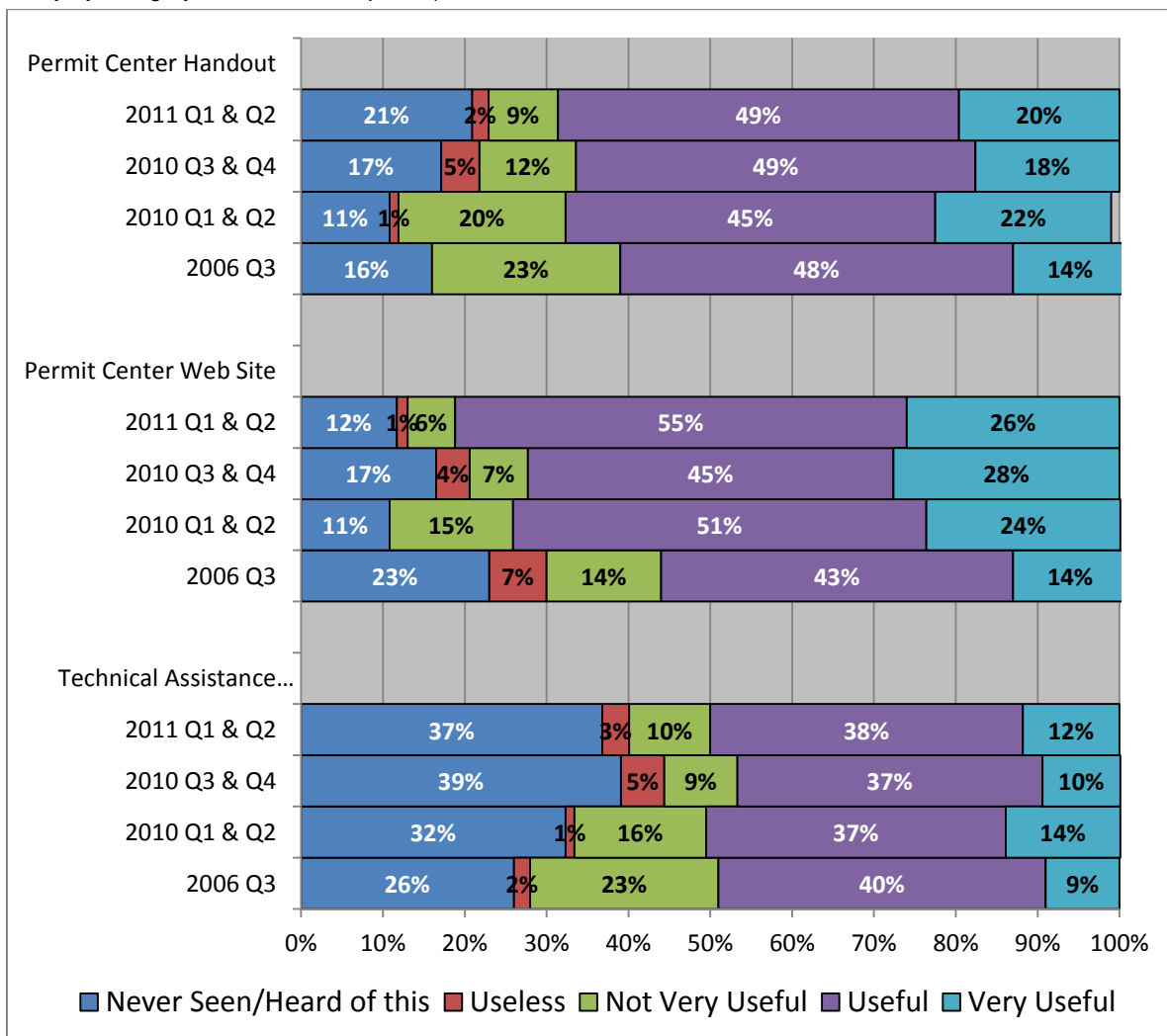
Users were asked to rate the usefulness of the Permit Center support materials. This included the Center’s website, handouts, and assistance bulletins.

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of customers that found the materials *Not Very Useful* or *Useless* has decreased significantly since the first half of 2010.

However, users’ awareness of handouts is decreasing. The percentage of users who reported they had *Never Seen/Hear of This* is the highest since the last quarter of 2008.

Figure 4. Usefulness of Permit Center Materials

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



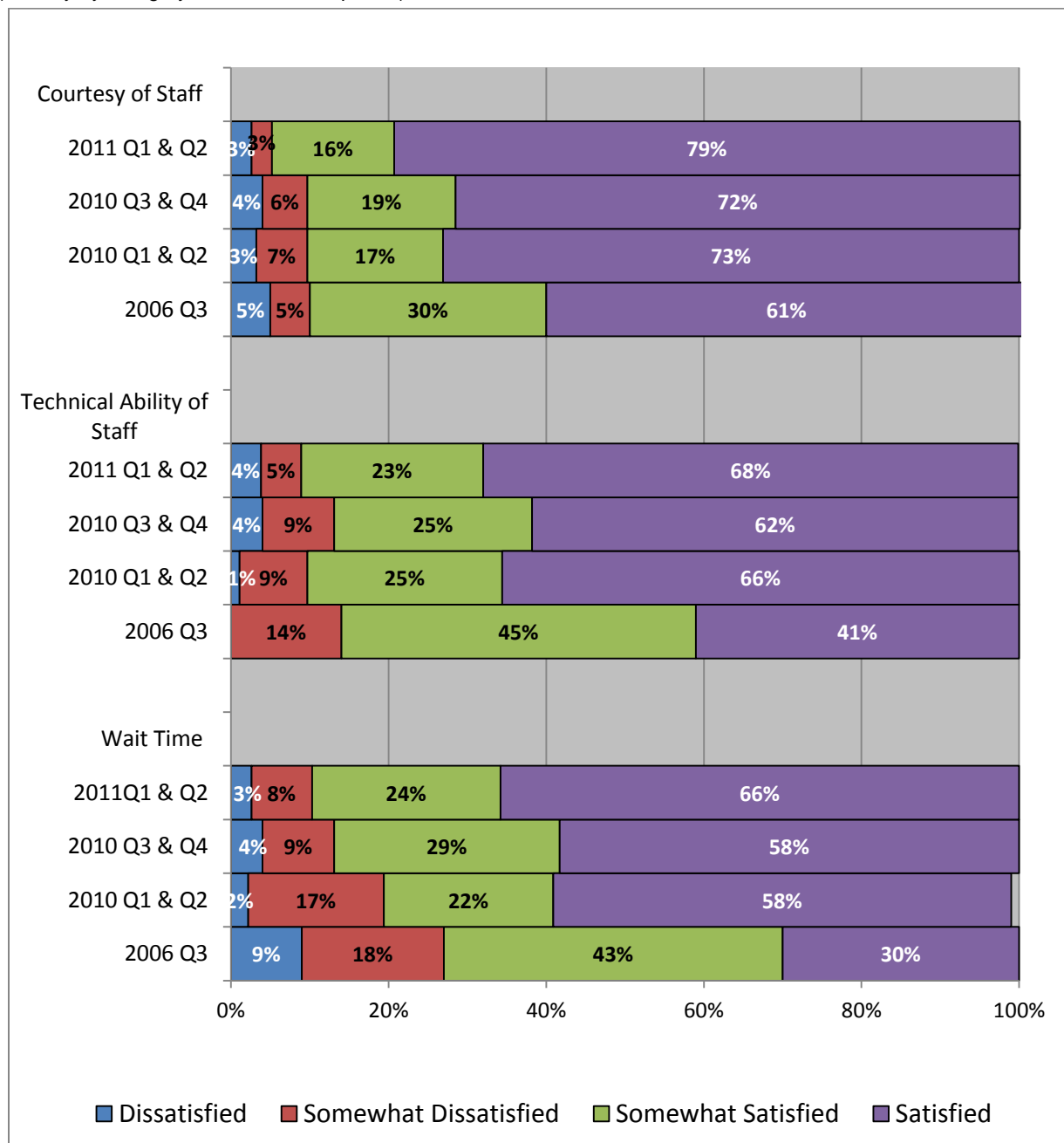
COUNTER ASSISTANCE

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the Permit Center’s counter staff. Respondents are most satisfied with the courtesy of the counter staff (79%).

The greatest improvement in respondent satisfaction is seen in wait time, which rose to 66% *satisfied* from 58% in the last half of 2010.

