

REPORT

**City of Bellingham  
Permit Center Customer Satisfaction Survey  
2012 Quarter 3 and Quarter 4**

**January 2013**

**Prepared by the  
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at  
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## ■ INTRODUCTION

During the last two quarters of 2012 (July to December ), 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 2012.

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 customer satisfaction survey was again conducted online, researchers obtained email addresses from the Permit Center for the individuals that used their services. A total of 854 email invitations were sent to take the survey during the last two quarters of 2012. Ninety-four (94) email addresses either opted-out or resulted in a hard or soft bounce status. This resulted in 760 survey invites being delivered.

Seventy (70) individuals completed the survey during the third quarter of 2012 (July to September) and another seventy-four (73) completed the survey in the fourth quarter (October to December). This resulted in a total of 143 respondents for an 18.8% response rate. This calculates to a 7.39% margin of error on the survey.

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

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

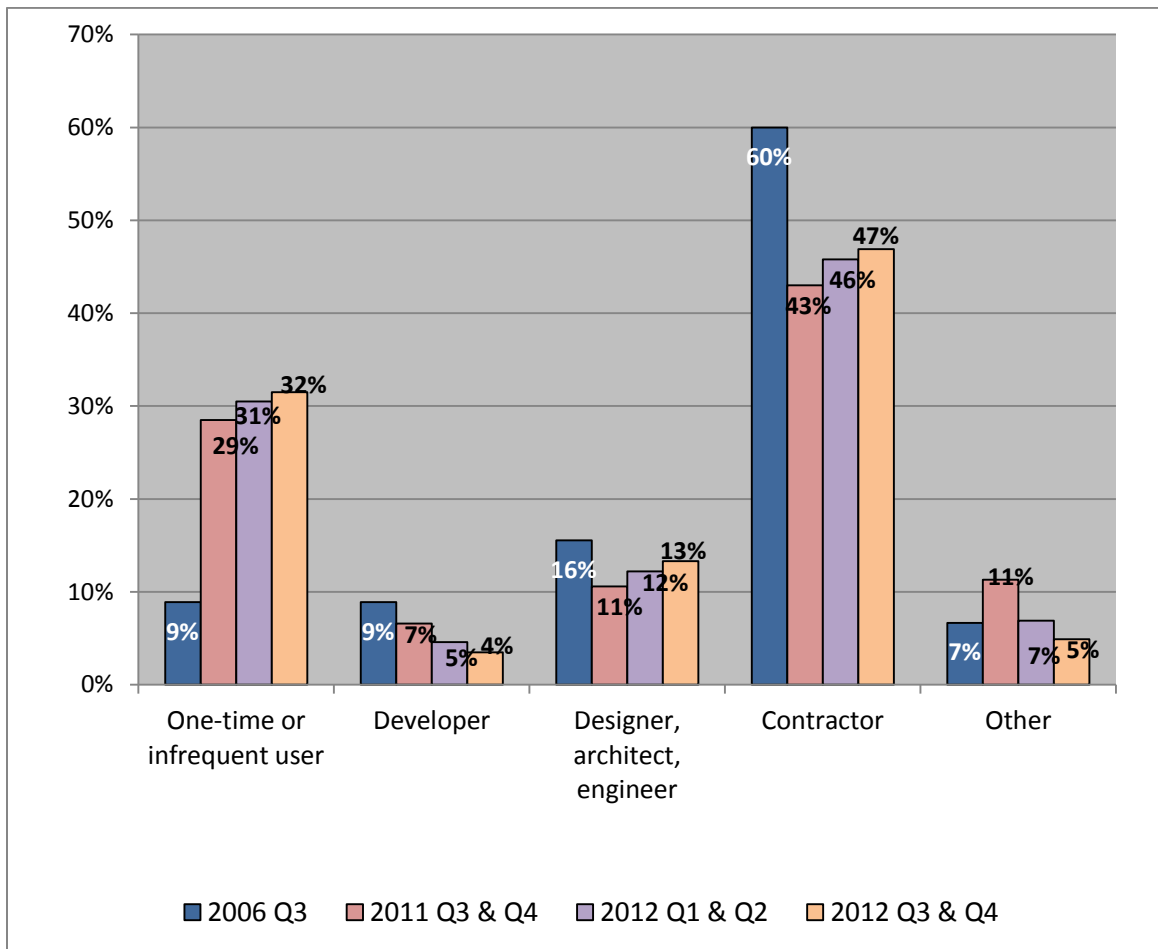
## TYPE OF CUSTOMERS

In order to understand the customers using the Permit Center, users were asked to describe the role that brought them to the Permit Center from July to December of 2012. As figure 1 indicates, contractors (47%) and one-time or infrequent users (32%) continue to be the most frequent users of the Permit Center.

The percentage of developers and other users continued to decrease during the last half of 2012 by 1% and 2% respectively.

Customer types reported under other include: *Development Consultant, Habitat for Humanity, Landlord, some of all the above, My company needs a permit approx 6 times a year, non profit organization, Professional permit expeditor but first time to Bellingham, Project Consultant*

Figure 1. Distribution of Permit Center Customer Type  
(N=143 for current time period)



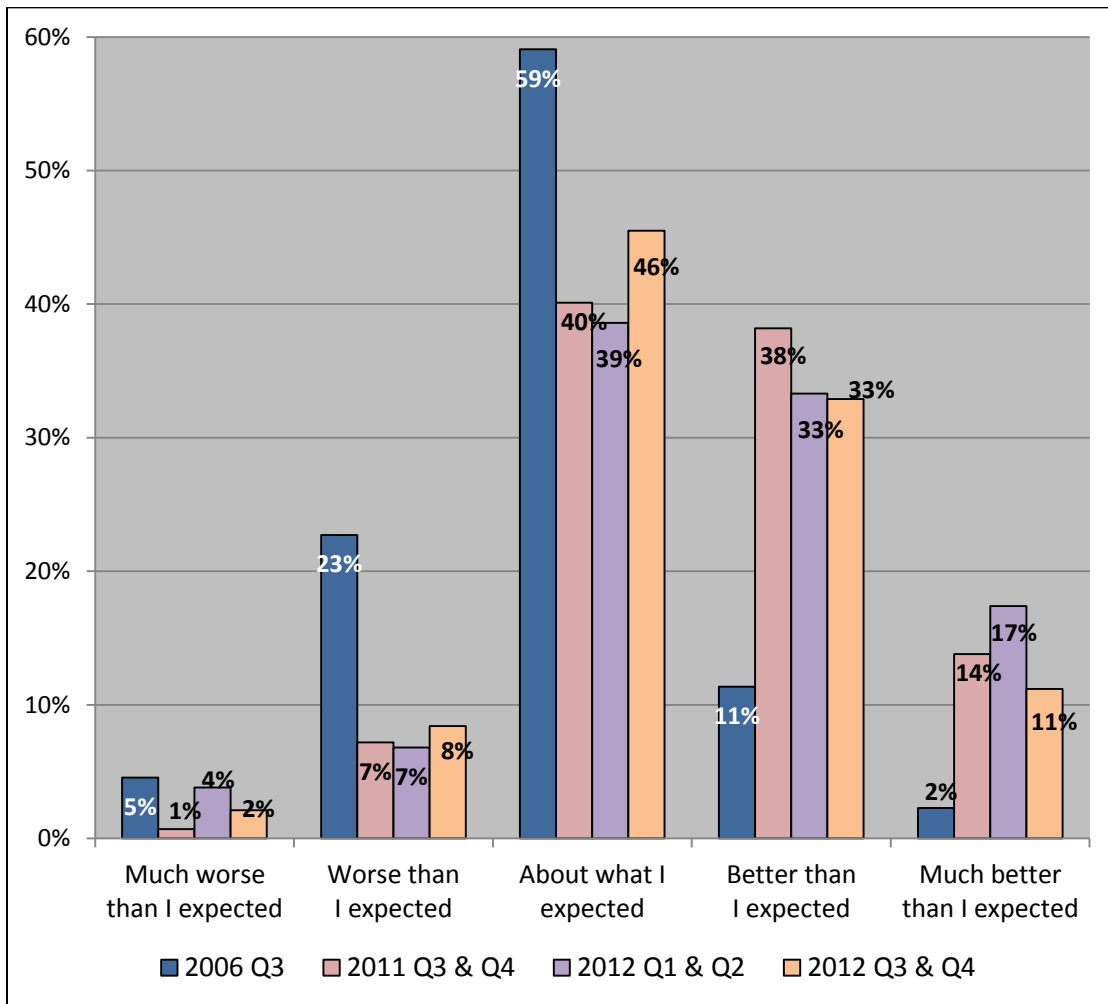
## OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked about their overall experience with the Permit Center. Figure 2 shows that during July to December, 44% of respondents said that their experience was *better than or much better than I expected*. This is a decrease of 7% over the first half of 2012.

The percentage of users who reported that their experience was *much worse* than expected decreased to 2% during the last half of 2012. Most users (46%) rated the experience to be *about what I expected*.

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

(N=143 for current time period)



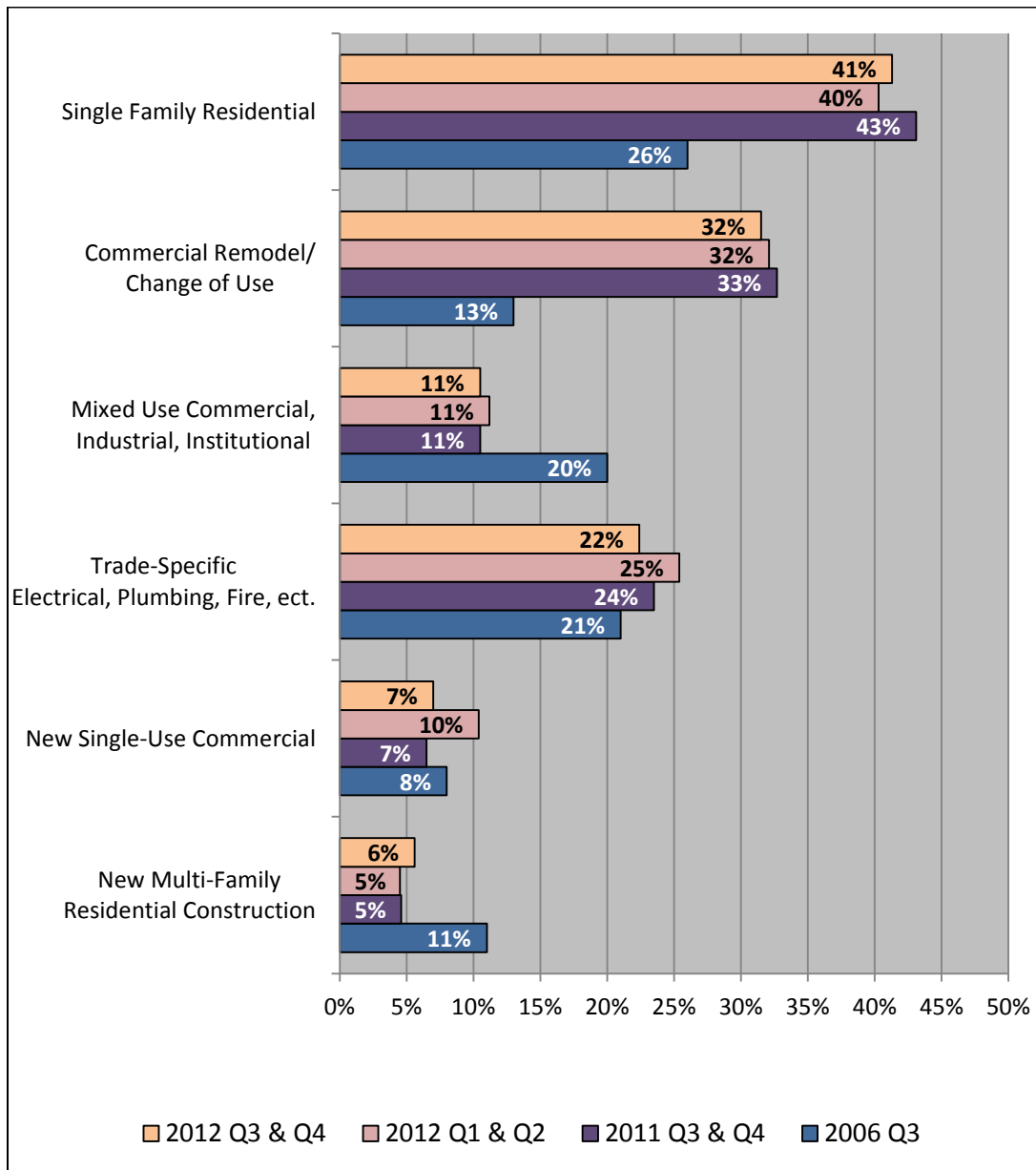
## PROJECT TYPES

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 (41%); however, they made up a smaller proportion of overall project than in the last half of 2011. The percentage of users who reported new single-use commercial projects decreased to 7%.

