

# CITY OF SAN BRUNO

## Community and Economic Development Department

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### White Paper



*Prepared by*

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## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this White Paper is to provide actionable recommendations to enhance the City of San Bruno Community and Economic Development Department.

## II. BACKGROUND

In November 2020, the City of San Bruno (“City”) engaged Municipal Resource Group (“MRG”) to assist in an assessment of its Community and Economic Development Department (“CEDD” or “Department”). In December 2020 Craig Whittom met with the City Manager and the then-Acting Community and Economic Development Department Director and agreed on a scope of work and the timing of the effort. The purpose of the White Paper was to identify actionable recommendations in the following four areas: Culture/Staffing, Customer Service, Permit Processes and Technology.

The Community and Economic Development Department provides critical services to the City’s businesses, residents and greater community. The professional and effective operation of this Department enhances the City’s ability to provide services that meet the needs of San Bruno residents. Ensuring staff is valued and accountable, administering clear permit processes consistently, and utilizing technology that is up to date and functional are important factors that will support private investment, which will fund ongoing and new City services. Investment in customer facing website information and technology and permit process clarity is urgent for the City to enhance the performance of this Department.

In conducting the assessment, Craig Whittom interviewed all staff members in the Department, key Department consultants and three recent/regular permit applicants. During the individual staff and customer interviews, participants were given the opportunity to provide input regarding the Department in the four subject areas. Interviews were confidential. Participants were assured that no specific quotes would be assigned to any one individual; rather, input would be integrated into general themes and recommendations.

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

**The most important and immediate Department need is enhanced customer-serving website information and technology and permit process clarity.** Providing current, clear and relevant information to permit applicants/prospective investors is the single most effective action the City can take to support economic development and investment.

The following four sections provide actionable recommendations to enhance the performance of the Department.

### A. Culture/Staffing

The Department has experienced significant culture change during the past five years. A new City Manager commenced work in July 2018, replacing a long-time City Manager. Since 2018, three Department Directors with significantly different management styles have led the Department. The culture and direction has changed significantly from Director to Director. Additionally, there has been department staff turnover during this period.

The development environment has also changed during the past several years. A number of very large and complex projects have been processed, and others are in review, requiring the Department to manage more complex permit applications and approvals. The Department has hired contract planners to process a number of these larger projects.

The Department staffing includes a Director, an Executive Assistant and traditional Building and Planning Divisions. Despite the title of the Department, there is not an economic development position primarily responsible for economic development activities.

The recommendations for Culture/Staffing are:

### ***Department-wide***

1. Maintain a realistic list of project priorities aligned with City Council 2021 goals and objectives; Integrate the priorities into individual staff work programs

The Department Director recently established a list of Department Project Priorities with target completion dates and a lead staff person for each project. Ensure this project priority list is reviewed with the City Manager and staff on a regular basis. The project list can be modified as City Council goals and objectives change over time. The list should also serve as the basis for establishing individual work plans (with target dates and desired outcomes) with all Department staff.

Budget Impact: None.

Timeframe to Implement: Now and ongoing.

2. Continue to improve two-way communication/transparency by the new Director

Communication between management (e.g. City Manager and Director) and staff has been inconsistent for many years. Ensure that at monthly all-staff Department meetings the Director shares City-wide information and provides a meaningful opportunity for staff to engage in a discussion of Department and City-wide issues (e.g. status of City Council goal setting, major City-wide projects). The City Manager should attend at least one all-staff Department meeting per year. Regular all-staff City Manager meetings are also valued and should be continued.

Budget Impact: None.

Timeframe to Implement: Now and ongoing.

3. Create a culture where employees want to stay and develop with the City of San Bruno

Employee turnover has been an issue that has limited the effectiveness of the Department. There is an excellent opportunity to reverse that trend with the current City Manager and new Director. The overall perception and opinion of staff and stakeholders is that both of these individuals are committed to a culture that values communication and “moves the City forward.”

During the upcoming 12 to 24 months it is important for management to continue to institutionalize two-way communication with employees, provide challenging work for employees, use contract employees to get work done in a manner that complements staff's talents, and work to ensure that the salary and benefit levels are competitive to ensure talented employees are retained as long as possible.