Figure 5. Customer Satisfaction with the Counter Assistance

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



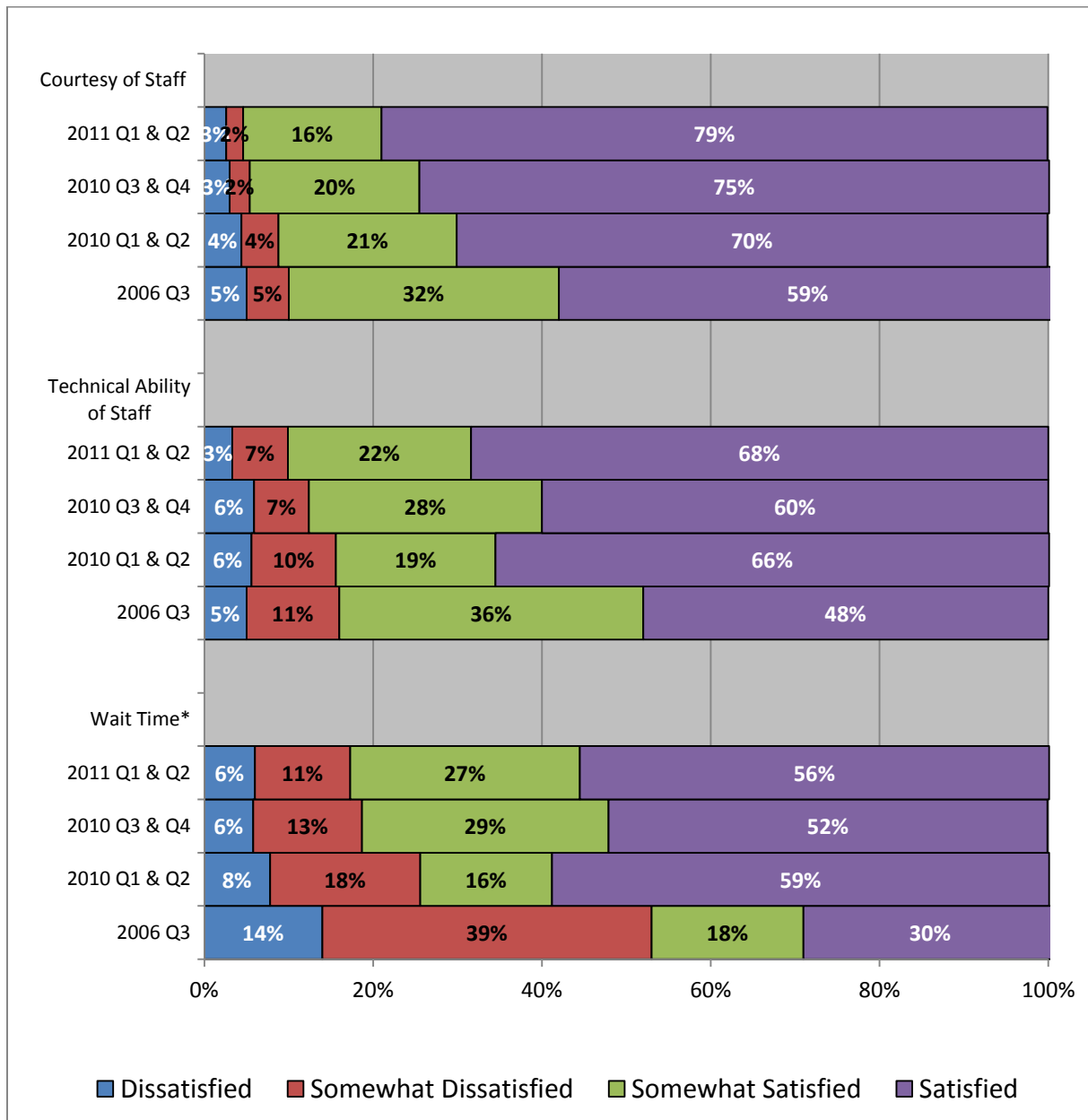
PROCESSING APPLICATION

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

Users who reported being *satisfied* with the technical ability of staff rose by 8%. The percentage of users who report being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* decreased in all categories.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with the Processing Application

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



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

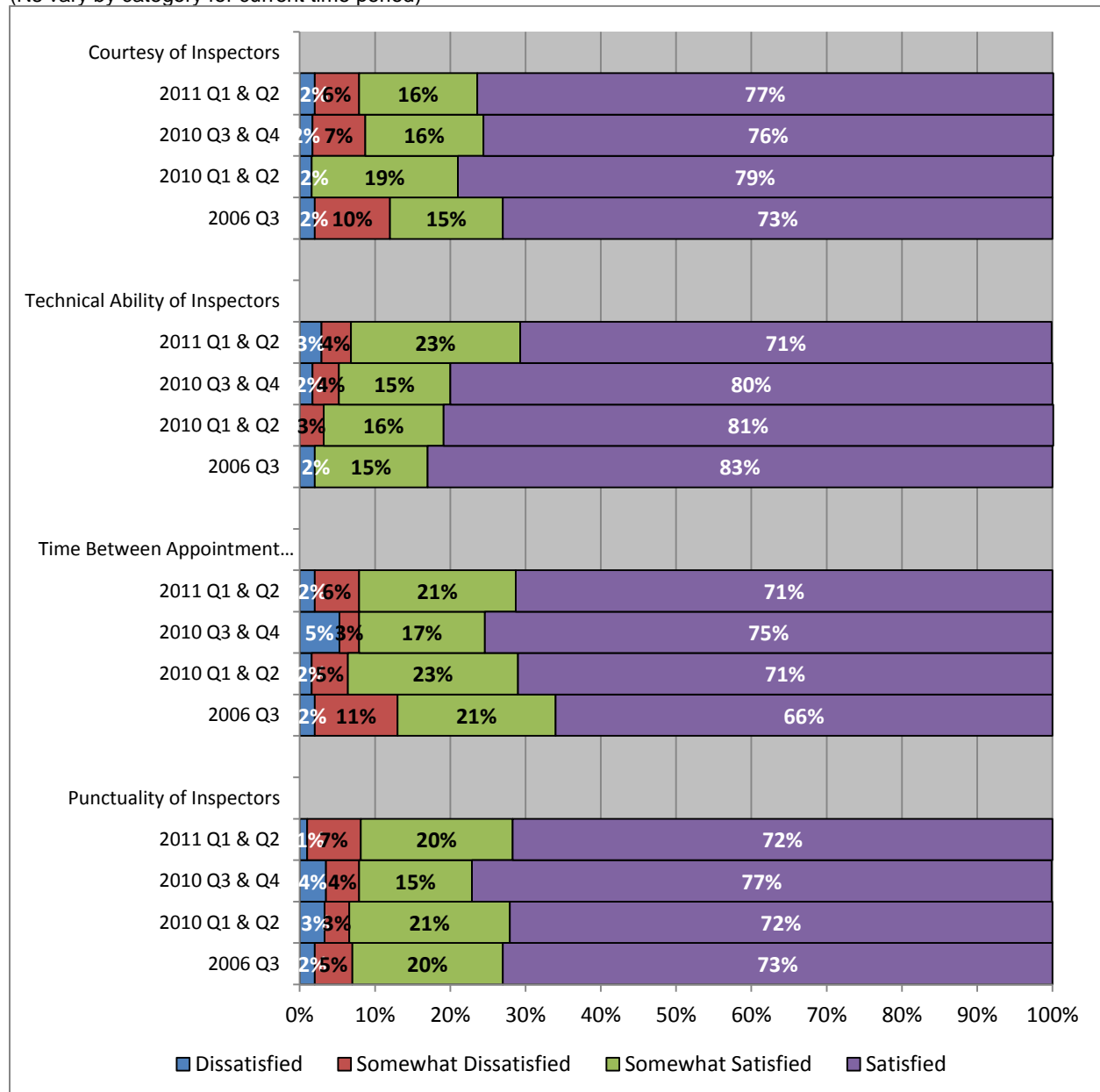
INSPECTORS

The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Figure 7 shows that for the first half of 2011 users were most satisfied with the courtesy of the inspectors (77% satisfied).

From January to June of 2011, the percentage of users who reported that they were *Somewhat Dissatisfied* or *Dissatisfied* with the technical ability of the inspectors rose slightly to 7%.

Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



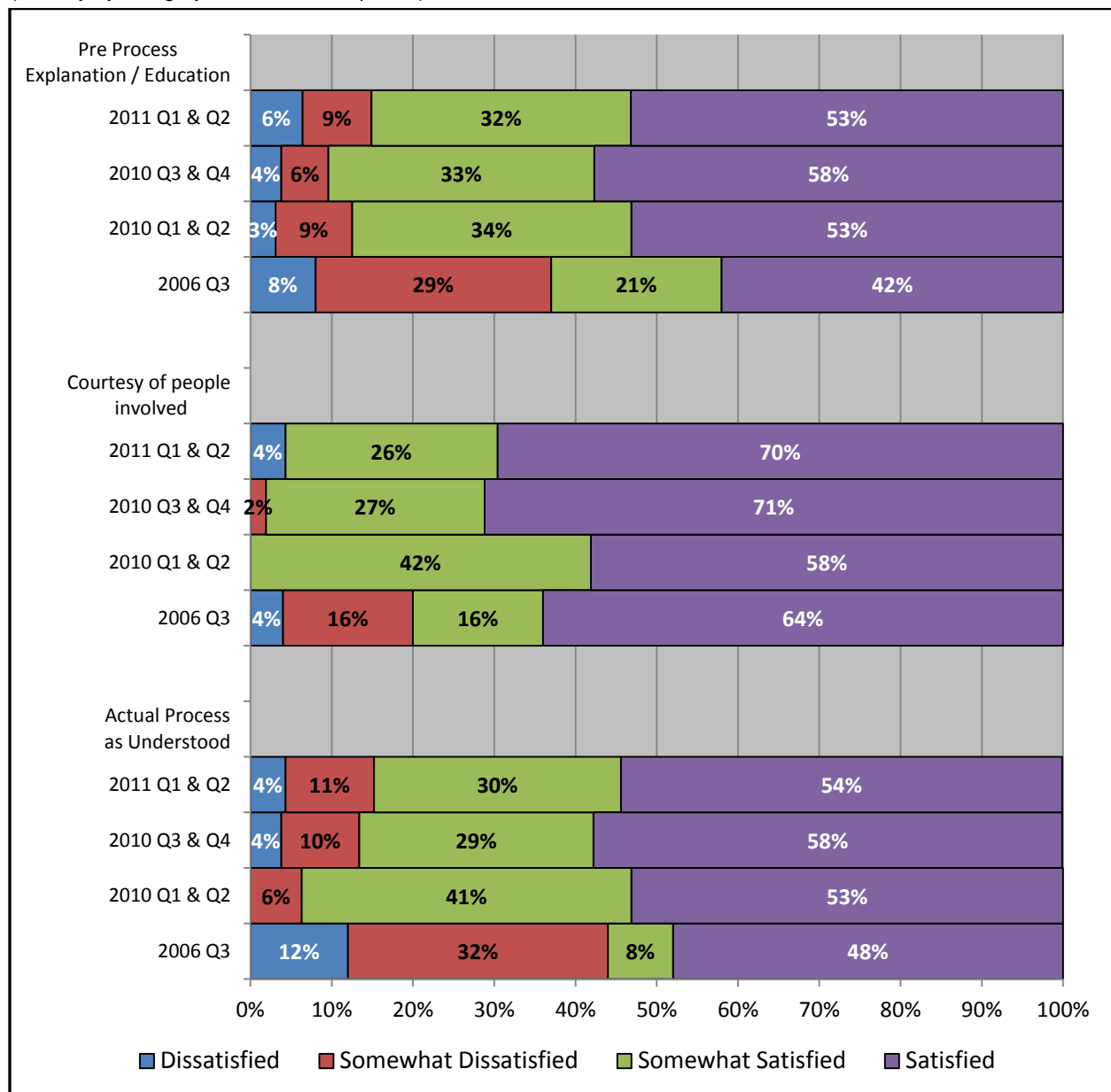
CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, the customer satisfaction rate for the process as understood remained steady. Users' satisfaction with the pre-process explanation fell 6%, to 85% of users being *Somewhat Satisfied* or *Satisfied*.

Respondents reported being *dissatisfied* with the courtesy of the people involved for the first time since the end of 2009.