Please note that respondents could select more than one type of project, so the total number of projects (169) exceeds the total number of respondents (n=143).

**Figure 3. Distribution of Project Types**

(Ns vary for each project type)



## PERMIT CENTER MATERIALS

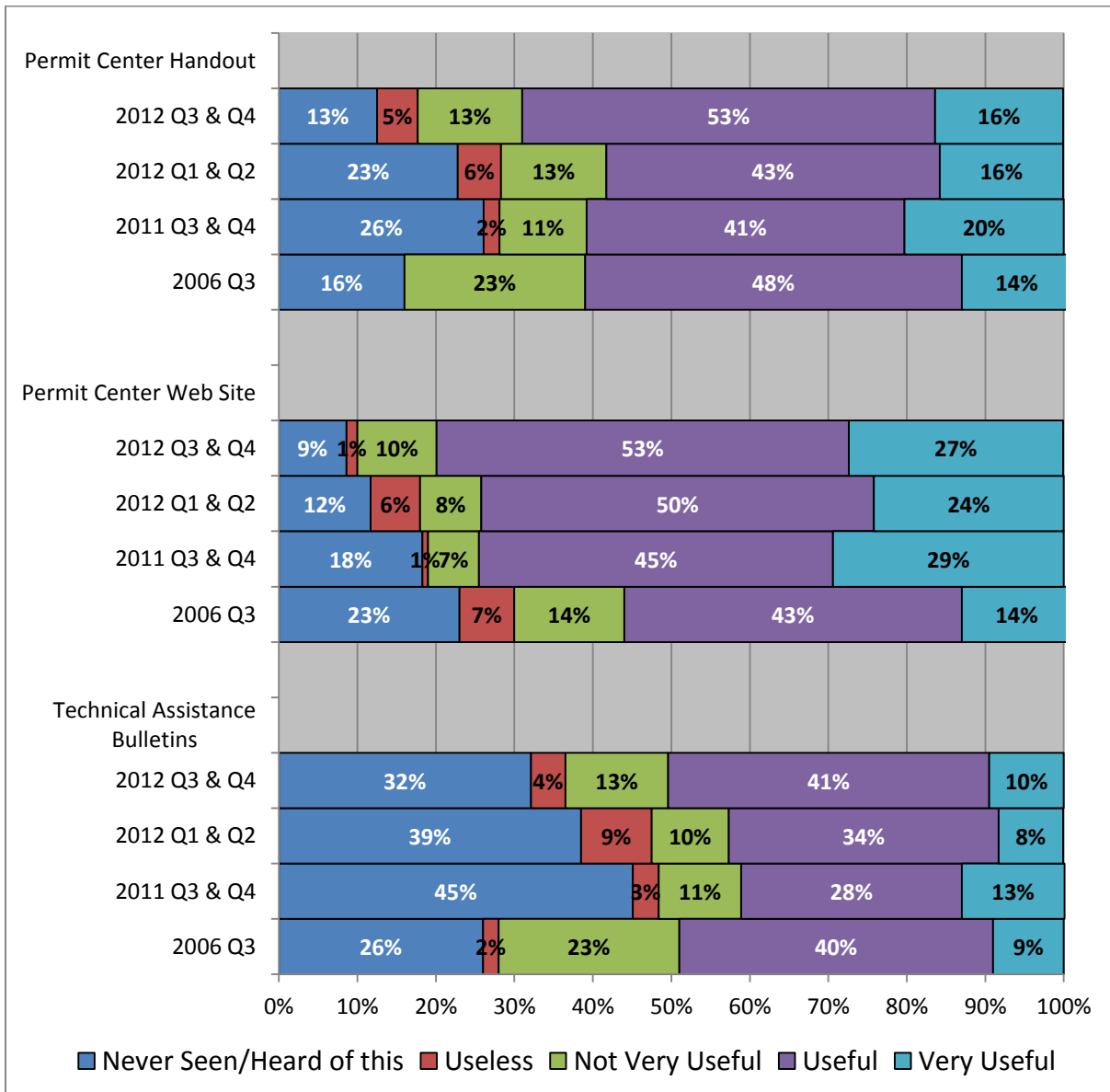
Users were asked to rate the usefulness of the Permit Center support materials. This included the Center’s website, handouts, and assistance bulletins.

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of customers that found the materials *useful* or *very useful* increased for all materials in the last half of 2012. The percentage of respondents that reported the materials as *useless* decreased for all materials. However, 5% of users still report that the Permit Center handouts are *useless*.

Users’ awareness of support materials is increasing. The percentage of users who reported they had *never seen/heard of this* has continued to decrease from the last half of 2011.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



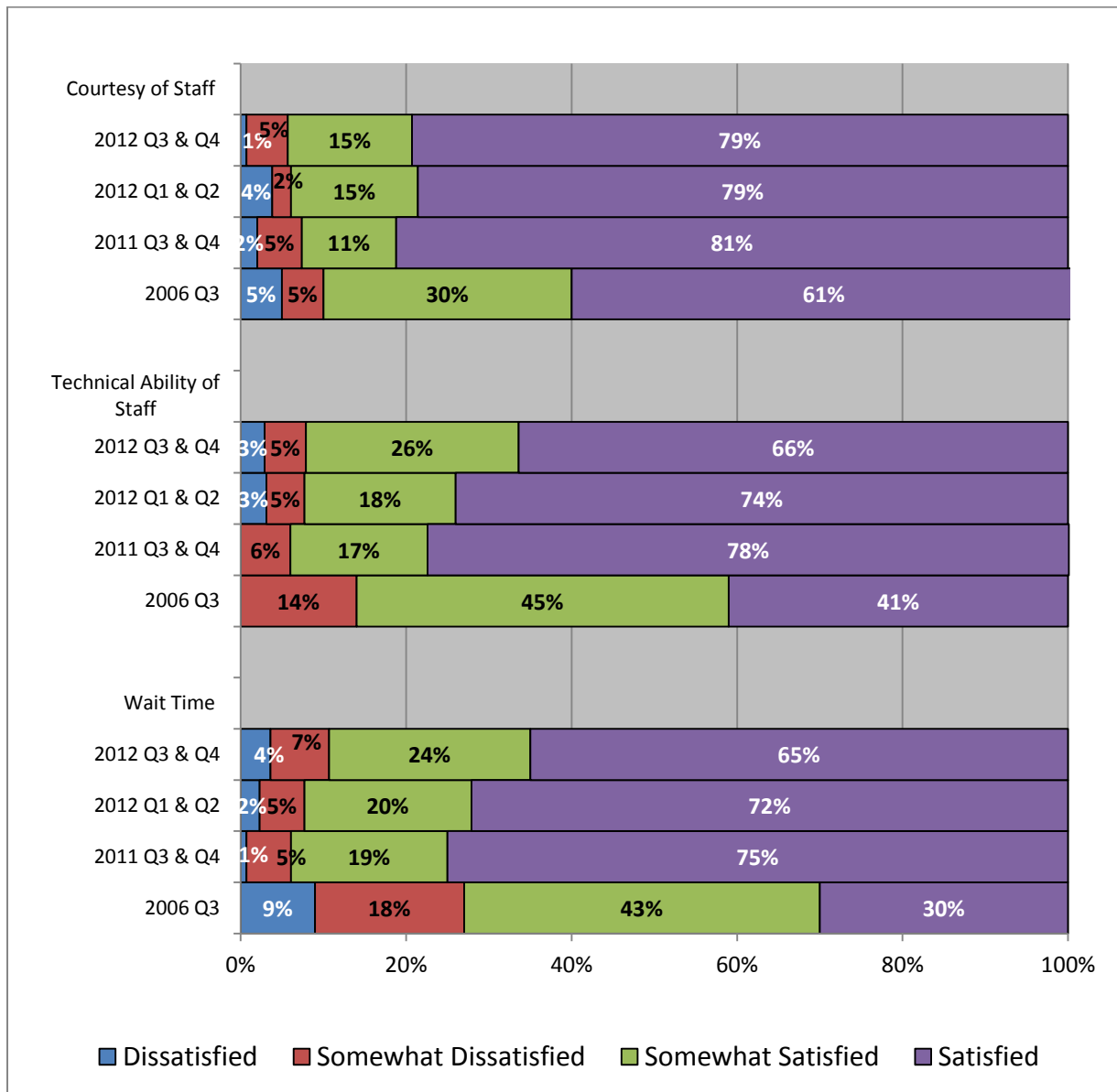
## COUNTER ASSISTANCE

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the Permit Center's counter staff. Respondents who reported that they were *satisfied* decreased from the first half of 2012 for technical ability of staff and wait time.

One percent (1%) of respondents reported being *dissatisfied* with the courtesy of the staff. This is decrease of 3% over the first half of 2012.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



