



Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Neighborhood Improvement
Development Corporation
Redevelopment Authority

Rocky Marcoux
Commissioner

Martha L. Brown
Deputy Commissioner

May 11, 2012

Ald. James A. Bohl, Jr.
Chair, Zoning Neighborhoods and Development Committee
City Hall, Room 205

Dear Ald. Bohl:

This letter responds to the questions you raised in your letter of May 2, 2012. We appreciate this opportunity to share more information about the operation of the plan review and permitting functions of the Development Center, and look forward to discussing these matters with you and the committee in greater detail.

Size and structure of the plan review staff

The Development Center staff includes 7 architectural plan examiners, 2 mechanical plan examiners, 3 program assistants, 4 office assistants, and two managers. There are no currently vacant positions, although one of the mechanical plan examiners has announced that he will retire in fall 2012. Recruitment for his successor is currently underway. A college intern will join the staff for the summer months within the next several weeks.

During 2011, the Development Center staff assisted 12,523 walk-in customers, issued 36,281 permits, handled more than 1850 plan reviews, and generated more than \$13.4 million in fee revenue.

Chris Rute is the manager of the development center. The nine plan examiners report to Chris. In addition, he handles training, interaction with the Departments of Neighborhood Services and Public Works regarding pending projects, prepares responses to requests for State building code variances, and serves as the City's flood plain administrator. Chris also administers processes that lead to granting of conditional permits and certificates of occupancy, and maintains records of State licenses for Community Living Arrangements.

Suzanne Hanson is the development center's operations manager. She supervises the program assistants, who issue public way and water service permits, and the office assistants. She also manages the development center's databases, is responsible for maintenance of the development center web site, and oversees the operation of the e-permits system.

The plan review process

Plan review is the process of evaluating information submitted by a customer who desires to construct or alter a building, for the purpose of determining whether the project conforms to the International Building Code suite (which constitutes the State of Wisconsin building code), the City of Milwaukee building code, the International Fire Code, and the City of Milwaukee zoning ordinance. Customers are required to provide a variety of information about the project, including plans, specifications, surveys, and other documents. The exact list of submittals depends on the size and scope of the project. Required submittals are found on the Development Center's web site:

<http://city.milwaukee.gov/Allcustomerinformationtopicsapplications.htm>. A sample customer information memo listing the documents that are needed to review plans for a new commercial building is attached for your information.

Plan review begins with a customer visit to a plan examiner to submit plans and other required documentation. Most customers see a plan examiner only once, either for a walk-in visit to the Development Center or for a one-hour appointment. Customers who do not have all the required information need for plan review must get missing documents to the plan examiner, either by mailing them or dropping them off in person. Except on extremely rare occasions, customers do not play a role in "shepherding" their plans through the review process. However, customers are responsible for applying for any additional entitlements needed for the project (such as a Board of Zoning Appeals special use permit, a zoning change, or a liquor license).

It is important to understand that, depending on the scope of the project, several plan submittals may be required. For example, if plumbing installation is part of a construction project, the customer will need to submit both a construction plan and a plumbing plan. Often different plan types are prepared by different design professionals and are submitted separately. However, the Development Center endeavors to assign all plans for a single project to the same plan examiner. Depending on the complexity of a project, it is possible for the project to involve five or more plan reviews.

The process works basically like this. The customer comes into the development center, either for a scheduled appointment or as a walk-in customer. In some instances, the plan examiner does his or her code review during the time the customer is at the development center, allowing the customer to leave with the desired permit. This process is used for small commercial alterations, fire protection plans, heating/ventilating/air conditioning projects in the range of \$5,000 - \$10,000, home additions, and alterations to one- and two-family homes.

Some projects are too large to do a thorough plan review within a one-hour appointment, or their plans require review by other departments. (For example, any project involving food preparation and serving, such as a restaurant, must be reviewed by the Health Department. More detail about this issue is found later in

this letter.) In such cases, the appointment time is used to evaluate the project's conformity with the zoning ordinance, which regulates the use of property as well as dimensional standards required for construction, and to check that the customer has provided all required documents. If the project does not meet the zoning ordinance, the customer is informed, and the plan examiner discusses the customer's options to resolve the matter. If documents are missing, customers are given a list of the items they must submit in order for the plan review to begin.

The plan is then assigned to a plan examiner by the Development Center manager. Review of the plan is handled on a first-come, first-served basis. Plans that must be reviewed by other departments are routed to those departments for evaluation within a day or two of the plan submittal. Comments from the other departments are sent to the assigned plan examiner, who incorporates them into his or her evaluation of the plans.

Following completion of the plan review, the plan reviewer generates a plan review letter that states conditions of approval and creates the corresponding building permits.

The time required to complete a plan review can range from 30 minutes to a period of many weeks. A variety of factors influence the time that elapses between submittal and completion:

- 1) The completeness of documentation submitted by the customer. Certain documents are required before the plan is considered "ready for review." For example, a plan examination for a new building cannot begin until the customer submits a survey showing exactly where the building will be placed on the property. Absent a survey, building and zoning code analysis cannot be done, and the project cannot be reviewed until the survey is provided.
- 2) The number of plans in the queue at the time a plan is submitted.
- 3) The time of year plans are submitted. Not surprisingly, review is faster in winter months because fewer plans are submitted outside of construction season.
- 4) The time required to get Board of Zoning Appeals approval for a situation that does not conform to the requirements of the zoning ordinance.
- 5) The time required to get Board of Standards approval for a situation that does not conform to the requirements of the City building code.
- 6) The time required for other departments to complete their reviews of the plans.