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Certificate of Occupancy Process

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



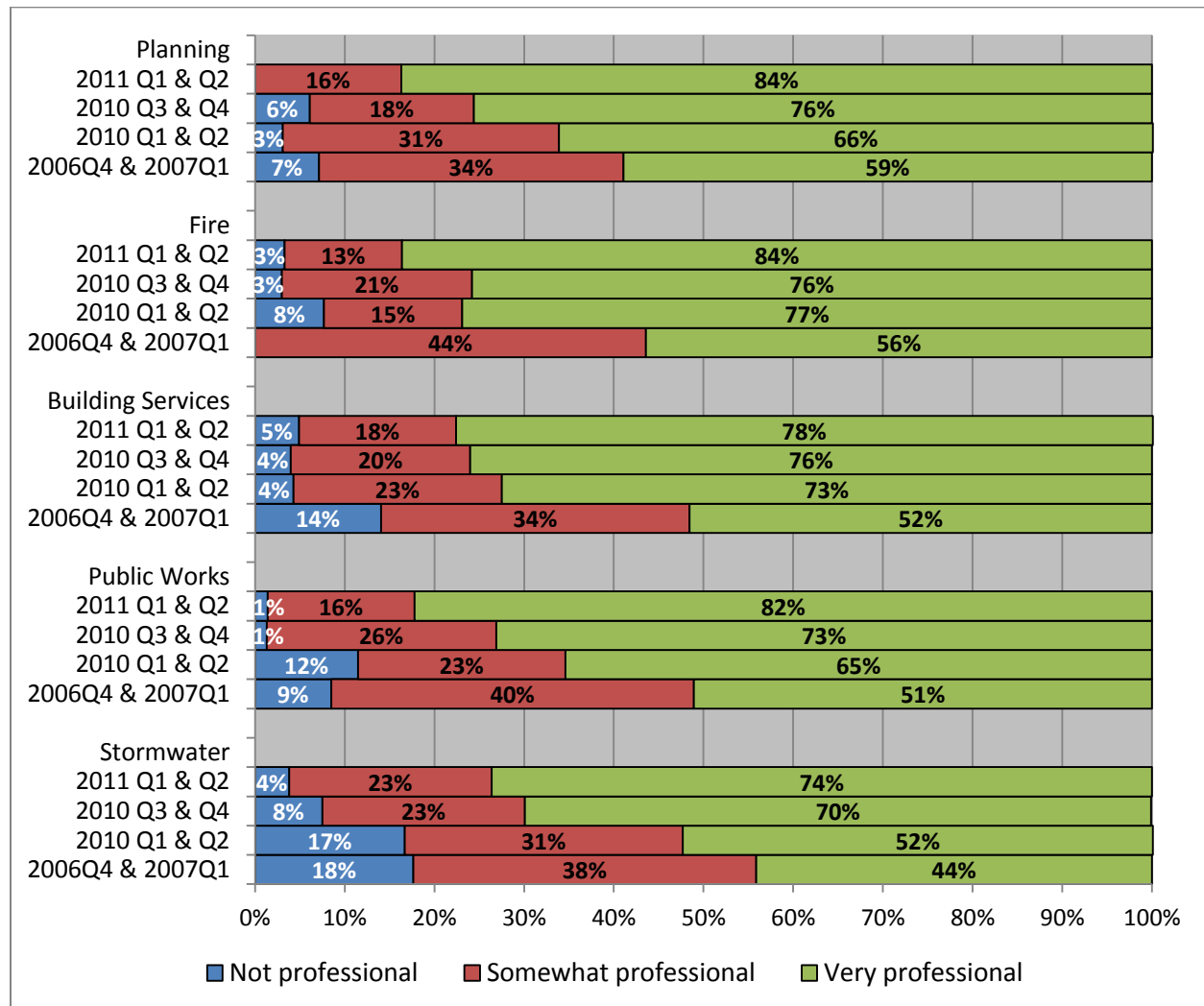
PROFESSIONALISM

Customers of the Permit Center were asked to rate the professionalism of each department with which they interacted. As figure 9 indicates, every department showed an increase in the percentage of users who reported *very professional* in the first half of 2011 over the last half of 2010. The greatest increase was in the Public Works department (82% vs. 73%, respectively).

No users reported that they found the Planning department *not professional*. The percentage of users who found the Building Services department *not professional* increased slightly to 5%.

Figure 9. Rating of the Professionalism of each Department

(Ns vary by year and department)



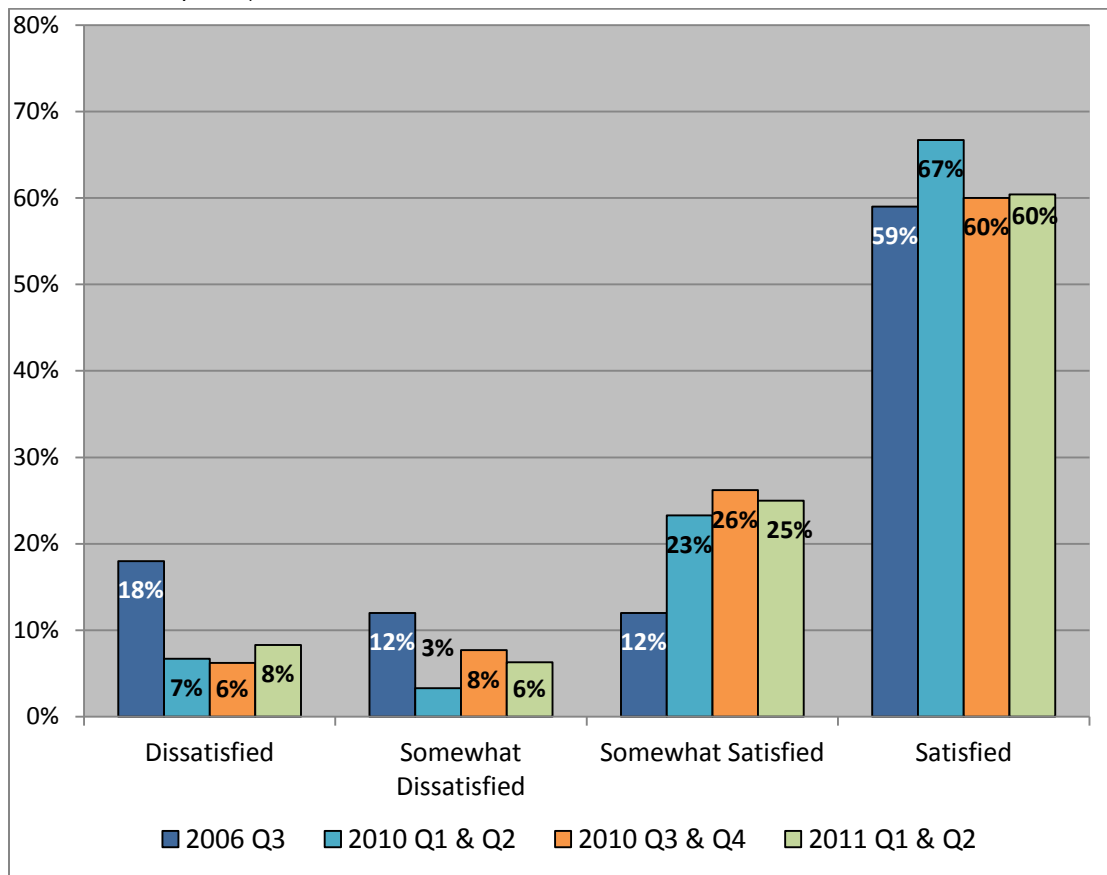
PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-application meeting (n=48) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, the percentage of *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* customers remained steady in the first half of 2011. Respondents that reported being *dissatisfied* increased to 8%.

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

Figure 10. Distribution of Satisfaction with Pre-Application Meetings

(N=48 for current time period)



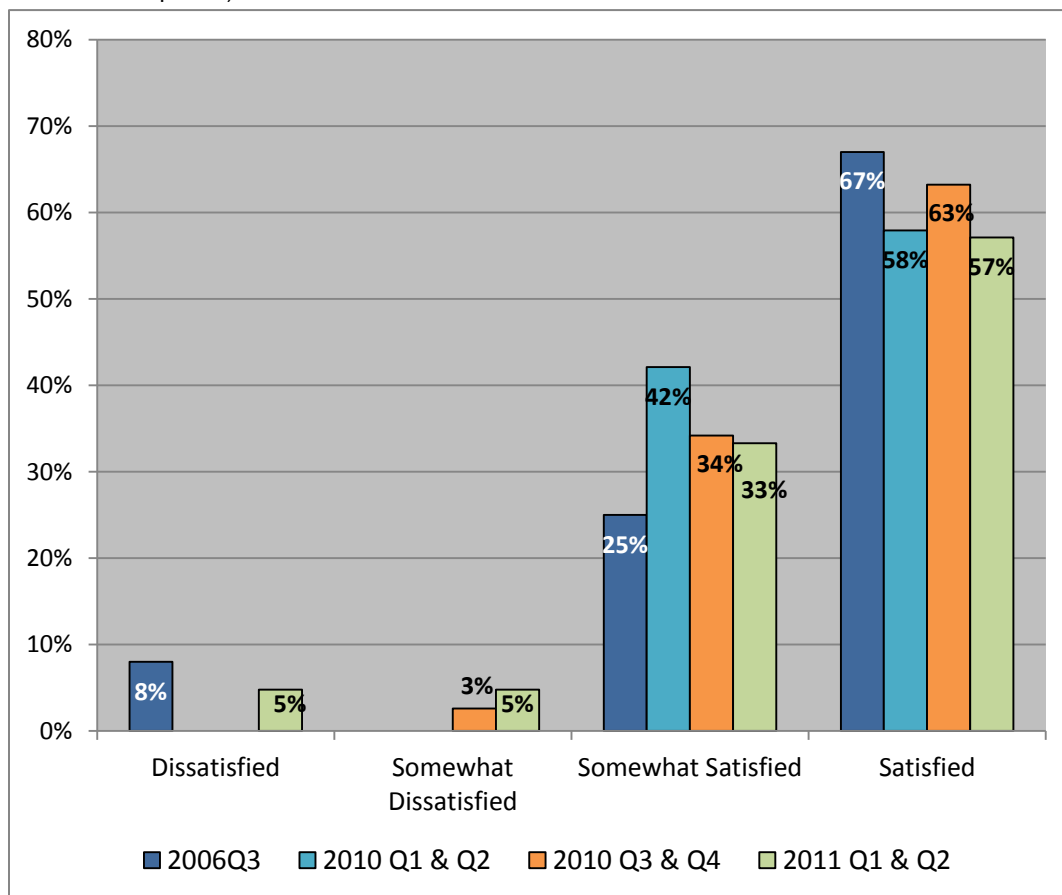
PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-construction meeting (n=21) were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, in the first half of 2011 there was an increase in the percentage of users who reported being *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied*. Users reported being *dissatisfied* with these meetings for the first time since the last half of 2009.