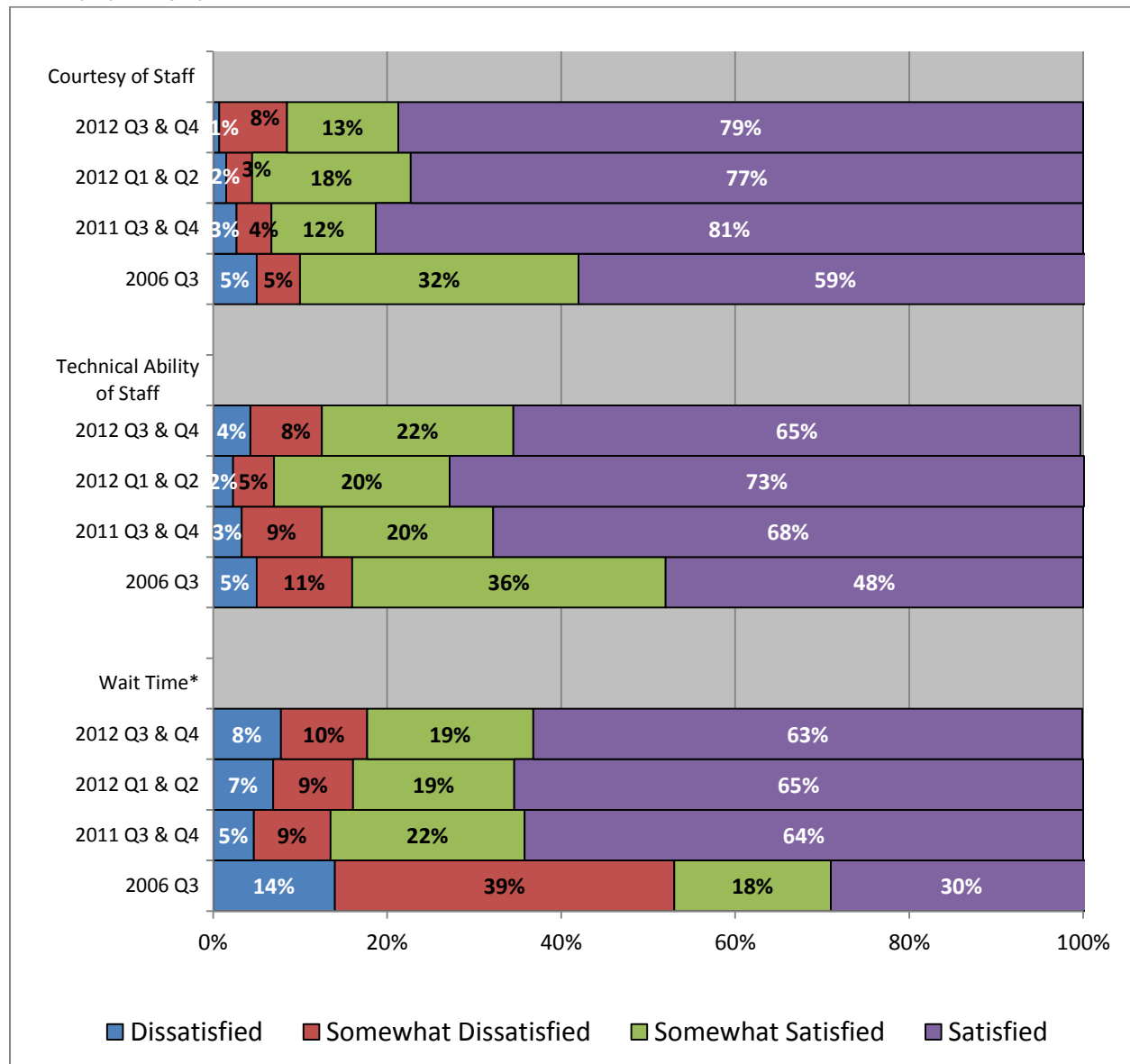
## PROCESSING APPLICATION

Permit Center users were asked to evaluate the application processing procedures. As figure 6 shows, the courtesy of staff continues to be rated highly. Only 1% of respondents reported being *dissatisfied* with the courtesy of staff.

Users who reported being *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied* with the technical ability of staff increased to 12%. The percentage of users who reported being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* with wait time increased to 18%. This level of dissatisfaction has not been reported since the last half of 2010.

**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



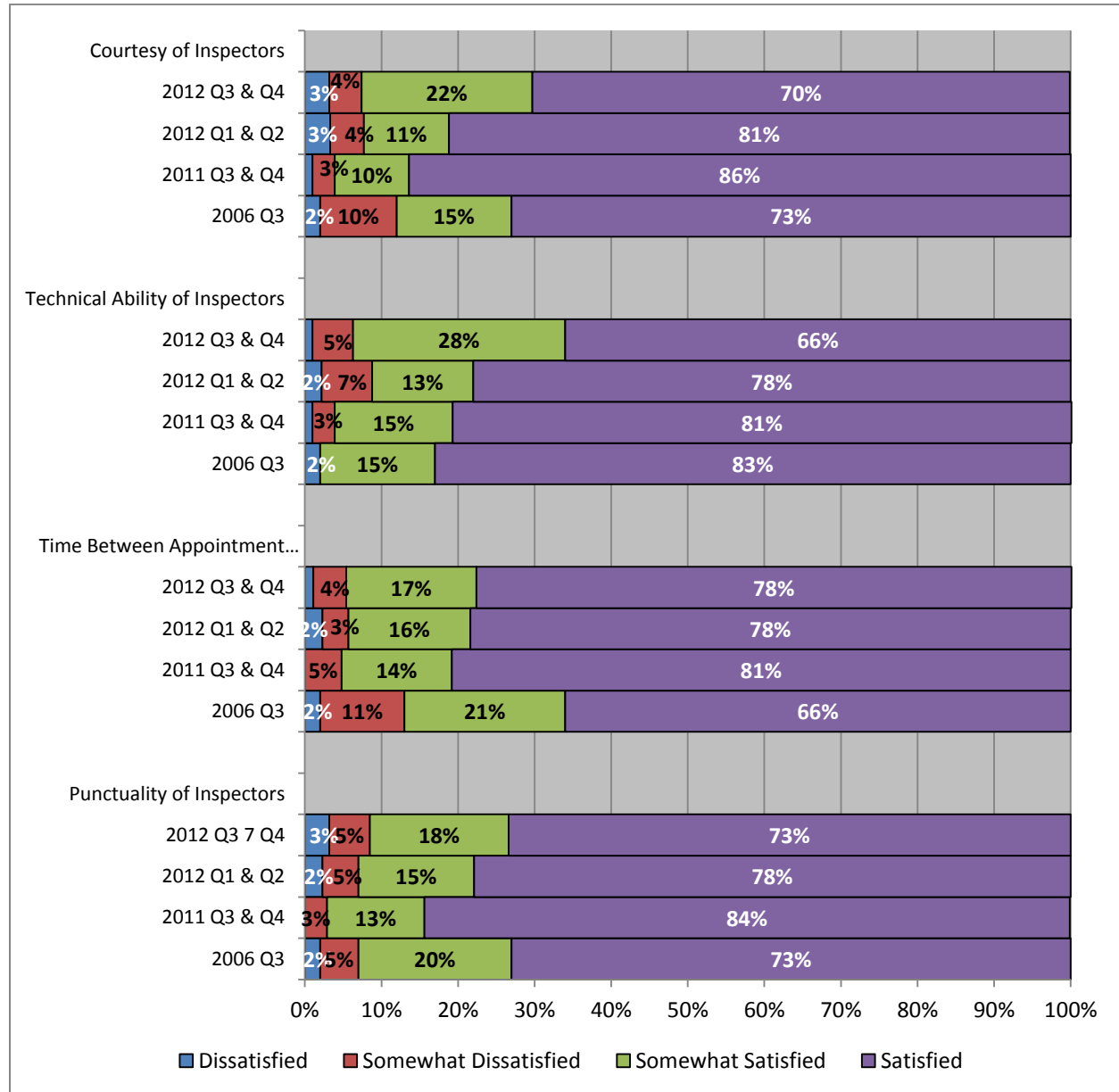
## INSPECTORS

The inspectors from the Permit Center were also evaluated by customers. Figure 7 shows that for the last half of 2012 users were least satisfied with the technical ability of inspectors. Users who reported they were *satisfied* dropped to 66%. This represents a 12% decrease in satisfaction from the first half of 2012

Dissatisfaction levels did change significantly between the first and last half of 2012.

**Figure 7. Customer Satisfaction with Inspectors**

(Ns vary by category for current time period)



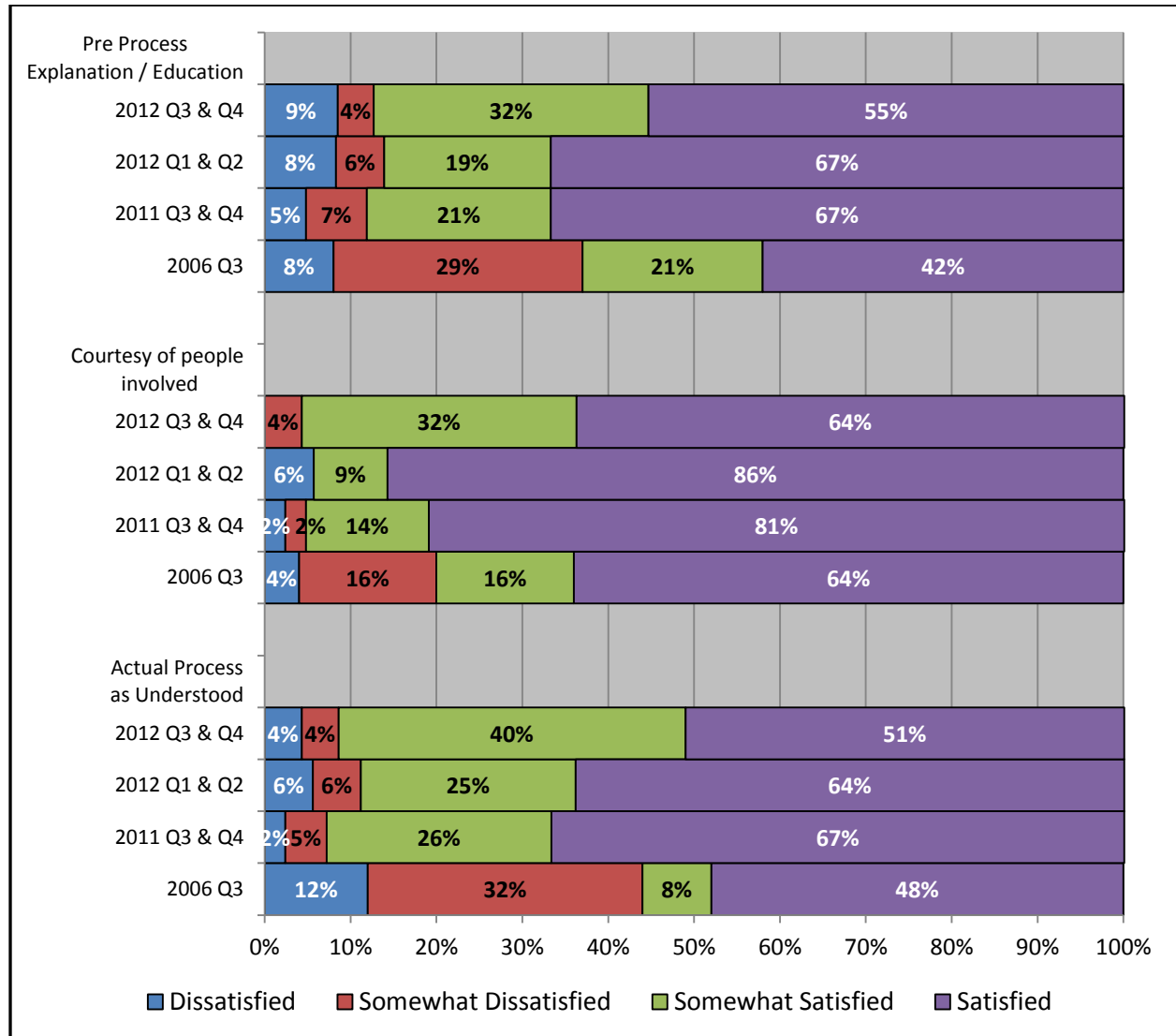
## CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY PROCESS

The Certificate of Occupancy process was also rated by customers. As figure 8 shows, no respondents reported that they were *dissatisfied* with the courtesy of the people involved.

Satisfaction levels are decreasing. Fewer users report that they are *satisfied* but the percentage of users reporting being *somewhat satisfied* has increased.