Budget Impact: Variable. Competitive salary and benefits will require balance with the ability to fund City services with existing revenue.

Timeframe to Implement: Pursue salary and benefit compatibility with neighboring cities as soon as possible.

4. Recruit a Management Analyst with economic development experience

Including “economic development” in the title of the Department is important to signal that development and investment is an important value of the City. Economic development in a City with San Bruno’s location will occur more quickly if the City has clear permitting and land use guidelines, current customer-facing technology for permit applicants, and a smart staff team that is committed to problem solving and working with residents and stakeholders. The recent approval of a Management Analyst position provides an opportunity to ensure that one staff position dedicates most of her/his time to supporting basic management needs of the department (e.g. budgeting, policy updates) as well as process improvements that support investment in the community. This position can lead the implementation of many of the recommendations provided in this White Paper.

Recommend crafting the job announcement/recruitment to individuals with experience in economic development, problem solving and success working across departments.

Budget Impact: Approximately \$150,000 per year.

Timeframe to Implement: Recruitment to commence by 3/15/21.

5. Hire an Economic Development Manager if funding available (FY 2021-22 or FY 2022-23)

The Department does not have a position dedicated to proactive economic development initiatives. The Economic Development Manager position would serve a variety of functions to support San Bruno small businesses and encourage new investment in the community. Principal roles would include small business assistance, downtown initiatives, ombudsman for larger permitting projects, business recruitment and retention). This type of position could be located in the Community and Economic Development Department or the City Manager’s Office. The position should initially be located in the Community and Economic Development Department subject to review after one year. A specific work plan for the position should be developed and major initiatives should be included in the project priority list discussed above.

Budget Impact: Approximately \$200,000 per year.

Timeframe to Implement: By 12/31/21.

***Building Division***

6. Consider contracting with a private firm to provide a part-time Chief Building Official; Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to Select Firm and provide additional contracted Building Division services

The current regional environment to recruit and retain a qualified Chief Building Official (CBO) is challenging at best. Turnover among newly hired CBOs is significant. San Bruno does not provide highly competitive salary and benefits to prospective applicants. Recruiting a full time qualified CBO has a limited chance of success.

If the City is unsuccessful in recruiting and hiring a CBO, or chooses to pursue a Contract CBO, it is recommended that the City issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to firms that could provide both a Contract CBO and other services. The RFP should include other services one firm could provide on an as-needed basis (e.g. building inspectors, plan check, community development technicians). The City currently contracts with three separate firms for key services in the Building Division. If the City contracts with one firm that can provide these services in addition to the CBO, that would enhance coordination and accountability for permit applicants.

If the City recruits and hires a CBO as a City employee, it is still recommended that the City issue an RFP for other Building Division services (e.g. building inspectors, plan check, community development technicians). As discussed above, consolidating these services provided by one firm would enhance coordination and accountability for permit applicants. This approach to retain one firm for Building Division contract services would also allow for efficient flexing of services needed for permit applicants based on the level of development activity.

Budget Impact: Approximately \$180,000 per year for CBO. Consistent with current staffing.

Timeframe to Implement: Issue RFP by 5/15/21. Contract commencement 9/1/21.

7. Modify the Building Inspector II position to a Supervising Building Inspector position if the City retains a Contract Chief Building Official

If the City retains a Contract CBO, it is important to maintain a core City of San Bruno staff as part of the Building Division. Reliable, accountable City staff can provide day-to-day interaction with residents, businesses and stakeholders that builds trust over time. Contracting out the existing Building Inspector and Community Development Technician positions is not recommended.

Creating a new position and eliminating the Building Inspector II position would provide the Department a reporting structure that would complement a Contract CBO. The Supervising Building Inspector would work closely with, and receive general direction from the Contract CBO. The Department Director would conduct performance evaluations for this position and meet with the individual on a regular basis.

Budget Impact: Modest increase to the salary range of the current position.

Timeframe to Implement: If the City retains a Contract CBO by 12/30/21.