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=21 for current time period)



SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

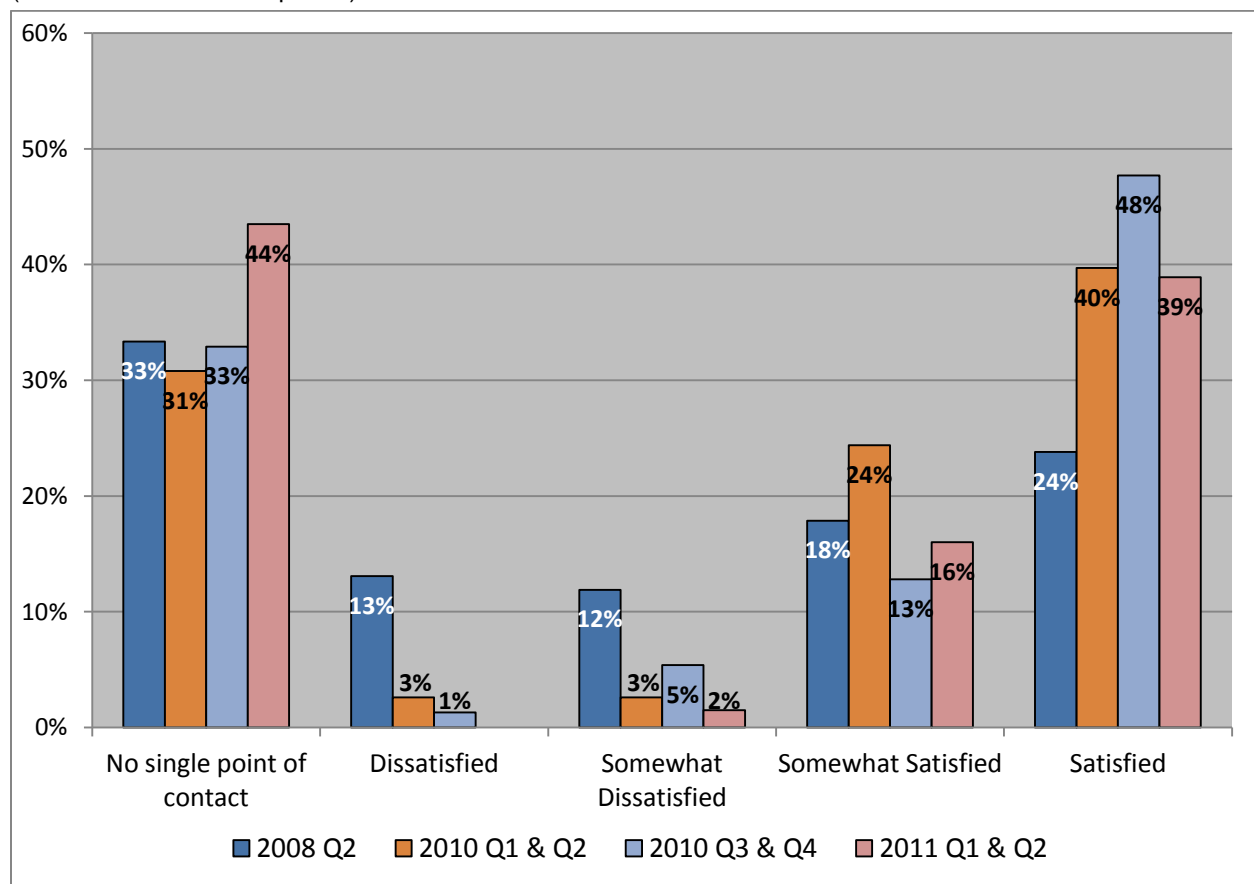
Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the Permit Center’s ‘single point of contact’ approach. As figure 12 indicates, the percentage of respondents who were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* decreased to 55% in the first of 2011. This is the lowest satisfaction rating since the last half of 2009.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they did not have a single point of contact increased to 44%, up from 33% in the last half of 2010. This shows a trend of Permit Center users not being aware of or not using this service.

When the *no single point of contact* responses are removed from the analysis, 97% of the remaining respondents reported that they were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*.

Figure 12. Satisfaction with Single Point of Contact Approach

(N=131 for current time period)



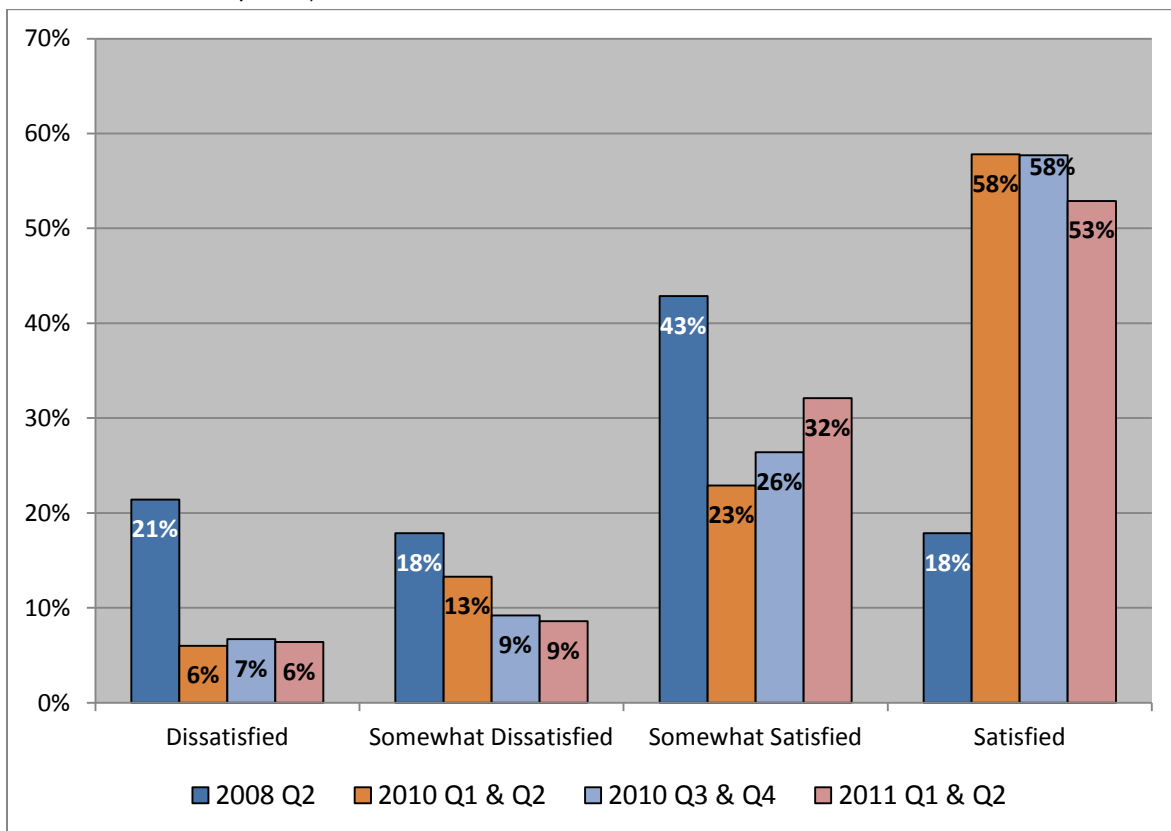
TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS AND TIMELINES

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

As figure 13 indicates, 53% of users in the first two quarters of 2011 reported that they were *satisfied* with the transparency. Respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* with the transparency of the process and timelines decreased slightly to 6%.

Figure 13. Satisfaction with Transparency

(N=140 for current time period)



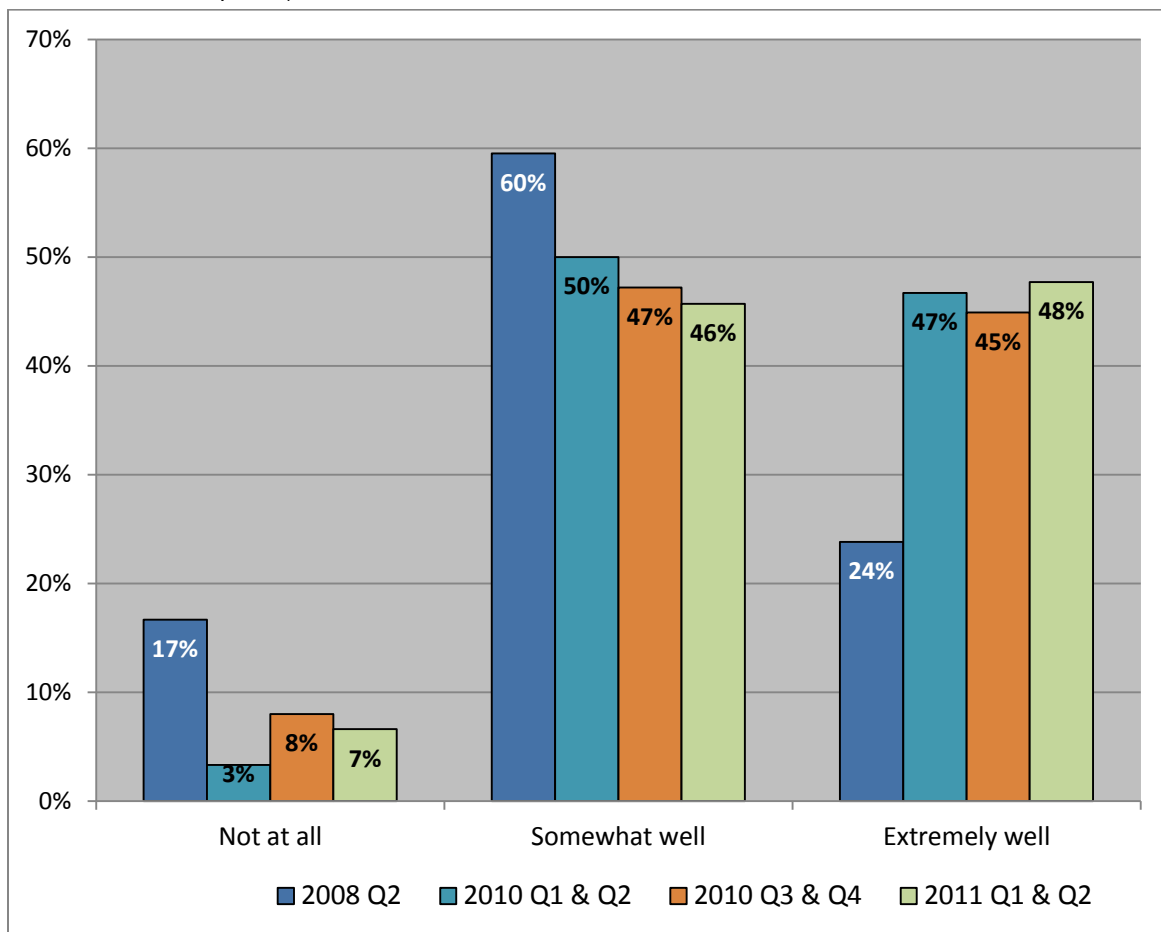
COMMUNICATION ABOUT PERMIT REVIEWS

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

As figure 14 indicates, the majority of respondents (94%) were either *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed by the Permit Center staff. Respondents who reported not being informed at all fell to 7% in the first half of 2011.