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

(Ns vary by category for current time period)

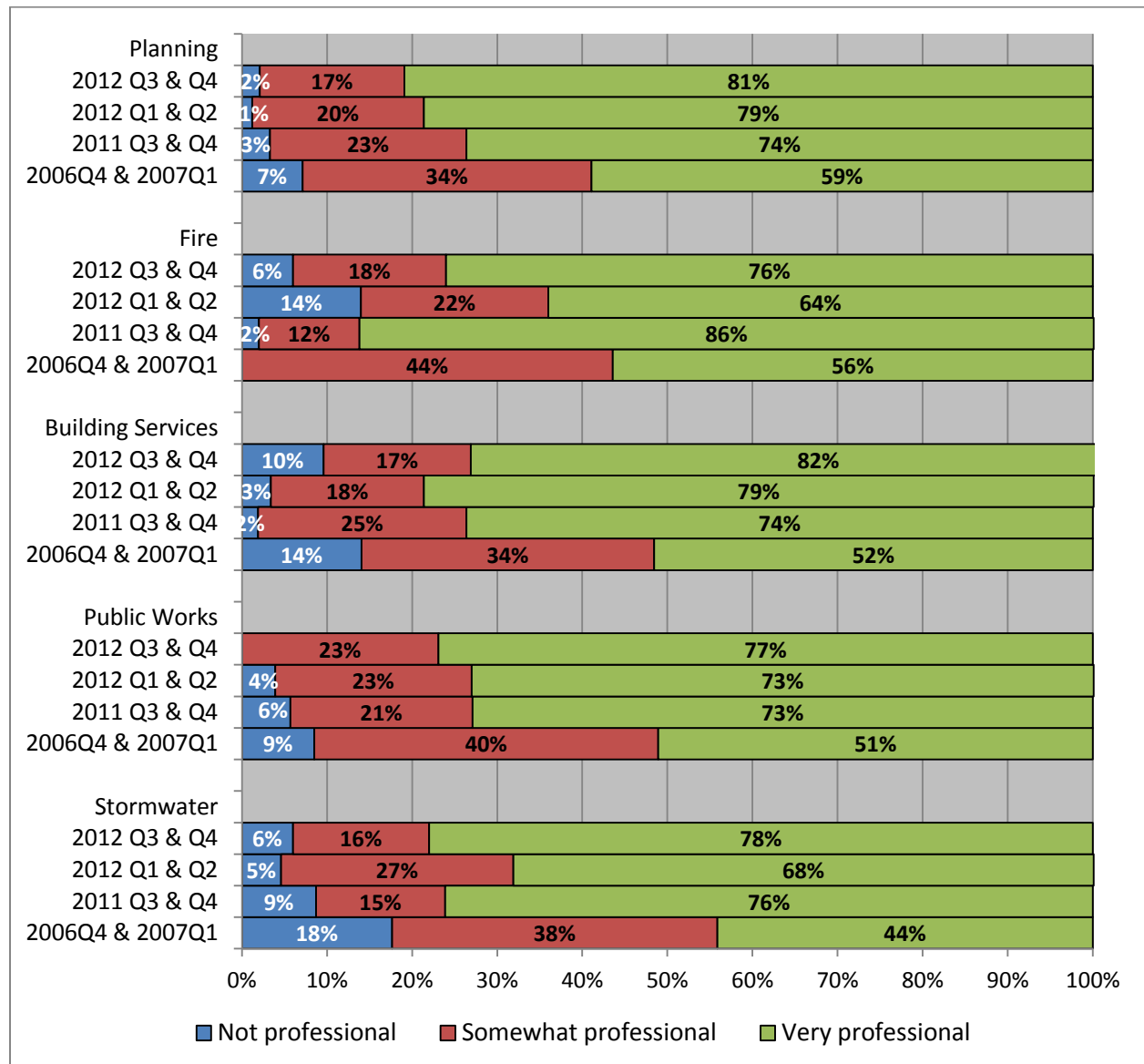


## PROFESSIONALISM

Customers of the Permit Center were asked to rate the professionalism of each department with which they interacted. As figure 9 indicates, users who reported that they found the Fire department *very professional* increased 12% from the first half of 2012 (76% vs. 64%).

There was an increase, to 10%, in the percentage of users that reported Building Services were *not professional*. No users reported that Public Works was *not professional*.

**Figure 9. Rating of the Professionalism of each Department**  
(Ns vary by department for current time period)



## PRE-APPLICATION MEETINGS

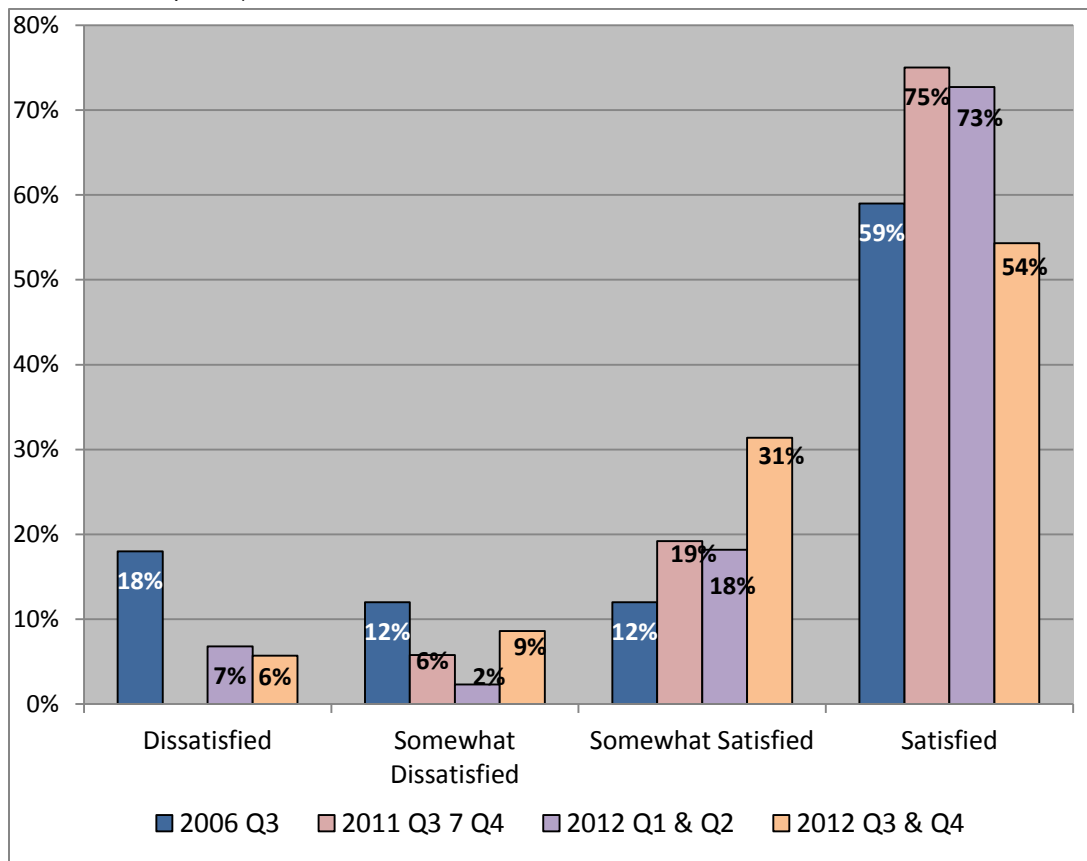
Respondents that participated in a pre-application meeting (n=35) were asked to evaluate the process. As figure 10 shows, the percentage of *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* customers dropped to 85% from 91% in the first half of 2012. The percentage reporting that they were *satisfied* dropped significantly to 54% from 73% from the first half of the year.

Users who reported that they were *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* increased from 9% in the first half of 2012 to 15% in the last half.

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=35 for current time period)



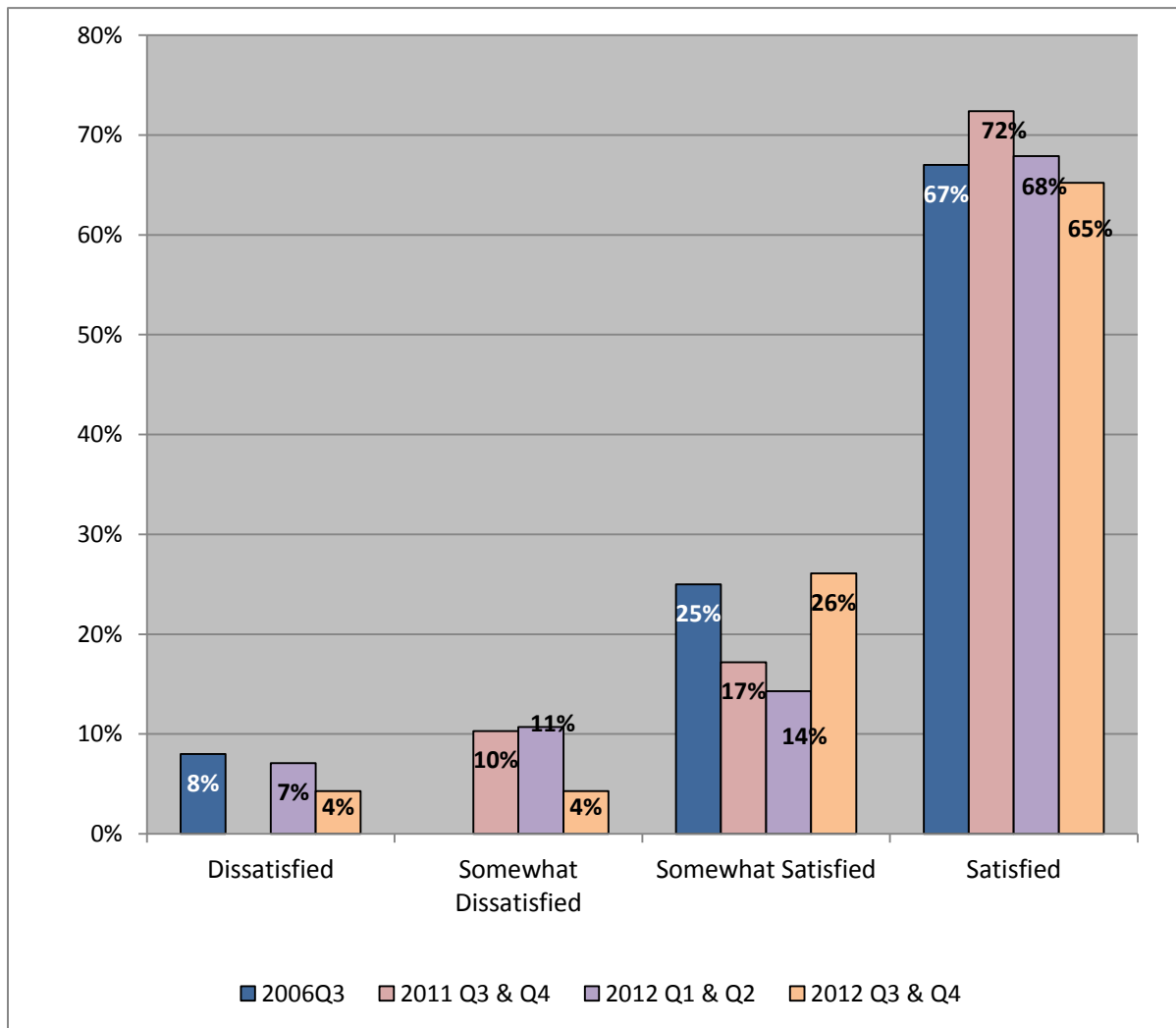
## PRE-CONSTRUCTION MEETINGS

Respondents that participated in a pre-construction meeting (n=23) were also asked to evaluate the process. As figure 11 shows, in the last half of 2012 users that reported being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* decreased to 8%. This is a decrease of 10% from the first half of 2012. Users that reported being *somewhat satisfied* increased to 26%.