### ***Planning Division***

8. Hire a Long-Range Senior Planner if funding available (mid-year FY 2021-22 or FY 2022-23)

The Department does not have a position dedicated to the numerous long-range planning responsibilities of a City. With the uptick in development interest and activity, long-range planning has been addressed by a variety of resources (e.g. contract planners, Planning Manager and Department Director). With the number of long-range plans that impact investment in the community (e.g. Upcoming General Plan, Zoning Code Update, Housing Element, Airport-related plans and CalTrans plans), hiring a Senior Planner is recommended to ensure consistency and attention to how these plans can support continued investment.

Budget Impact: Approximately \$200,000 per year. Portion of this work is currently being supported by contract planners.

Timeframe to Implement: By 12/31/21.

9. Add Clerical Support to the Planning Division on an as needed basis

The current and forecasted level of development activity creates the need for additional clerical support in the Planning Division. The investment in technology will limit the need to as needed support. Contracting with a private firm / contract individual for on call services will respond to the ebbs and flows of permit processing. Tasks would include responding to incoming permit questions, supporting preparation of public noticing, assisting in the preparation of commission and City Council agenda items and supporting Planners with other administrative elements of the permit process (e.g. ensuring Contract Planners' work is included in TrakIt). This should allow Planners to process high-value permits in a timelier manner.

Budget Impact: \$25,000 per year.

Timeframe to Implement: Include in FY 2021-22 Proposed Budget. Retain private firm / contract individual by 10/1/21.

## **B. Customer Service**

Perceptions of the quality of customer service vary among staff and permit applicants. This is consistent with the reality in most municipalities. Understanding how customers perceive the Department should rely on data regularly collected from customers. Improvements in the other three subject areas of this White Paper will significantly enhance customer service.

The recommendations for Customer Service are:

### ***Department-wide***

#### 10. Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey; Annual Community Roundtable with staff

In order to truly understand how the Department is performing, customer service data is needed. Two annual means of collecting customer service data are recommended:

- a. Customer Satisfaction Survey - An e-mailed Customer Service Satisfaction Survey should be mailed on an annual basis. All permit applicants during the previous year should be e-mailed or mailed the survey (in cases the applicant did not provide an e-mail address). Responses would be consolidated, reported to the City Council and posted on the Department website.
- b. Department Customer Service Open House - Once per year (approximately six months after the survey is distributed) the Department should host a Customer Service Open House. The Open House could last approximately two hours. Content would be an introduction of staff, tour of the department offices, a brief review of the recent activities of the Department and future plans. The majority of the time would be dedicated to receiving input from participants regarding how customer service could be enhanced. Input would be recorded and documented, and acknowledged in a subsequent e-mail to participants.

Budget Impact: Modest. Less than \$3,000 per year organizing.

Timeframe to Implement: Survey by 6/1/21. Open House six months after survey issued.

#### 11. Update website to provide easier customer access to information

Building and Planning Division information on the City website is very limited and does not predispose permit applicants to a positive customer service experience. Forms and applications are dated and many are not in a fillable format. Providing more comprehensive/easier to complete information regarding permit processes would enhance the customer experience and limit the need for staff to respond to telephone and e-mail inquiries. There are numerous models in other cities that could be adapted to the City's regulations.

Examples of improvements include:

- ◆ Easy customer access to Building and Planning Division permit fee information;
- ◆ Checklists/flow charts with descriptions of common permit requirements (most Building Division permit handouts are dated 2014); and
- ◆ Status of permits by property.



The timing for this major undertaking is appropriate. The update to the Zoning Ordinance and the pending User Fee Update will require new content. The platform for the City's website is proposed to be upgraded in FY 2021-22. Developing content to be integrated with that upgrade is timely.

Budget Impact: Management Analyst could lead this effort.

Timeframe to Implement: By 10/31/21.

## C. Permit Processes

Every community finds a balance between what physical improvements are permitted with a complete application and what physical improvements require discretionary approval. The balance, and the processes that implement that balance, however, should be intentional on the part of policy makers and clear to the community. The recommendation to more clearly articulate this balance in San Bruno and the requirements of specific permit processes was discussed in the previous section regarding the City's website.

The recommendations for Permit Processes are:

### ***Department-wide***

12. Consider modifying the 50% rule; reduce/modify the conditional use permit requirement for a broader range of home renovation projects

During interviews with staff and stakeholders, the 50% rule was the one issue related to the balance between discretionary and non-discretionary approvals that was consistently raised. The feedback was that the rule could be updated in a manner that would be more efficient for staff and also more customer friendly for homeowners. Particularly when it relates to smaller structures, there was a belief that the percentage could be increased.