Figure 14. Communication about Reviews

(N=151 for current time period)



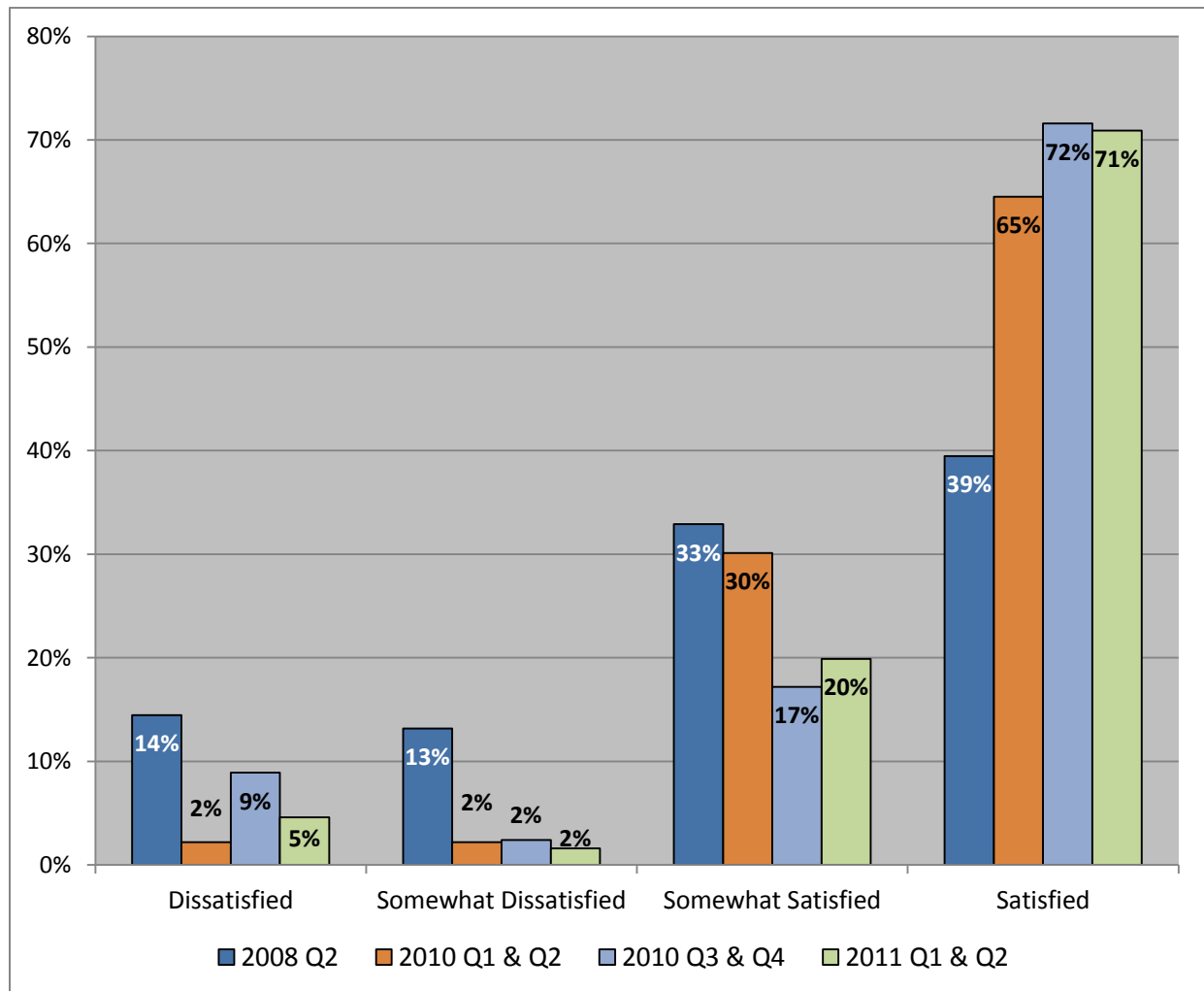
COMPLETENESS OF APPLICATION REVIEW

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

As figure 15 indicates, the majority of respondents (71%) were *satisfied* with the level of review completeness by Permit Center staff. The percentage of respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* decreased to 7%. This is down from 11% in the last half of 2010.

Figure 15. Level of Completeness in Application Review

(N=153 for current time period)



CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

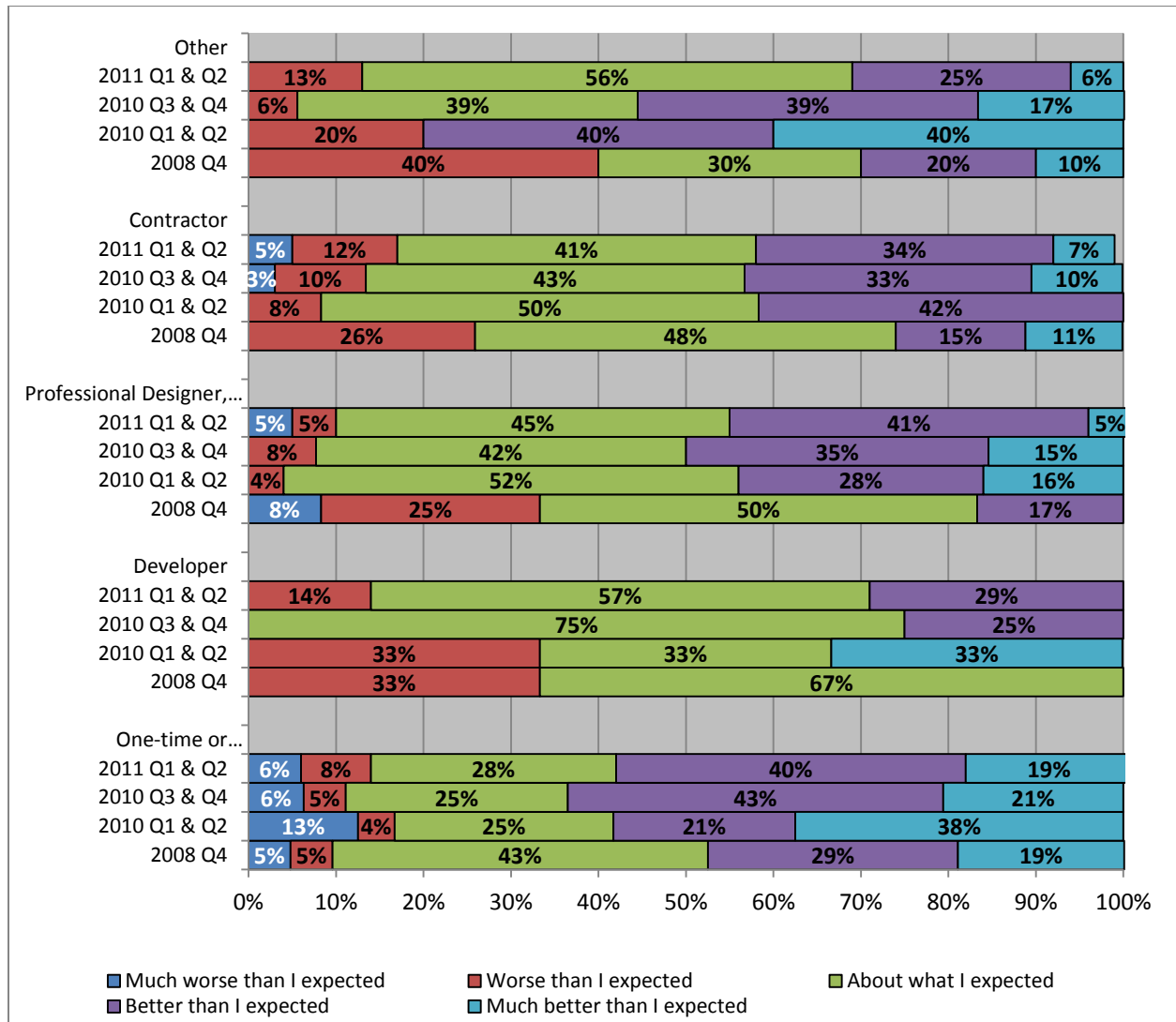
By cross tabulating the data from Figure 1 and Figure 2, it is possible to match the customer type with the overall experience they had with the permit center.

As figure 16 indicates, one-time or infrequent users continue to have the highest percentage of respondents selecting *better than I expected* or *much better than I expected* (59%). Seventeen percent (17%) of contractors reported the experience was *much worse than I expected* or *worse than I expected*. This is an increase from 13% reported in the last half of 2010.

No developer reported that the experience was *much worse than I expected*. However, the percentage that report the experience was *worse than I expected* rose to 14%.