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=23 for current time period)



## SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

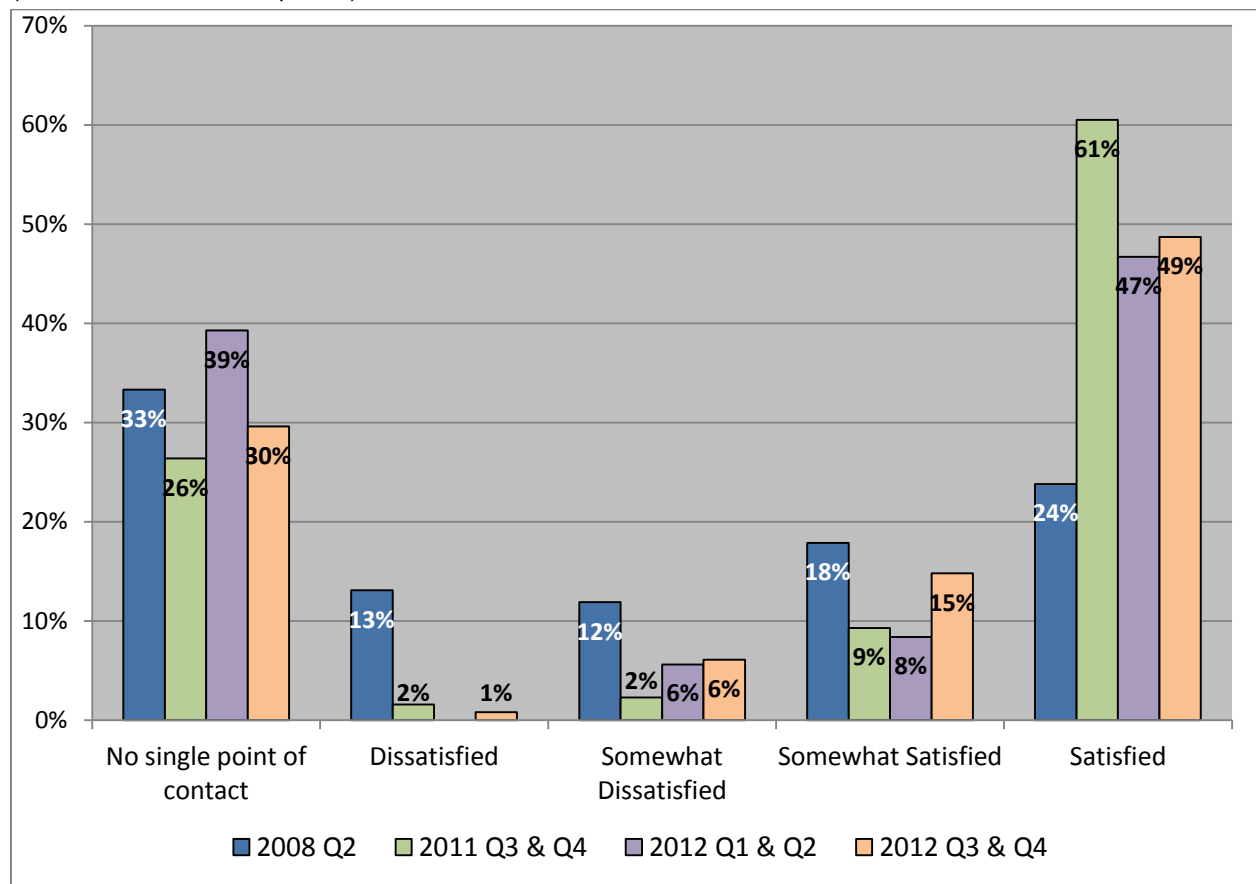
Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the Permit Center’s “single point of contact” approach. As figure 12 indicates, the percentage of respondents who were *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* increased to 64%.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they did not have a single point of contact decreased to 30%.

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

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

(N=115 for current time period)



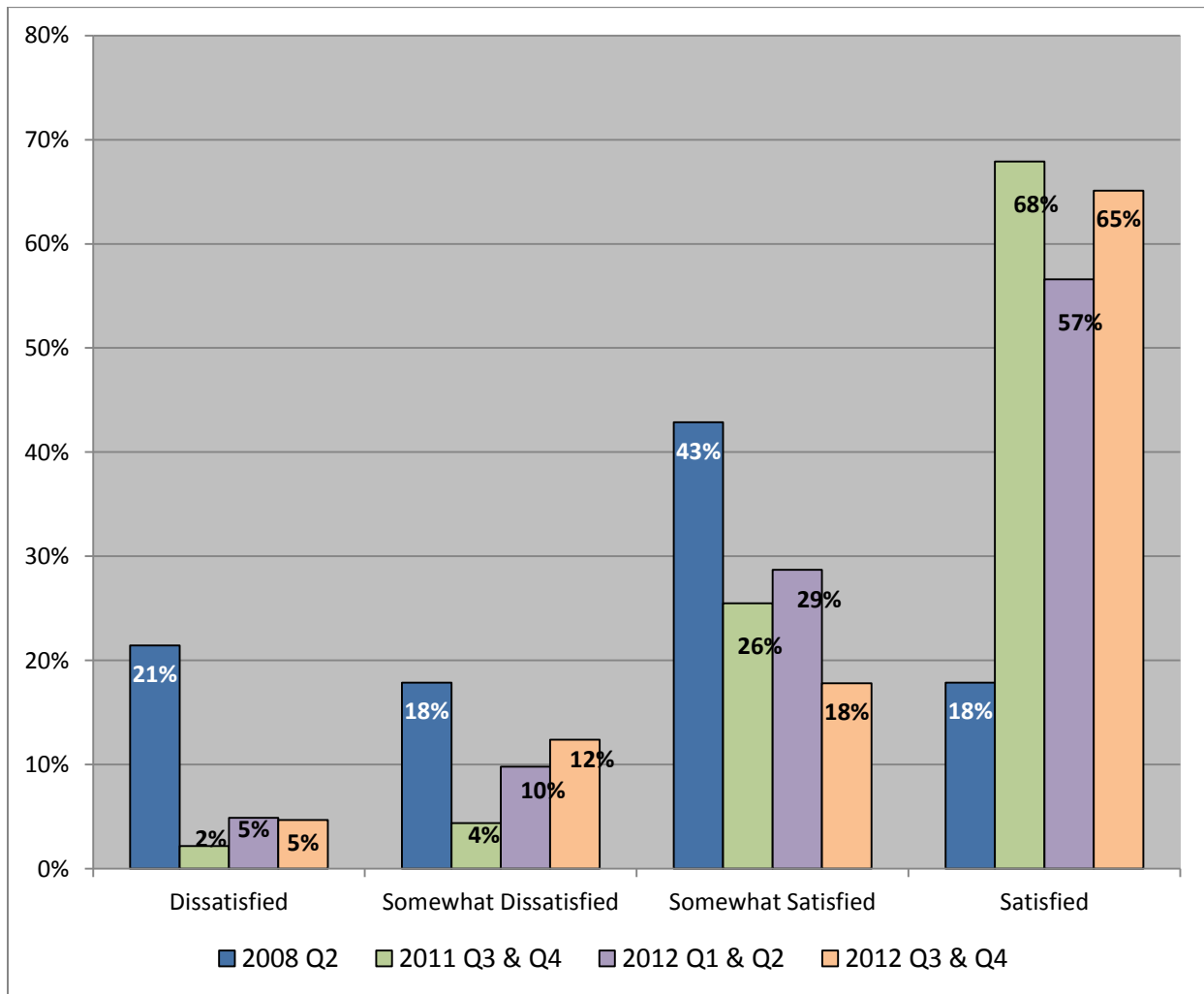
## TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS AND TIMELINES

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

As figure 13 indicates, 65% of users in the last half of 2012 reported that they were *satisfied* with the transparency. Respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* or *somewhat dissatisfied* with the transparency of the process and timelines increased to 17%.

**Figure 13. Satisfaction with Transparency**

(N=129 for current time period)



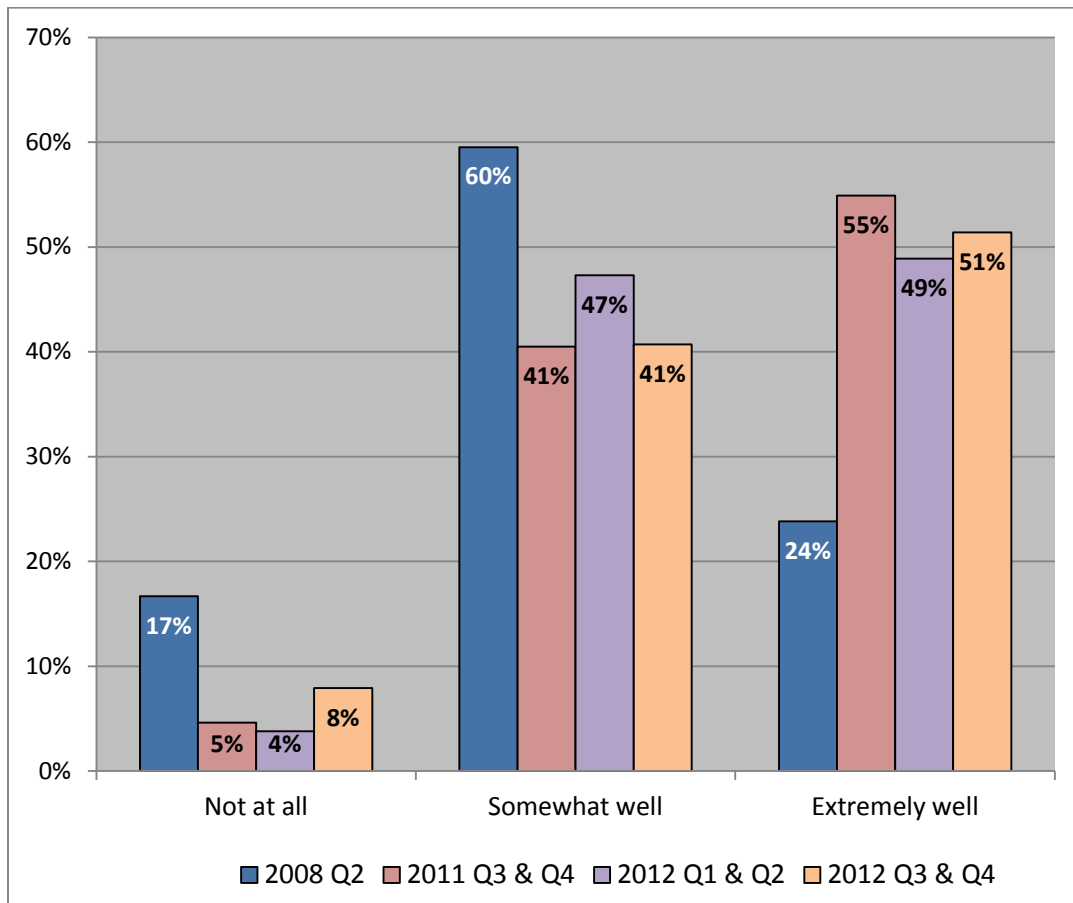
## COMMUNICATION ABOUT PERMIT REVIEWS

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 (92%) were either *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed by the Permit Center staff. Respondents who reported not being informed at all rose to 8%, the highest percent since the last half of 2010.