Budget Impact: Likely net positive. Change could stimulate more residential building permit activity. Would free up time for Planning Division staff to focus on higher-value commercial projects.

Timeframe to Implement: Review as part of General Plan Update.

### ***Building Division***

13. Provide staff flexibility in establishing public counter hours that maximize staff production

Public counter hours become less important when cities excel at providing on-line information and services. Additionally, public counter users adjust to new schedules if provided proper notice. Implementing an on-line appointment system (discussed in the Technology section) will also allow greater certainty for customers. Providing staff flexibility to adjust counter hours (e.g. closing during lunch hour) can allow for additional production by staff.

Budget Impact: None.

Timeframe to Implement: Two months after notice to customers.

14. Enhance plan check consistency and accountability

Plan check services are currently performed by a different consulting firm than the firm that provides Chief Building Official and Community Development Technician services. Feedback was received that the current firm performing plan check services can be inconsistent and unfamiliar with unique San Bruno community features. Limited on-the-ground San Bruno training/familiarization for contract Plan Checkers is recommended. The issuance of an RFP for the CBO (and other services) discussed above provides an opportunity to enhance consistency with plan check services.

Budget Impact: None. Currently budgeted. Cost recovery from Plan Check fees.

Timeframe to Implement: By 12/31/21 if successful RFP process.

### ***Planning Division***

#### 15. Consolidate Conditions of Approval in digital format

Conditions of Approval (COAs) are important elements of discretionary project approvals. COAs ensure health and safety conditions are met and the financial obligations of permittees are clearly articulated. Having easy-to-understand language across departments also enhances the permit applicant experience. It is important that these conditions are updated regularly (no less than every two years) and maintained in electronic form on a shared drive that can be accessed by staff and only modified with the proper approvals. Initially consolidating the Conditions of Approval in the electronic form and establishing a regular schedule for updates is recommended.

Budget Impact: None if performed by Management Analyst. Estimated \$5,000 if using consultant.

Timeframe to Implement: Management Analyst could lead this effort. 90-day project.

#### 16. Make annual decisions regarding citizen commission and committee meeting frequency

City Council-appointed commissions and committees are an important way in which residents can participate in local government. Meetings also require staff time to ensure that the content of the meetings is valuable and consistent with the purpose of the committee. On an annual basis the commission/committee should establish a meeting schedule that can be supported by staff. Staff, working with the chairperson, should have the authority/support to cancel meetings for which there are no action items to be considered by the commission/committee.

Budget Impact: None.

Timeframe to Implement: The next time the City Council considers policies related to committees.

#### 17. Consider moving lead staff responsibility of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee from the Planning Division to the Public Works Department

It is common for bicycle and pedestrian advisory committees to be staffed by Public Works departments. Close collaboration with the Planning Divisions is important. Typically, much of the discussion in BPACs is related to capital improvements. Moving lead staff responsibility of the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to the Public Works Department would free up capacity of the Planning Manager to have a greater focus on projects that enhance investment in the community.

Budget Impact: None

Timeframe to Implement: After coordination with Public Works Department.

## D. Technology

Ensuring the customer-facing technology and website information is easy to understand will drive permit compliance, satisfaction among customers, and investment. Improving back-end infrastructure (e.g. website platform), Department system upgrades (e.g. digitizing plans, checklists / flow charts for all common permit processes) and new customer-serving technology (e.g. on-line permit applications, on-line scheduling of appointments, on-line permit tracking) will enhance investment in the community. Much work is needed in this area. Providing staff with current basic technology (e.g. laptop, software, smart phone reimbursement, Wi-Fi hotspots access in the field) is also important to ensure a productive and accountable staff team.

The recommendations for Technology are:

### ***Department-wide***

#### 18. Improve website content and functionality

Much work is needed to improve the City's website regarding regulations, permitting processes and the staff's interest in helping the City's customers. The City's website is operating on an old platform. An update is planned for FY 2021-22. It is critical this upgrade and re-design proceeds as soon as possible. This will be an opportunity to increase the capabilities of the website with basic customer-serving enhancements. These enhancements should include, but are not limited to, on-line scheduling of inspections, on-line issuance of certain standard permits, on-line fee calculator and on-line tracking of permit processing status.