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

(N=156 for the current time period)



CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

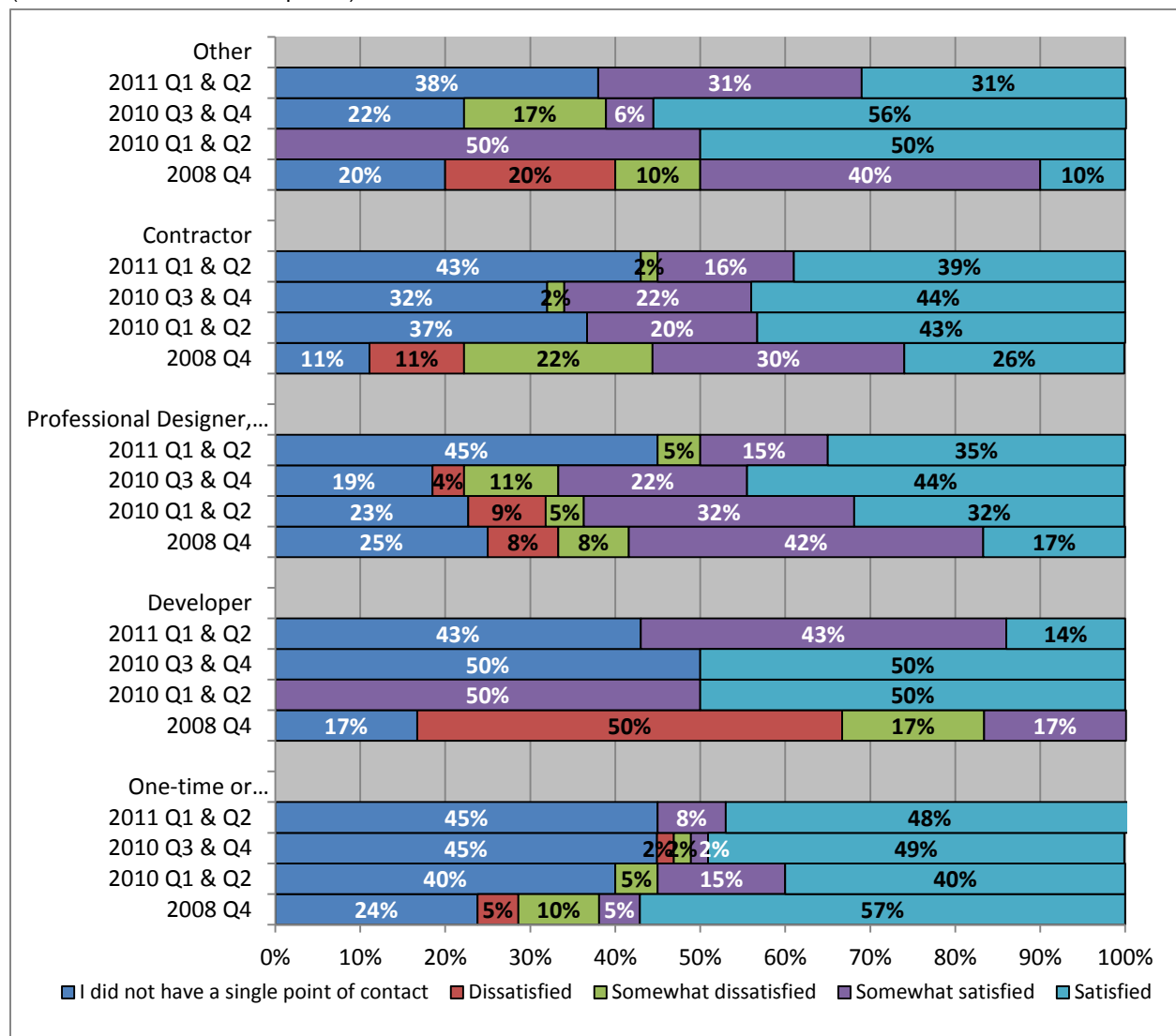
Next, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the Permit Center’s new ‘single point of contact’ approach with your project manager?”

As figure 17 indicates, almost half of each user type reported that they did not have a single point of contact. This illustrates that this service is either under-utilized or unknown. Other users reported the highest satisfaction with 61% reporting that they were either *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied* with the single point of contact.

When the single point of contact is removed from the data, only contractors and professional designer, architect and engineers reported being *somewhat dissatisfied* (3% and 9% respectively).

Figure 17. User Type and Single Point of Contact

(N=131 for the current time period)



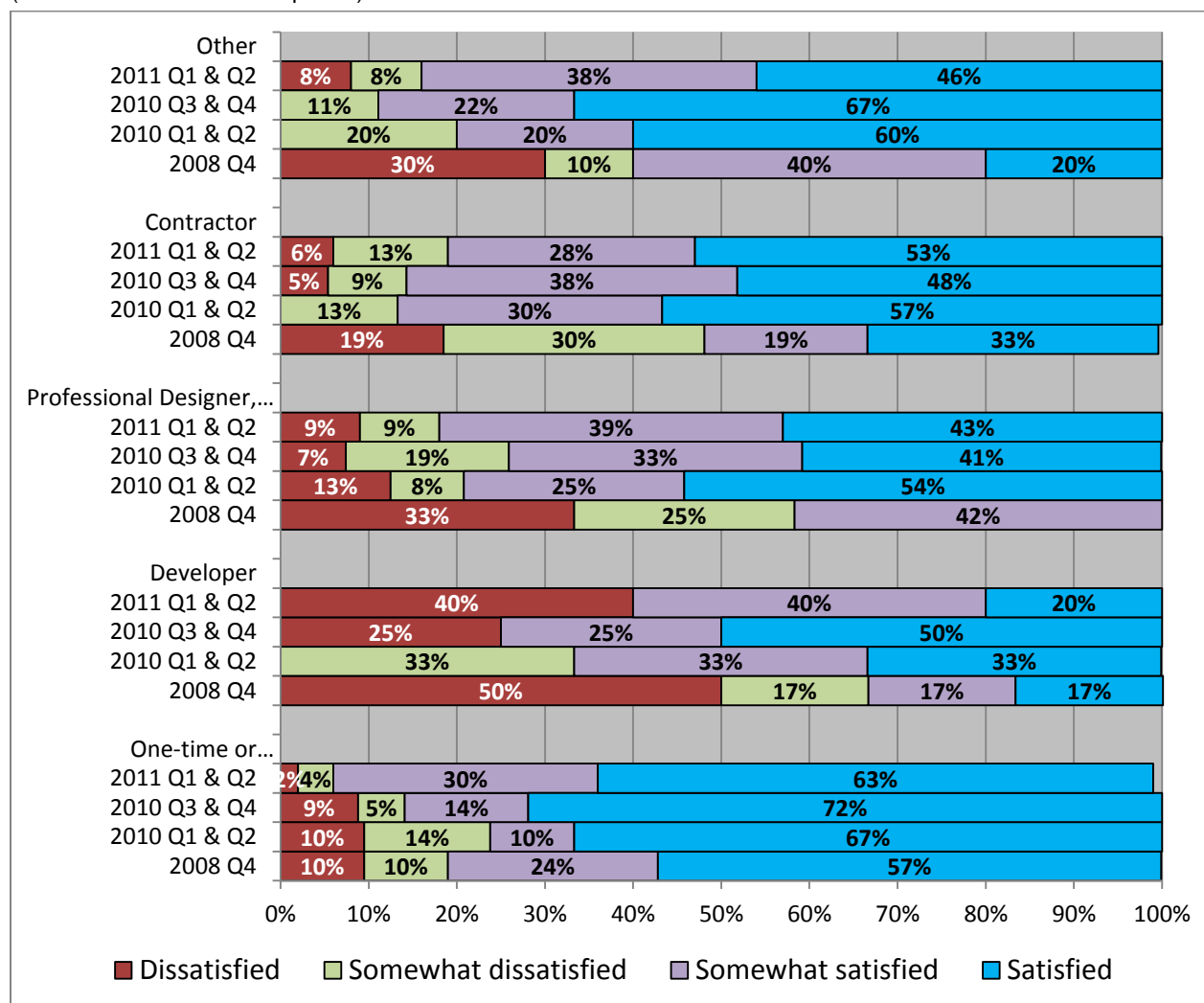
CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND TRANSPARENCY

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 with 93% reporting that they were *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*. Forty percent (40%) of developers reported that they were *dissatisfied* with the transparency, up from 25% in the previous period and 0% reporting being *dissatisfied* two periods ago.

Figure 18. User Type and Transparency

(N=140 for the current time period)



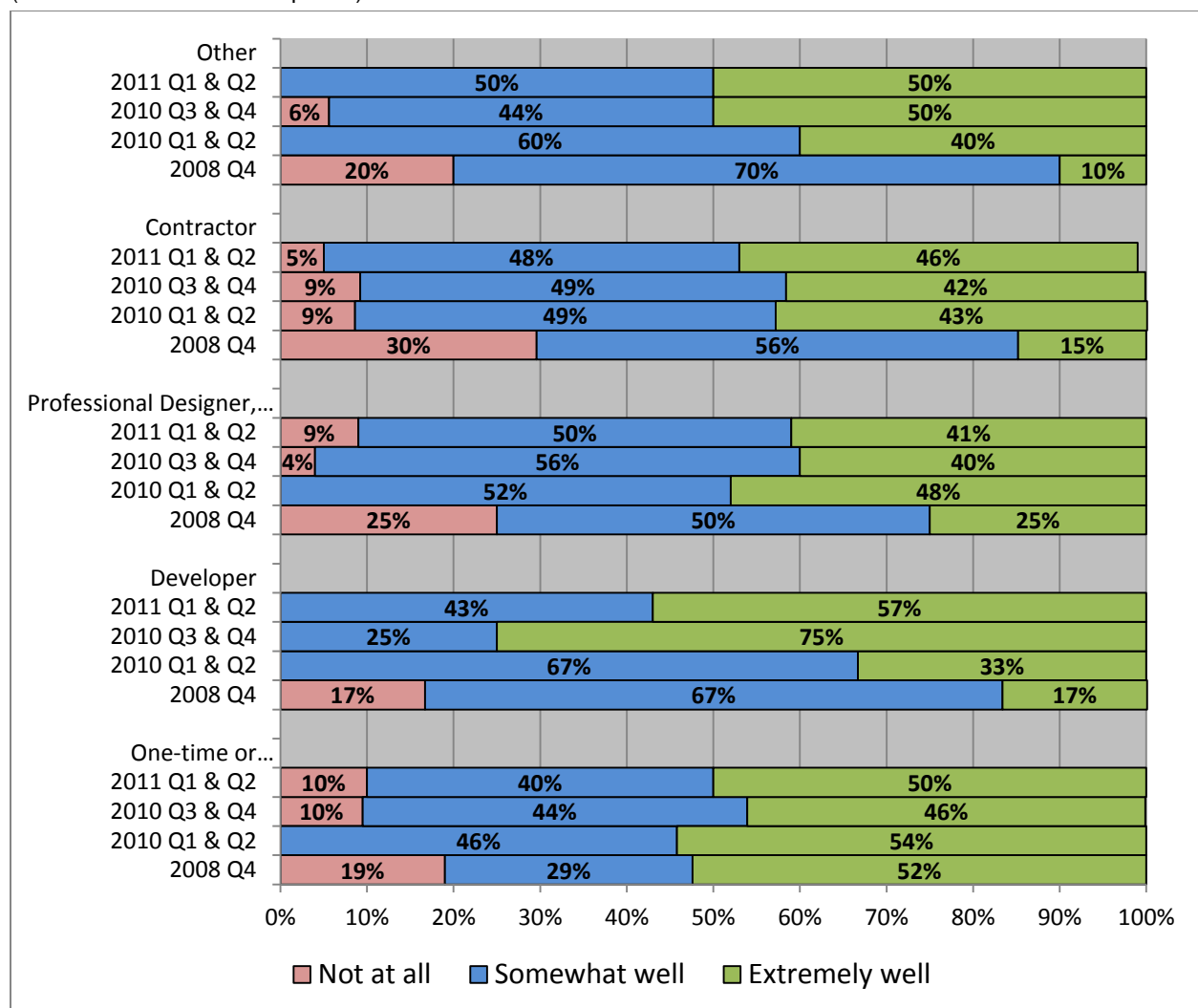
CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT DELAYS

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

As figure 19 indicates, developers and other users feel they were well informed about the process with 100% of users responding that they were *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed. The percentage of professional designers, architects and engineers who reported that they were *not at all* informed about delays rose to 9% in the first half of 2011.