**Figure 14. Communication about Reviews**

(N=140 for current time period)





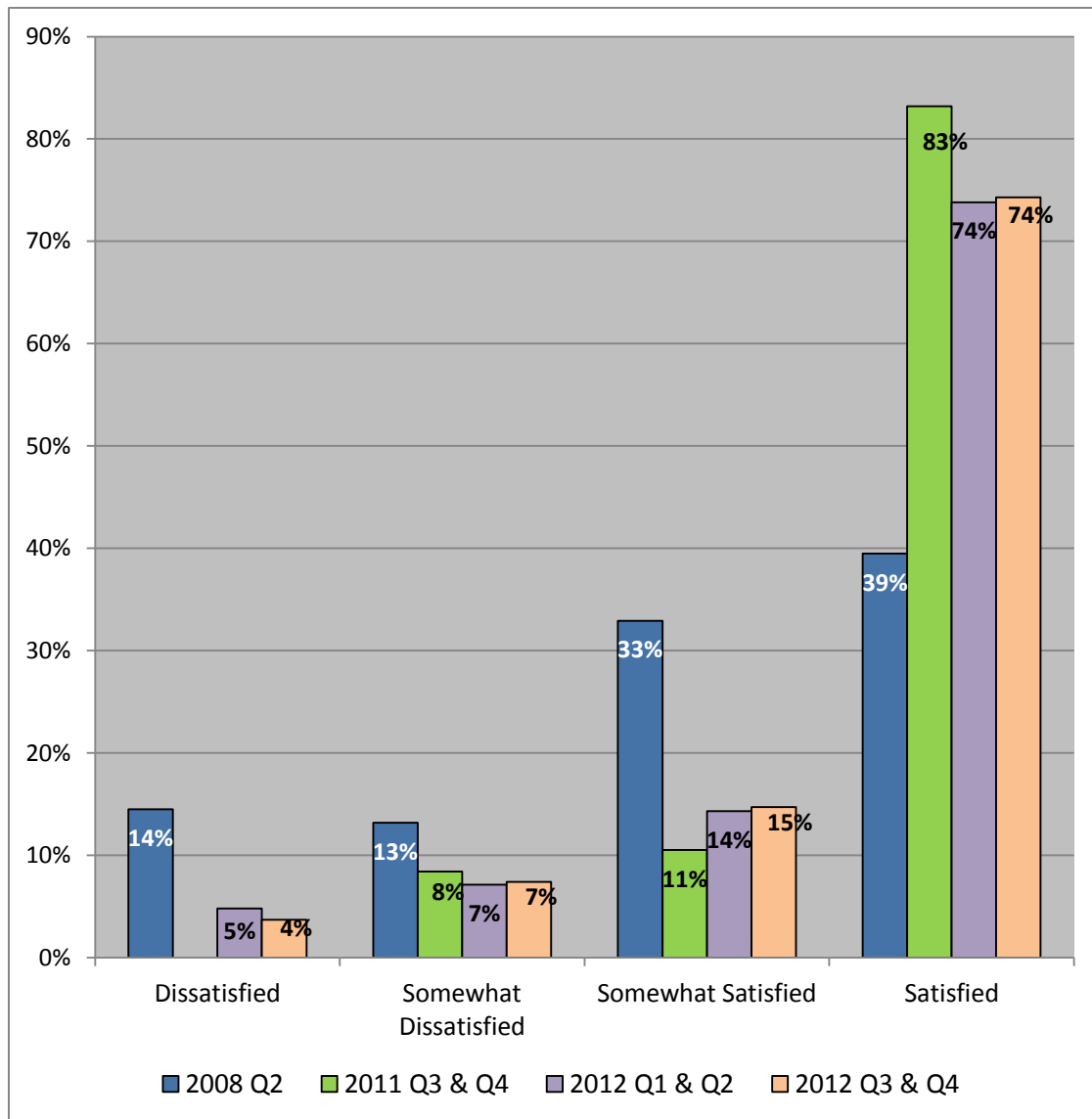
## COMPLETENESS OF APPLICATION REVIEW

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 (74%) were *satisfied* with the level of review completeness by Permit Center staff. This matches the reported level of satisfaction from the first half of 2012. Respondents who reported being *dissatisfied* with the completeness of the application review decreased to 4%.

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

(N=136 for current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

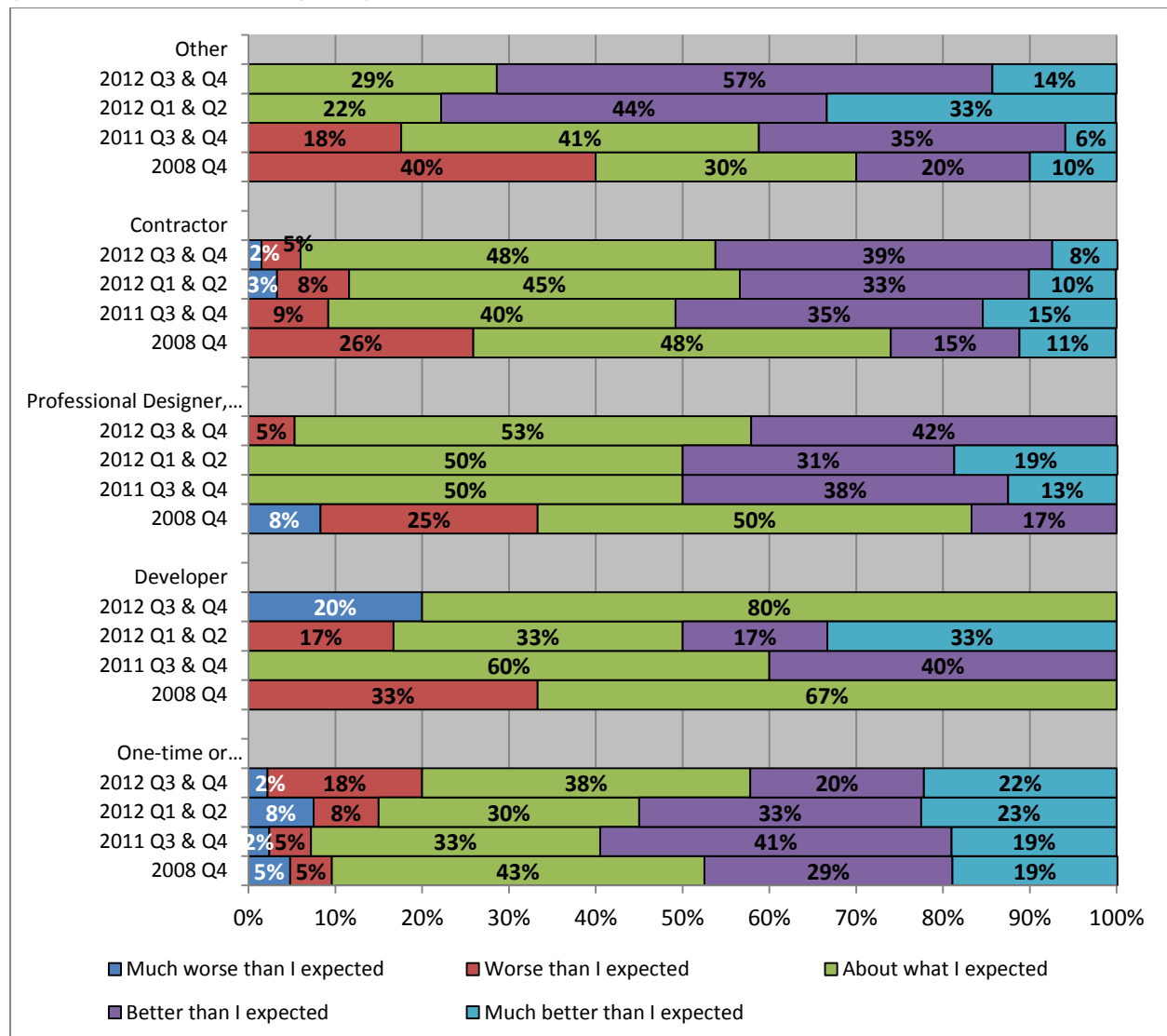
By cross tabulating the data from figure 1 and figure 2, it is possible to match the customer type with the overall experience they had with the permit center.

As figure 16 indicates, other users reported a better experience with 71% responding *better than I expected* or *much better than I expected*. No developers reported that the experience was *better than I expected* or *much better than I expected*.

Twenty percent (20%) of one-time or infrequent users reported the experience was *much worse than I expected* or *worse than I expected*. That is the highest dissatisfaction reported for these users since the last half of 2009.

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

(N=143 for the current time period)



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

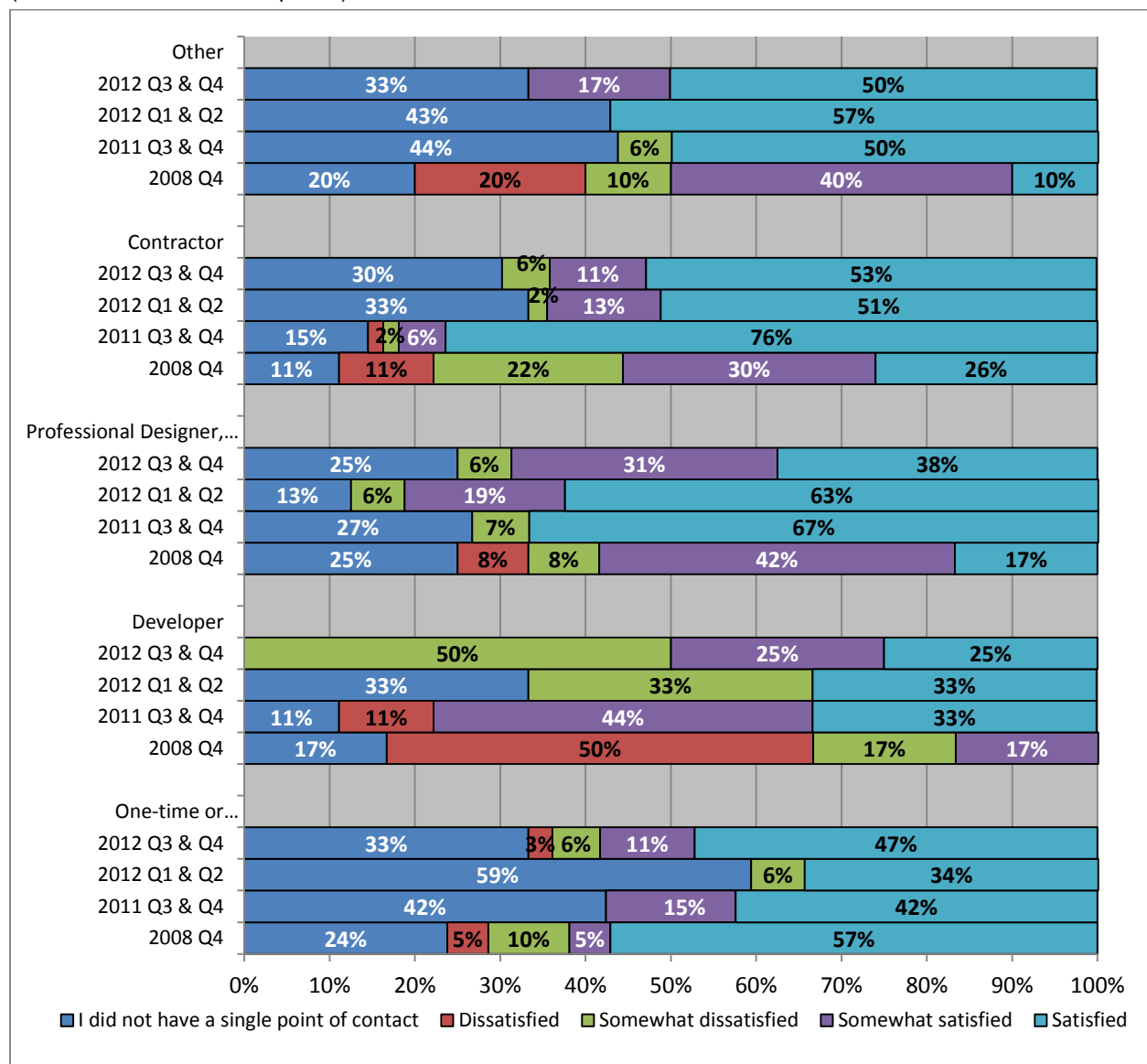
Next, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the Permit Center’s new „single point of contact” approach with your project manager?”

As figure 17 indicates, there was a decrease among all types of users of those reporting that they didn’t have a single point of contact. Only one-time or infrequent users had respondents (3%) report that they were *dissatisfied* with the single contact approach.

When the *no single point of contact* is removed from the data, 76% of contractors said that they were *satisfied*.