**Budget Impact:** None if Management Analyst coordinates the Department's content and technology upgrade. Estimated \$20,000 consultant cost if Management Analyst does not lead this effort.

**Timeframe to Implement:** As soon as possible in FY 2021-22.

#### 19. Coordinate Technology Fee budgeting with General Fund investments

The technology fee assessed on building and planning permits provides an ongoing source of funds for customer-facing and internal technology investment. The Department, the City Manager's Office and IT should coordinate during the FY 2021-22 budget process and agree on prioritized investments.

**Budget Impact:** None regarding investment of Technology Fee revenue.

**Timeframe to Implement:** During FY 2021-22 budget process.

#### 20. Ensure staff has access to current hardware and hotspot web access in the field

In order to enhance productivity, it is important that staff technology is current. The ability to connect remotely to City software and drives should be a priority. For example, building inspectors should have hot spots that can allow for remote entry and editing of permit data in the City's permitting software. Planners' and building inspectors' use of large monitors is important as the City transitions to plan review and commenting on line.

**Budget Impact:** Estimated \$20,000 annual allocation. Technology fee can provide portion of funding for this investment.

Timeframe to Implement: Annual allocation as a part of budget process.

### ***Building Division***

#### 21. Implementation of E-Trakit with full capabilities

E-Trakit has recently been installed to allow for building inspectors to access permit files while in the field. The Acting CBO is working on network and customer-facing enhancements as time permits. The current legacy software should be implemented to its fullest capabilities as soon as possible. In addition to fee payments, features including permit inspection scheduling, permit application information and property search functions are standard in many municipalities.

Budget Impact: \$20,000 to bring additional technician resources to support Acting CBO on enhancements to current legacy software. IT is currently soliciting cost information to upgrade to most current Central Square software suite.

Timeframe to Implement: Basic permit look up and on-line applications for most common applications by 5/1/21. On-line payments and all applications on line by 9/1/21. Move to Central Square – enhanced suite of on-line services by 12/31/21.

#### 22. Digitize Plans

Digitizing building plans with an integrated (with permitting) cloud storage solution is important. Project needs to be scoped and bid. Hire a contractor to complete the project.

Budget Impact: \$30,000.

Timeframe to Implement: By 12/31/21.

### ***Planning Division***

#### 23. Acquire Central Square (New Generation of TrakIt)

TrakIt allows all staff associated with the development process to coordinate processing of permits on-line and track deadlines. The current version of TrakIt is a legacy product and no longer supported by the producer. The Department and IT are working to secure a cost estimate to upgrade to the most current version of the internal tracking system. Including Public Works in the design of this new system could also enhance management of capital improvement projects.

Budget Impact: Estimated \$30,000. IT currently securing cost estimate.

Timeframe to Implement: By 12/31/21.

## ATTACHMENT A

### List of Interviewees

#### CEDD staff

Sandy Alvarez  
Rucha Dande  
Madeline Lopez  
John Murphy  
Matt Neuebaumer  
Michael Smith  
Bryan Wong  
Pamela Wu

#### IT staff

Paul Vella/Daniel Rivas

#### Consultants

Dan Marks  
Donald Zhao

#### Permit Applicants

Ken Busch  
Ken Ibarra  
Linda Larson

## ATTACHMENT B

### Interview Questions

#### Staff Interview Questions

1. Staffing / Culture

- A. What are your department's strengths? Weaknesses?
- B. Do you have any suggestions related to the unit's current organizational structure/assignment of tasks to make it more effective?
- C. Does working for the City of San Bruno inspire you? Any suggestions on how the department could enhance its work culture?

2. Customer Service

- A. How would you describe the customer service experience for residents / permit applicants?
- B. Any particularly outstanding or poor areas of customer service?
- C. What would make the department customer's experience better?

3. City Processes

- A. How would you describe the day-to-day processes in the department that allow the department to serve the public?

- Permit processes
  - Communication within the department
  - Communication among departments
  - Support from management

- B. How would you describe the interdepartmental work culture?
- C. Do you have suggestions for improvements?