Figure 19 User Type and Communication about Reviews

(N=151 for the current time period)



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated by the survey results from the first half of 2011, customer satisfaction with their overall experience at the City of Bellingham's Permit Center decreased slightly. The courtesy of the staff remains highly rated, except for those who are involved in the certificate of occupancy process. Users continue to rate the professionalism of the Permit Center departments highly. However, satisfaction with pre-construction meetings has fallen and more users are reporting that they are dissatisfied with the meetings.

One area of continued concern is awareness and usage of the single point of contact. Almost half of the Permit Center users reported that they did not have a single point of contact. This is the highest percentage unaware of a single point of contact since the first half of 2009. However, almost 100% of users who reported having a single point of contact were satisfied with this approach.

In addition, awareness of Permit Center materials remains relatively low. Almost 40% of Permit Center users are not aware of the technical assistance bulletins and over 20% are not aware of Permit Center handouts. It may be important to increase awareness of these products as those respondents who use them rate the materials as useful.

Discussions regarding improvements should try to identify what processes, procedures, or personnel have changed in the last six months that lead to the slight increase in dissatisfaction being reported. For example, pre-application meetings and the certificate of occupancy process had higher rates of dissatisfaction reported by users.

Contractors remain the largest percentage of users. They had the highest percentage of users who reported the overall experience as worse than expected. Developers continue to report that they were well informed about permit reviews and delays. It may be worth investigating if there is a difference in the communication method or style used with this group of users versus the other users.

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?

- follow through with statements and comments at application
- Have staff admit they are going to do everything allowable to discourage your attempts to improve your property, rather than the initial optimism they project.
- Having questions prepared before the meeting is much more productive.
- I was satisfied with the pre-application meeting.
- Information received in pre-application meeting did not hold true during final permit issuance. Caused additional time and cost for additional design work and information required, that would have been ready if we were told that it was needed upfront.
- my meetings were at the counter only.
- My wife and I visited the planning office several times to clarify code and other details during the designing stage of our project. We found all staff there to be extremely helpful. They treated us courteously, their explanations were clear and helpful, and we felt very pleased with the experience. I'm not sure if these visits constitute a "pre-application meeting", but they amount to significant pre-application contact with planning staff.
- No suggestions at this time
- No suggestions, it was very effective. We had staff present that normally work in other regions, the process in Bellingham was far superior to other regions, thanks so much.
- No, the process works as it is.
- NONE
- perhaps they could have a clue what they are talking about so as not to waste my time and my clients money
- Pre-application meeting was held at the permit counter. Staff person brought in Watershed consult to preview plans. Was very helpful.
- Run very well. Excellent idea and service to the applicants.
- Sometimes get different answers from different people
- Staff went above and beyond. Expected to just drop off permit application, but XXX in Permitting and XXX in Planning made sure we knew what we were doing, what to expect, and possible financial consequences. They did research, coordinated with other departments, and were completely professional and helpful.
- The amount of detail required for a pre-app is burdensome. Why are we required a prelim storm water report if we are not sure the proposed site & building design will be approved? If we are required to make changes, the prelim report is possibly toast.
- The answers were not the same depending on which person you spoke to.
- The information given at preapp meetings needs to be complete. Additional permit requirements that are imposed after the preapp meeting throws project timing completely off.
- The Public Works portion re: storm drains, etc. was very vague; too technical, and I didn't really understand what he was talking about.
- was told to bring in set of drawings and permit request and then wound up needing 3 more permits

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

- n/a
- nONE
- No suggestions at this time
- Overall, I was dissatisfied with the planning department's inability to answer questions regarding anchoring a residential deck to the floor joists of the house. I got a different answer with every phone call, contractors who bid the job said they could not get a straight answer. By phone, I received advice from an inspector to cross-brace the posts and have a one-on-one review. The review did not get called and the permit was approved, yet insisted on the anchor system. When I talked to the reviewing inspector, he agreed to remove the anchor requirement as the other planner had suggested. Overall, this issue seems to be a big problem not just with my permit, but with contractors as well. there is not a consistent voice from the planning department.

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

- All staff (XXXX in Permitting, XXXX in Planning, and the inspector) went above and beyond, and were courteous, EXCEPT for the person who called re. scheduling the inspector. She was short, exasperated, and made our requests (to have the inspector call ahead so one of us could get off work to be there) sound onerous and unreasonable. It was surprising, because everyone else was so great. Despite that one odd exchange, our experience with Permitting was fast, easy, and professional. XXXX and XXXX did everything they could to save us money and keep our options open for future work on the house. Very much appreciated.
- Accessory Dwellings with an upper floor needs to be simplified. Building code and Planning and Zoning code conflict and are unclear. Mezzanine does not include ceiling hts., zoning does, various rules including stairwell in the total square footage and counted on both floors when the stair can only be used from the main floor to get to the upper floor, etc. Just simplify it to 1/3 of the total square footage of the lower floor, counting the stair in the main floor square footage and if the area with a ceiling ht of 7 ft. (IRC code min.) is less than 200 sq. ft. no code stairway is required.
- Although the staff was friendly and seemed knowledgeable, I ended up having to make more trips to the Planning office and take more time away from my professional work than I had planned, because I was told two different sets of requirements by two different staff members. My first trip was to find out what was required for my particular situation. The second trip was to deliver what I had been told was required, but I was told of an additional requirement, which caused me two additional trips as well as additional confusion with my title company. This was very disruptive to my life, especially considering my due diligence early in the process to make the best use of my time.
- City will need to hire more inspection staff to cover increased load, freeing up plans examining staff to process plans in a more timely manner.
- Computer changes are not allowing the office girls to submit a simple mechanical,plumbing permit. We wasted alot of time trying to get a simple permit,couple of trips. Should be a simple process but nobody seemed to be able to

get an answer for a 15 minute process. We have bought hundreds of permits over the years and it seems like it is getting worse.

- Credit card payment & permitting online for simple electrical, plumbing & mechanical permits.
- Figure out how the fire department can take our money and process the permits in one stop!!!
- frustrated with the BSD time frame for completing review
- I appreciated very much being ""assigned"" one person, who led me through the entire process. She was wonderful to deal with...very down to earth; she actually listened to me, to our proposals and questions, and was always cheerful and helpful...
- My one ""negative"" comment is that our building needed repair...the repairs had nothing to do with the proposed business..but, once the word ""business"" was spoken, no one could separate ""Building repair"" from ""business"". Consequently, the building continued in a state of disrepair until the proposed business was approved.

Other than that, I was very happy and actually surprised that everyone was so helpful, courteous, consistent. Fortunately, the ""horror stories"" I had heard about dealing with the City proved to be rumors, and this was a very smooth experience. I say, Thank you, everyone, including the main receptionist, for a very positive experience!"

- I brought in the application I printed off the website to the center to check with someone to make sure I had the correct paperwork. A technician asked if I was within city limits which I am, & said yes I had the correct paperwork after barely looking at my paperwork. I came to find out I printed off an application for the county not the city when first trying to submit it. This caused a little extra time on my part. I suggest that the technicians keep an eye out for this simple mistake.
- I called in for an inspection. Your phone system asked if you want to leave a message for the inspector to press 4. I left a detailed message. We were written up on violations for no contact and access for the inspector. which was part of my detailed message. When I called to find out why my detailed message was not addressed I was told. "" You did not leave a message. Our computer would know if you left a message."" I thought that was rather rude. The inspector XXXX. was really responsive and made every attempt to make arrangements to come back and re-inspect. At that point there where no corrections needed and we could proceed. With the timing of the little SNAFU it put the job behind to where we are now fighting class schedule to complete the rest of the job but that's life.
I the future I think for our needs I will try to talk to a rep. while scheduling an inspection so the automated phone thing don't become an issue.
I would like to thank to COB for this forum to find out how you are interacting with the public.
- I feel the staff is working to help the public and contractors better
- I had all but the final inspection done for a simple remodel. I missed the deadline for the final and received a registered letter from the Police department. This seemed was upsetting to my children and is unnecessary, as I renewed as soon as I was financially able.
- I had an expired permit that I had intended to take care of at some vague future point, but then we started getting letters from the Police Department saying that if we didn't finish up our work that there would be bad consequences. As I had the Public Works inspector over to review what needed to be done, he said that if the work

wasn't completed in two weeks our water could be shut off! Yikes! Well, between the police letter and the threat of water being turned off, I got the work done, inspected and passed. I still have a number of other tasks to complete before mid-June. Hopefully I'll get it done.