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

(N=130 for the current time period)



## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND TRANSPARENCY

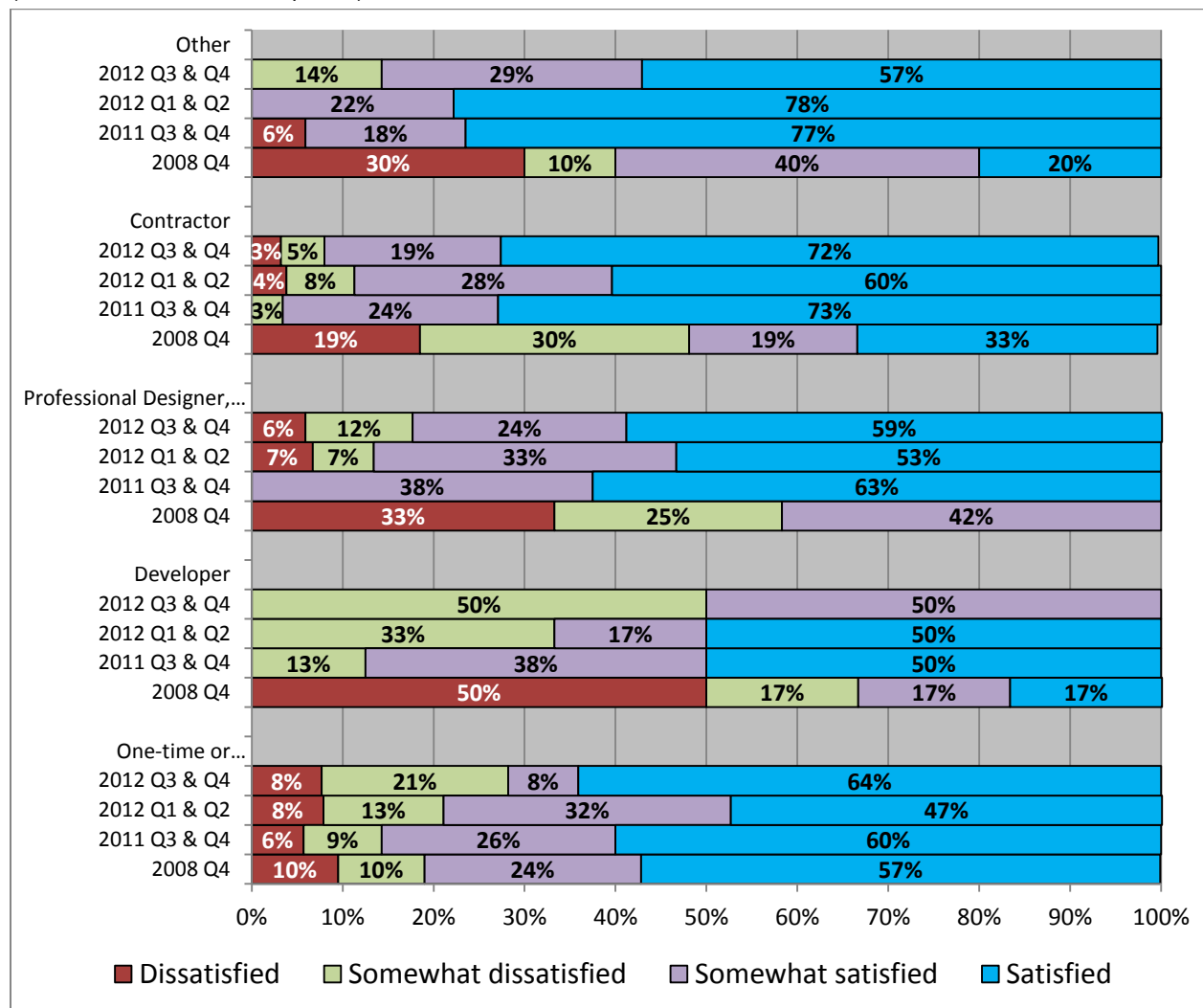
By cross tabulating the data from figure 1 and figure 13, the customer type was matched with their response to the question, “How satisfied were you with the transparency of the Permit Center’s process and timelines?”

As figure 18 indicates, 91% of contractors reported that they were *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied*. No developer reported that they were *satisfied* with the transparency of the process or timelines.

For all user types, except contractors, the percentage of users who reported that they were *somewhat dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied* increased from the first half of 2011.

**Figure 18. User Type and Transparency**

(N=129 for the current time period)



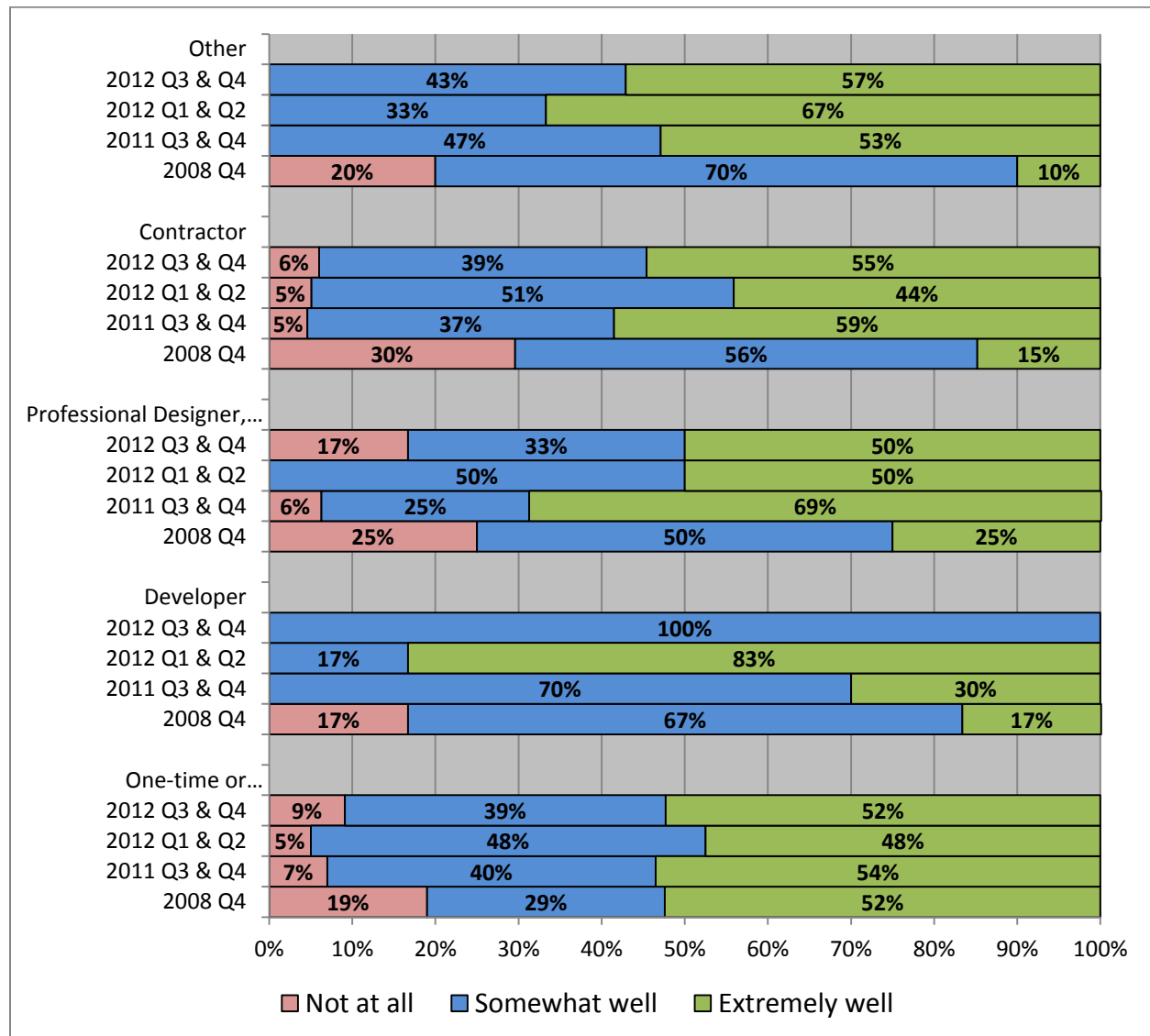
## CROSS TABULATION: USER TYPE AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT DELAYS

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 felt they were well informed about the process with 100% of users responding that they were *somewhat well* or *extremely well* informed. Seventeen percent (17%) of professional designers, architects and engineers reported that they were *not at all* informed about delays. This is an increase from 0% in the first half of the year.

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

(N=140 for the current time period)



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated by the survey results from the last half of 2012, customer satisfaction with their overall experience at the City of Bellingham's Permit Center decreased slightly. Single family residential projects remain the most commonly reported project type. Users' awareness of Permit Center materials continues to increase. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of users reported that they were satisfied with the courtesy of the staff. Users continue to rate the professionalism of most Permit Center departments highly.

There remains a high percentage of users who report that they did not have a single point of contact. However, users that had a single point of contact were very satisfied with this approach. In addition, users, with the exception of developers, reported high satisfaction rates with the transparency of the process and completeness of application review.

Contractors remain the largest percentage of users. However, other users reported the best overall experience. Other users and developers reported that they were well informed about permit reviews and delays.

For several categories such as certificate of occupancy process, construction inspectors, processing of application and general counter assistance there appears to be a shift from users being satisfied to being somewhat satisfied. Discussions regarding improvements should try to identify what processes, procedures, or personnel have changed in the last six months that could be causing this shift in satisfaction.

## 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?

- Ask applicants for a more complete plan set.
- Help to make sure that the applicant understands what permits are required in what order, and if they are submitting multiple permits for concurrent review that they understand exactly what permits need to be submitted together. A lot of information comes out of pre-apps and sometimes logistics can slip through the cracks by assuming the applicant is familiar with the permits and/or processes relating to them.
- I appreciate being able to hold meeting by conference call.
- I have been through 3 plan revisions to build a simple deck and each time the engineer keeps coming up with some else to address. Each revision time consuming and costly. I have heard nothing but bad things about this process and no I understand, first hand.
- Less City participants, More City review prior to meeting
- Make sure EVERYONE with the City who reviews your application attends the Pre-Application Meeting!!!! This is an extremely important meeting for the applicant, and for someone to not show up is absolutely unacceptable. It is equally ridiculous to send someone else in your place who hasn't looked at the plans or the draft comments! We waste valuable time waiting for the representative to read through the comments, then look at the plans, and attempt to make some kind of snap judgement on the fly. It is nonsense, and is the most frustrating part of the entire process!! I drove two and half hours to get needed feedback, only to be told, "X could not attend". Those who did attend were extremely helpful and gave me the proper feedback, but those who did not attend left me unable to obtain needed feedback so I can proceed with the permit process.
- Meetings in preparation for a variance request: -the reviewer should refrain from making personal statements of how a presented project does/doesn't relate to him -offer to take a project to a group reviewers meeting instead of having to ask for it after 4-5 visits that offered up other possibilities to the project
- Most of the time, the attendees from the different departments came unprepared. We have to submit preliminary plans and details in multiple copies and pay a fee for the meeting. That cost us a lot of money!!! Attendees come to the meeting and it is clear that many of them have done little more than glance at the plans 5 minutes before the meeting. Then, Every person that comes to the meeting want there own piece of the pie with direct conflicts between what each departments wants. The different players don't coordinate together there different demands before the meeting leaving us shaking our heads when we leave who we are to please. Later, they change there minds and demand additional things. If the would have been prepared and carefully review what we submitted them the first time, it would have saved a lot of time and money for everyone.
- N/A
- No
- No suggestion at the moment
- none
- Not really. They explained what I needed to do and I did it.
- Several things were directly said during the meeting that were later completely changed and resulted in multiple revisions to plans. Interpretations of existing laws were very subjective and the staff seemed biased toward trying to push their own agendas. Stormwater staff XXXXX treats you like an ill-abiding citizen, talks over you or at you

with little ability to effectively communicate, and operates out of the false assumption that well meaning people are doing something they shouldn't.