4. Technology

- A. Does the technology provided by the City support a productive work environment and serve its residents well?
- B. Do you have suggestions for enhancements?

5. Other things you would like to share?

## Permit Applicant Interview Questions

### 1. Customer Service

- A. How would you describe your customer service experience with the City of San Bruno?
- B. Any particularly outstanding or poor areas of customer service?
- C. What would make the department customer's experience better?

### 2. City Application Processes

- A. How would you describe the City of San Bruno planning permit application process?
- B. How would you describe the building permit application process?
- C. How do the San Bruno application processes compare to other jurisdictions in which you do business?
- D. Do you have suggestions for improvements? Examples of other city processes that are more efficient?

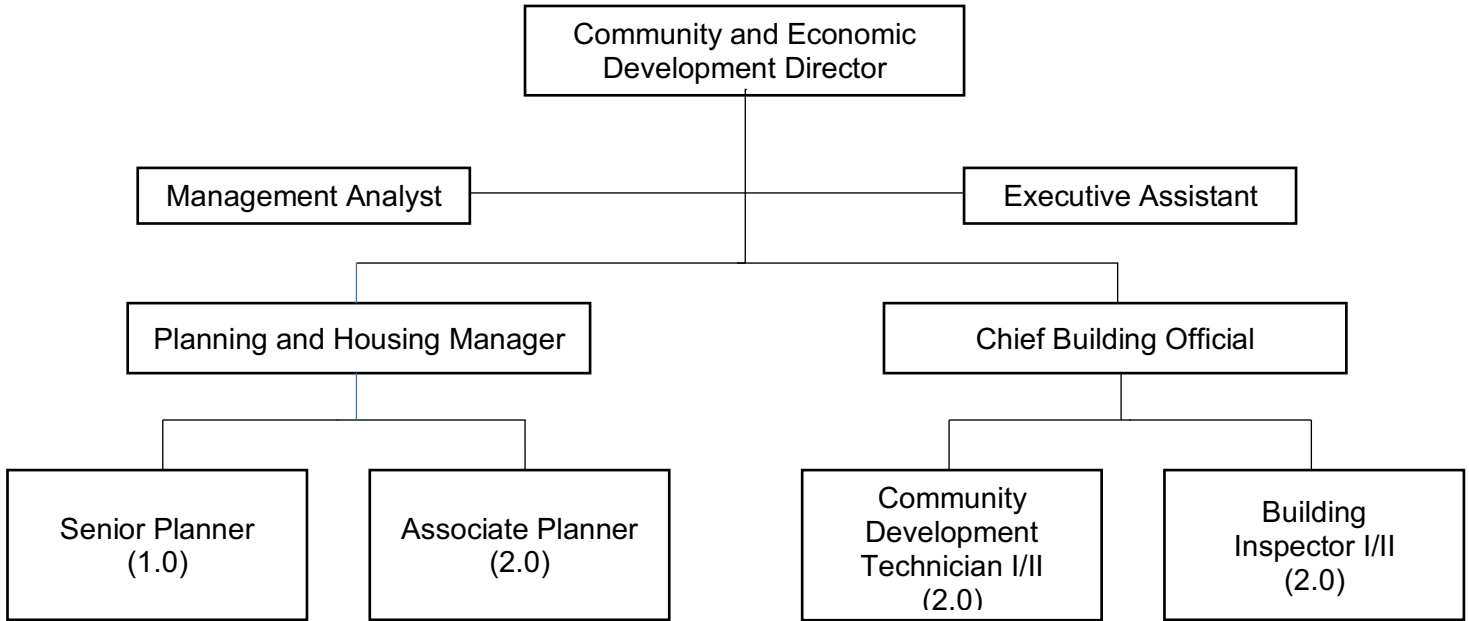
### 3. Technology

- A. Does the customer-facing technology (e.g. website, on-line application interface) meet your needs as an applicant?
- B. Do you have suggestions for enhancements?

### 4. Other things you would like to share?



**ATTACHMENT C**  
**ORGANIZATION CHART – CURRENT**



**ATTACHMENT D**  
**ORGANIZATION CHART – PROPOSED**