But the big question for me is whether EVERYONE is getting police letters for leaving their permits open, or is there something special that we have done to get this attention. If you know, please call. *{Customer Identifying Information Removed}*

- I just want to say that the staff was very helpful, polite and friendly!
- I only apply for Fire Permits. My experience with XXXXX has been awesome...she rocks! However, the payment procedures need to be re-thought. Going from the Fire Department to the Permit Center and back to the Fire Department is a waste of time and gas.
- I used the subject to field inspection process for my remodel and I was quite satisfied with the process. I review the handout and indicated at the counter that I was hoping to use the process. Once the plans were reviewed for the scope of my project and a preliminary review by the building services employee I got my permit the same day. I hope you continue to use this approach, especially on interior remodels.
- "I was given incorrect information twice regarding the type of permit I needed to file for the same project. Much time and money was spent going in the wrong direction-based on guidance from your office. I was approved for one permit which was then revoked (for good reasons-(I dont understand how I was approved in the first place) I was not given all the feedback from all the reviewers until 2 weeks after the initial review. I dont know why I was not given that paperwork, and why the third reviewers comments were not made known to me in the beginning.
- I interacted with various people who all claimed to be knowledgeable in the the field-yet, again and again I was disappointed and misinformed. I will say, the staff was somewhat helpful despite themselves. And I hope the completion of this process goes more smoothly than the permitting process.
- I was very satisfied with the people behind the counter. I believe they were very professional and courteous with me even though I was not current with all the regulations and requirements. My only complaint was in not having all issues addressed by one person. So, one person could indicate that I was progressing forward up and until another person would flag something entirely different. This was the only frustrating issue I had with the permit center. Overall, I found all of them helpful and sincerely willing to work with me.
- I would like to do all my permitting on line like L@I does it sure cuts down on drive time and saves lots of money.would like the permit site to be more user friendly so i could look up all of our permits at one time with out having all of the permit # on hand.You should look at the L@I web site as i think they have a very good system that does not cost us a lot of man hours buy not having to drive to city hall for every permit and sometimes driving there 3 to 4 times to get a basic electrical permit
- it seems that there are limited parking spaces for applicants for electrical. it also drives the price of small jobs up to physically go to the permit office and have to wait in line for a permit to add an outlet or can light. also as a contractor i never have a checkbook or cash on me. i know that when i work in bellingham i need to but online payment and purchase of over the counter electrical permits for no wait permits would save everyone time and money. i dont mean to be critical these are just my thoughts. for the way it is set up now it is efficient for what it is i believe. oh, you should take credit cards, it is 2011 :) thanks for allowing feedback to be given!!!!

- It would be useful if Planning would review their many applications for redundancies. These applications have been added to over a period of time and could use editing and or consolidation. Building Services should consider revising the Special Inspection Form to remove the requirement for individual signatures for owner ,contractor and testing agency. It requires a lot of several days of coordination on part of the applicant to fax around the form for signatures. These special inspections are always noted as conditions on the permit so the applicant/contractor is aware they must have them performed or risk not having inspections signed off.
- It would be VERY helpful if you accepted payment by credit cards online!!!!
- Just one thing, we had an unusal situation and we had two building inspectors come and look at it and mentioned different things, it would have been better to have only the decison maker come. Everyone was very nice though. Thank you
- Keeping in touch by e-mail is very helpful and should be encouraged.
- Lots of improvement in recent years, keep up the great work and thanks.
- Most contractors start work at 8:00 am, some even sooner. When I arrived at 5 till 8:00 I found out you did not open till 8:30. So I stood around for a half hour, otherwise the service was very good. Having to pay down the hall and then come back to get the permit was a bit of a pain also. It would have been a bigger pain if I would not have been there first thing.
- My project was relatively small (a garage) and I encountered no significant problems or issues, even a status change to the plans was promptly resolved.
- My simple remodeling project was delayed over two weeks costing me money and my customer inconveniece. This was a very straight forward project that I think should have been over the counter. XXXXX agreed when he did the final, But because it was determined that it needed an examiner to review it, and XXXX was to busy doing field inspections to do so, it sat on his desk for over two weeks. My other experience last month was regarding another very simple job. I was in the process of designing a new home. The lot was covered with blackberries making it impossible to walk. The customer wanted them cleared so we could get a feel of the lay of the land to aid the design work. It is not in the watershed, and I thought about just doing it, but I figured I better go down to the city and get a permit. They first said that I was not allowed at all. Then a guy from public works said that I could it I submitted a plot plan with erosion control etc. He said that when the actual building permit was issued that I would be given credit for the plot plan and errosion control portion of the fees. I said fine, drew up the plan, submitted it, and a few weeks went by and I was told that they could not issue the permit. I had done what I was told to do, the site plan I submitted was standard per typical guidelines and was not sited as the problem. They simply went back to the first thing that they had told me, that it was not permitted even though the public works guy said that I could. So, I spent my time for nothing, my customer was unable to walk around on the property that they had just perchased, and our home design efforts were compromised.
- No suggestions at this time
- none
- Occupancy Approval form required an 807 Sorm Water Inspection. Requested inspection, recieved conf. # and no show. Not able to get clarification on why storm water department says they do not do inspections called in on Building Permit. Spent may hours calling and being passed from one counter to another with no help.
- On two differnt issues, spoke with 3 different people on both of the 2 very differnt issues and received 3 differnt answers, and the answeres were worlds apart. Who can we trust?

- Overall I was very happy with the whole process. It was a little confusing for a first timer to figure out which permit applied, and how to go about the inspections. I just did all of the work, except closing up the wall, and the inspector checked it all and passed my final inspection. If I had needed to have any preliminary inspections, no one informed me of them.
- Plan review shouldn't be required for every little thing. Set fees should be in place.
- PLEASE INITIATE PROCESS TO OBTAIN SIMPLE/SMALL ELECTRICAL PERMITS OVER THE INTERNET FOR CONTRACTORS
- Please make all your website pdf application forms fillable.
- Please see comments on question 15.
- Received a letter "Consolidated Correction Letter" stating need more information and contact XXXX. It took 3 weeks to hear from XXXX after multipul calls to the number listed.
- THE ABILITY TO PULL PERMITS ONLINE WOULD BE NICE
- The change in staff changes the answers that you may get over the period of an on-going planning process.
- "The counter staff has become very good in the last couple of years but the field staff has really gone down hill. Bellingham has laid off thier best inspectors and the remaining ones seem to feel that doing inspections is below them. XXXX in particular who used to be an electrical inspector now is a general pain in the butt for everyone. He has made inappropriate comments in front of home owners and can be very hard to work with. This is not a one time problem, I have had issues with his inspections on my last two permits.
- Due to the self supporting nature of the building dept. I would hope that they and planning can get together to make it less problematic to work with them, if they can not they may find that they have no work at all. In the future any building renovations/repairs that go on will not be permitted and new development will continue to take place out of the city limits. The counter staff as told me that they don't go looking for work being preformed without a permit. I will continue to pull permits for all of my work but will focus my marketing in other areas including whatcom county and the Anacortes area so that I don't have to deal with COB permit requirements and the inspectors with bad attitudes.
- The expectation needs to be clear and held accountable, just as much as we are held accountable to the timeliness.
- The Permit Center has been short-staffed due to circumstances beyond its control and has still been able to meet our immediate needs. Kudos.
- The permit center staff was very courteous and helpful. Wait time for receiving comments is long, but expected, due to the limited staff.
- The permit I got was for overdimensional load movement on City streets.
- The permits are way too expensive. The low voltage electrical permits cost about 4 times what the state charges.
- The problem is that the managers of the departments are hamstrung by the employee union. That is why XXXX left - he could not make the personnel changes he felt were needed. XXXXX has complained about his inability to make change because of the union. Professional employees need to be exempt from the employees' union. Then and only then can meaningful change occur. Until then, the employees will continue their vindictive ways towards private sector professionals. Here is an example: we designed a commercial remodel that clearly required an architect or engineer's stamp. Our clients contractor removed our stamp and title block and got a permit within 3 days. He did so because he knew that with our

stamp and title block on the drawings it would take weeks. And in fact, we did submit a commercial remodel much smaller and less significant in scope at the same time, and it took 6 weeks.

- The thing is becoming process oriented. There appears to be little room for staff to exercise its best judgement.
- The time to do the actual review for an electronic fire alarm that only monitors a sprinkler riser is at most ten minutes, but it took three weeks to get a permit, When we submitted the application it was made known that it would at least three weeks, compared to Whatcom county, that can deliver a much more complex system that would take perhaps up to an hour of review time, we get them back within a few days. It appears that the fire department needs more staff to deliver in a timely manner. One project last year took over four months to get it approved that destroys a contractor. Delays that are beyond two weeks are longer than almost every other AHJ that we work with. They need some help! Please understand as we checked the boxes above the staff people are fine it just seems there is too much work for to short of a staff to get done in a timely manner.
- The value that was assessed to the completed addition was to high. The city valued it at 28,000 dollar improvement and we spent 15,000 to build. I would like to have further discussion about the asseement.
- There was supposed to be 14 day min. between sumitting addl. requirements on LLA application and hearing back on its completeness. This time-frame was exceeded. I'm happy with all other interactions.
- They are doing a better job with fewer people. Oh, wait. I guess they've just caught up with the rest of us!
- They need to learn the meaning of the words REASONABLENESS and SERVICE and apply them to their jobs.
- Traipsing back and forth from the Fire Department and City Hall to make payments and back to Fire Department is very unconvenient due to pay parking.
- waiting 3 days for a simple permit is a poor way to run your business.
- We often have five or six small projects going on simultaneously and need to meet with the inspectors to ensure good communication. It is important thatwe can establish at least approximate inspection times.
- We're very satisfied. There's a great deal of detail, and we did feel anxiety along the way, but codes and restrictions aim at comfortable and well-conceived building. Our experience dealing with the staff at the planning office was very positive. Thanks!
- Would like to be able to purchase Electrical permits on line, either by credit card or a deposit account for users.
- I will say this was a frustrating process filled with miscommunication. Our contractor tried several times to set up the final inspection (and has record of this) to which he had no response from permitting which resulted in our receipt of a violation notice (!!!). On our final inspection, the inspection officer required us to put back on the turn nobs on our locks that the previous inspector required us to take off. Good thing I kept them. It would seem to be good business if inspectors interpreted the rules the same way and kept records of required changes. That way if different inspectors visit then they are all on the same page - not telling us to do opposite things (as was our case.)

APPENDIX B: SURVEY SCRIPT

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

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

1. Which description best fits you as a user of City of Bellingham Permit Center during (current time period)?
 - One-time or infrequent user
 - Developer
 - Professional designer/architect/engineer
 - Contractor
 - Other, please specify

2. How have your recent experiences with the Permit Center compared to your expectations?
 - Much better than I expected
 - Better than I expected
 - About what I expected
 - Worse than I expected
 - Much worse than I expected

3. Which description best fits your project(s) from (current time period)? (check all that apply)
 - Single Family Residential
 - New Multi-Family Residential Construction
 - Commercial Remodel / Change of Use
 - New Single-Use Commercial
 - Mixed Use Commercial, Industrial, Institutional
 - Trade-Specific (Electrical, Plumbing, Fire, etc.)

4. How well were you informed about what kind of permit review was needed for your application and how long it would take?
 - Extremely well
 - Somewhat well
 - Not at all

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

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

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

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

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

7. General counter assistance

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

8. Processing your application including review and corrections

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

9. Construction Inspections (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

10. Certificate of Occupancy Process (if applicable)

(Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied)

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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

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

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

- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

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

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