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

- Be open to new construction processes.
- Make sure everyone that needs to be there attends.
- N/A
- No
- NO.
- none
- SHOW UP ON TIME WITH EVERYONE FOR STARTERS. The only person that showed up on time was the building inspector and he was there for 10 minutes. We had 4 people from our company and the dirt contractor there expecting XXXX from storm water and a number of other people to show up. After waiting an hour and a half, paying everybody to stand around and do nothing, we all left. XXXX shows up 3 hours late, no apology what so ever and goes off on our job superintendent about the site not being clean enough, etc. HE IS THE ONE WHO FAILED TO SHOW UP TIMELY SO THAT WE COULD FIND OUT WHAT HIS EXPECTATIONS ARE SO THAT WE CAN MET THEM. That is the whole point of the preconstruction meeting. This guy thinks he is some kind of god the way he struts around with an arrogant attitude. That is a very poor way to get a job started. We aren't stupid or peons. We are professionals so treat us like one. If you treat us that way, we will treat you back the same way. Respect us like you expect us to respect YOU.
- XXXX was very helpful on my project, very informative.

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

- . It would be real nice to be able to acquire my mechanical permit online. That would save a tremendous amount of time.
- A little more info up front from Planning in cases involving design review, historical districts, etc would be helpful, instead of a seemingly endless parade of requests for more info, resulting in delay of projects and creating scheduling conflicts.
- a surprisingly s-m-o-o-t-h process, thank you
- As we are only looking to do alterations to our current home, we were pushed behind building permits that came in during our review which knocked our position for review and completion back considerably. We do not believe that this is acceptable. Perhaps these different types of applications should be handled by different planners. We realized that there is more revenue made to the City for a building permit, but our time is valuable too and we've wasted plenty. Thank you.
- Don't constantly tell us what we can't do. Tell us what we can do. HELP US FIND SOLUTIONS AND WAYS TO MAKE SOME THING WORK. Ultimately, it should be about helping us comply with the regulation so a permit can be issued, not demoralizing people to the point where you just give up and go home. Nobody wins that way. I am to the point where I tell my clients to not build in Bellingham and to look elsewhere. Over the last 8 years, we have helped several clients relocate out of Bellingham and new companies looking for a place to locate go elsewhere. To build the same project in Bellingham will cost an average of 15% more and you have to put up with twice the bad attitudes and grief that you don't get somewhere else.



- Everyone in the office is very nice and professional. As far as the time lines I've been trying to get my building permit for two and half weeks now. They said I would have it Friday, it is now Tuesday and no word. I'm worried that they are going to take as long on the inspection and the occupancy And I won't be able to open by February.
- Everyone was extremely helpful,
- Fire XXXXX, he is not capable. Make new electrical inspector guy XXXX full time, he is capable and nice. Everyone else in the system works well. Add online permit purchasing for small electrical permits, otherwise good job!
- Great service - Keep it up - Thanks
- I feel the last few years have been much better then in the past. Great Job! One of my main struggles is with coming in to talk about commercial work or especially change of use work. Many times I can't get a real answer back on what will be required until we pay an architect or designer a lot of money to do the work (sometimes on spaces that are potential rentals for my clients). Once we turn it in we find out we have to meet certain requirments that are way too expensive to be worth the work. If this could be delt with earlier it would save us all time and money.
- I felt as though we were not able to get a good timeline estimate and things took longer to receive feedback. I like the permit status on the website but I am not always given the permit application number and I would liek to see a search option by parcel number rather than just permit number.
- I have completed a survey in each 1/4 as I am an active and regular customer at the permit center. As before, the Planning and Fire Departments stand out as the least professional, organized, courteous and helpful. Certain staff at the Planning Department are continually dissapointing in their behaviour and also in their ability to complete their tasks in a professional and timely manor. The Fire Department is very difficult to work with and I find imposes the most egrigious and unnecessary regulations on development.
- I liked having the ability to talk to a site plan person before submissions so as to make sure the drawings and documents are correct.
- I spent \$171 to have a person tell me what the engineer needs to look at and so far between the ridiculous geological survey (the geologist explained why the bureaucracy lead to this UN-warranted expense), 3 plan revisions and the time spent to builds a deck I shutter at the thought of doing anymore renovations. This process is eliminating JOBS!
- I was very pleased with the whole process. Staff were exceptionally helpful during the whole process. I felt they were on my side throughout.
- I would have preferred to pay with a debit card, but this form of payment was not accepted.
- It seems realistic, and well balanced. I have no criticisms, even though we deal with the City regularly. They are doing their job well, and helpful for my company to comply where we are remiss in a realistic and respectful manner, without fining first.
- It seems with the construction downturn, COB has become more user friendly as well as considerate of the applicant. Previously, my experience showed it was "All About Them". This turn of events is nice. Prior to this latest experience I had vowed to do no more projects in Bellingham for the Pain and suffering was not worth it. Blaine is FAR MORE User Friendly, They are sincere, helpful, to the point, clear on their requirements and unwavering in their execution. I developed in Blaine, having built two homes there.
- It would be great to be able to more accurately estimate fees (permit fees, SD charges, review fees, application fees, etc.) at or before the time of submittal. I know some of this is done on an hourly basis, but it's helpful for financing, and project planning.
- XXXXX is a pleasure to deal with.

- My only negative comment is we (permit coordinator and architect) found it difficult to communicate with staff in a timely manner. Responses to phone messages and questions took too long for initial responses.
- none
- None needed. Am happy with the permitting process. Thankyou
- Not many jurisdictions require plans and having to physically go get a permit for simple jobs. It makes a small project more expensive than it should be.
- overall it was a good experience. I am hoping that they can guide me better in their final comments about the restrictions or any other issues related to the building in question to meet my business objective.
- Overall, I had a great experience. If it's at all possible to allow more specific inspection times, that would be great (I had to block out a whole day for it, as I couldn't be sure when the inspector would show). But, overall, my experience was wonderful. Thank you!
- Planning process is taking too long especially for Design Review.
- Please train your planning department in how to accurately identify proper setback lines. Our project began 2 1/2 years ago with a plan to add a mudroom & carport. We contacted the city planning dept to verify the proper setback lines for construction. We were told wrong information (20' instead of 30'). We submitted a first set of plans in 2010 with the drawings right up to the 20' setback line. This was not addressed in the review process. We changed the design a bit and in 2012 submitted new plans. Only then was it recognized that the setback line should have been 30' instead of 20'. This expensive and time-consuming mistake was completely preventable by the planning department if only they had given the correct information to begin with. Never was it our intention to try to bend the rules--but we were given the wrong rules from the beginning. We are now attempting to receive a variance due to this mis-information and the continued desire to have a mudroom and carport on the "living area" end of our house.
- Process was the same as I have experienced with other municipalities - you can't count on getting all your answers at the Pre-App meeting because staff members choose not to attend. I say "choose" because the Intake Engineer explained that Pre-App meetings have a set time and schedule each week. It's not like this meeting was set arbitrarily and unknowingly conflicts with staff schedules! Fix that please!
- Seems to be problems with communications between the PC and Finance in regards to accuracy of fees
- Some of the people working there need to take a class in public service!!!
- Some times simple permit applications for change of use or tenant improvements seemed to take longer then necessary. Communication within the permit center seemed to be lacking. Had some conflicting instructions between permit center and finance department.
- XXXXXX is very professional, understanding and helpful.
- The building department needs to provide a complete review the first time. It is very frustrating to provide a comprehensive response, only to have the City come back with more, new requirements. My project took nearly 5 months for permit that in other jurisdictions would have been over the counter. We had no change of use, no structural work, just a very unresponsive Building Dept.
- The City of Bellingham permit center need to follow the example of Labor and Industries which would allows an electrical contractor to apply for, purchase and review permit activity without the need of physically going to the permit center in Bellingham. With the technology that is available today, it is a huge waste of time for an electrical contractor and for the permit staff to have to go through the permitting process as it is currently being implemented. With the exception of plan review jobs, everything should be able to

be accomplished online and should be almost instantaneous. The electrician should be able to leave the shop with permit in hand and ready to get to work instead of spending an hour or more in the plan center trying to get a permit before work can begin. In some instances, getting the permit can take almost as long as the entire installation. We would like to see online accounts and permit purchasing be made available for electrical contractors. Thanks!

- The energy compliance worksheet was the only part of the process that I found to not be user friendly. Something simpler would have been nice.
- The periodic upgrades to the website are appreciated. Some items are negotiated more easily.
- The permit center should review any revisions to a project plan BEFORE asking the applicant to pay the fees. We found out after paying fees that a site survey would be required. As young homeowners, we don't have the extra capital to spend on a survey after the fact. A review of any revisions on approved permit applications should take place before full payment. That should be basic procedure. Second, at least one of your inspectors was cold and unprofessional. When a homeowner says "Hello," the typical response is "Hi," not "Where's your permit?" Otherwise, the permit center was very helpful, and I could see a marked improvement overall versus when I tried to get a demo permit two years ago. Seems like these surveys are taken to heart. That's a good sign.
- The technical ability and courtesy of inspector rating would have been great had I only been rating XXXXXX.
- There is no reasonable explanation for how long the process took for a simple application
- There needs to be a differentiation between people doing their own project and those having a contractor. People kept asking why I was getting a permit for our project as if we were stupid to do so. The staff needs better, more helpful procedures to deal with people like me who are not contractors.
- This latest project was replacing an existing garage in an existing footprint. This was clearly noted on the plans and the permit process was stopped due to the thought there was going to be encroachment over what was existing. This happened right before I was leaving for a trip and luckily I caught the note while checking online before leaving. The planning folks were great and agreed there were no issues and quickly got it back into the system. Now after receiving the permits there is a note that a survey is needed for a side property line. The new structure is further back from this line than the existing building which to me means this should not be needed. It seems like many times the additional costs to homeowners and builders is not taken into consideration. This is where my biggest disappointment in the process lies and why many homeowners do not want to get permits for projects. This makes it difficult for those of us who try and do the right thing.
- Way way better than working with the county!!!
- We did not go thru with the project to completion. Limited contact with city staff during planning phase.
- We had to come back to get our fire sprinkler permit 3 times as on that Friday they were either in a meeting or there was no one who could hand the permit to us as it was approved and waiting to be issued to our fitter. All the other processes went smooth and fast the plan reviewer was quick and issued the permit quickly it fell down on the permit pick up end. We had to get a cover inspection the same day that no one was in the office to hand us the permit you need to make sure when a permit is ready to be picked up that anyone at the center should be able to hand it to the waiting technician.

- We have ordered two oversize movement permits this year, and received very good service for both.
- We have submitted a non compliance form with The head planner. It has taken weeks and nothing has happened. How long does it take to send a form letter?
- We look forward in the future to work on a personal level with the plumbing and mechanical inspectors in the field, as we have in the past, to best suit the needs of our customers, our field personnel and the City inspectors.
- We were told we were in a 28 day construction review process and then it was changed to a 6 week review process without our notification. The lengthy wait times even just to receive comments back is unreal. The construction review process even brought into question a plan drawn up and stamped by a structural engineer - unheard of! The stormwater and city planning staff only answer 50% or less (at best) of questions sent to them by email. The entire process to get anything permitted in the stormwater runoff area is difficult, very expensive, lengthy, and almost impossible. Very discouraging for a family who is actually trying to do the right thing.
- What would be really great, especially for the DIY set (myself included), is for the city to have available drawing/cad details and sectionals specific to local building code. This would be preferable to spending time finding detailed sectional drawings to incorporate into the plans and have them snidly shot down by planning staff for not conforming to specific local code.

## 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.