- 7) The time required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission, if the project involves a property that is a local landmark and the work will affect the exterior of the building.

- 8) The availability of plan review time on the plan examiners' schedules. Copies of typical work schedules for construction plan examiners are attached to this letter. These seven staff collectively work 280 hours/week. (This assumes no one has taken vacation or sick leave during that week.) Of these 280 hours, 70 staff hours are spent providing walk-in service to customers. Plan examiners staff phone lines for 42.5 hours/week. Plan review appointments consume 27 hours/week. Contact with customers during the plan review process consumes about 37 hours/week. Training consumes seven hours/week. This leaves a maximum of 124 hours/week for plan review. Absences due to illness or vacation, holidays, and furlough days reduce this total.

Statistical data

Since January 1, 2008, on average 146 plans have been submitted to the Development Center each month. Of these, 121 have been assigned to the seven architectural plan reviewers. The remaining 25 are plumbing plans assigned to mechanical plan reviewers.

The chart below provides information about the number of major plans submitted for review during the past four years, plus year-to-date information for 2012. The actual total of plans reviewed is slightly larger than the chart indicates, because several smaller volume plan types are not included.

Plan type	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 YTD
Plumbing	345	238	281	337	88
Commercial building	777	607	739	847	209
Residential building	278	254	263	257	53
HVAC	260	219	204	212	70
Fire protection	259	205	216	197	66
TOTAL	1919	1523	1703	1850	486

While the Project Tracking System generates only very limited reports regarding plan review time, our analysis indicates that, year to date in 2012, 54% of all residential plan reviews and 30% of all commercial plan reviews were completed on the day plans were submitted. Among the HVAC plan reviews done in 2012, 44% were completed on the day of submittal. 49% of fire protection plan reviews done in 2012 year to date were completed on the day of submittal.

The roles played by other City departments in the plan review process

The Development Center routes many plans to other departments for their review.

Department of Public Works: reviews all projects involving new commercial construction and additions, plus new homes. DPW staff are evaluating the interaction of the project with the public way (street trees, street lights, sidewalks, curb cuts, etc.), public utilities, and public easements that encumber the property. DPW staff also review stormwater management plans; such plans are required for any project that adds ½ acre of impervious surface, or involves a development site of 1 acre or larger.)

Health Department: reviews all restaurants, taverns, grocery stores, food-related occupancies to ensure the plans conform to the State of Wisconsin food code and City ordinances affecting food services. Health Department approval is required before construction permits may be released.

Dept. of City Development planning staff: reviews design of any project that involves a zoning change, is within a detailed planned development or zoning overlay district, involves sale of property by the City or Redevelopment Authority, or involves financing by the City or RACM. DCD review is meant to ensure conformity with design requirements imposed by these processes

City Clerk's Office license bureau: certain permits for licensed premises (primarily those with a liquor license) may not be released before the Common Council approves the issuance of the license. The Clerk's office also licenses home improvement contractors.

Dept. of Neighborhood Services: if a customer seeks a permit to do work on a property that is subject to a raze order, DNS must approve the issuance of construction permits. DNS also provides staff support to the Board of Standards, whose approval is required if a project requires a variance to a City building code provision. If a customer seeks a variance to the State of Wisconsin building code, the manager of the Development Center consults with the Commissioner of DNS to determine the response to the variance petition. DNS staff are responsible for local licensing of plumbing and electrical contractors.

City Clerk's office historic preservation staff: reviews plans for projects that require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission, to ensure that design of exterior features conforms to COA requirements.

Board of Zoning Appeals: Development Center plan reviewers determine whether BOZA action is required to allow a development to proceed. If a BOZA special use permit or zoning code variance is needed, staff issue a "denial letter" that denies the permit, which triggers the BOZA application process. Plan review for such projects is generally halted until BOZA approval has been granted.

Evolution of the plan review process

The plan review and permitting processes have evolved considerably since the Development Center was created in 1999. Some changes have been fostered by the addition of technology; others are the result of closer communication among the many departments involved on the plan review and permitting process; still others relate to changes in codes.

Technology

An electronic project tracking system (PTS) was developed early in the life of the Development Center. PTS keeps a single record of all plan reviews required for each discrete project, the dates various required documents are submitted, the routing of plans to other departments, plan reviewer comments, and correspondence between the plan reviewer and the design professionals involved in the project. PTS also is used to track plan review assignments, balance workloads, and maintain statistical data on development center operations.

The Development Center's web site has become a critical resource for customers. More than 100 customer information sheets provide data about submittal requirements, codes, entitlements...

The ePermits system, introduced about five years ago, is another major technology change. The system allows customers to apply for and receive plumbing, electrical, and HVAC permits over the internet. Information about ePermits is routed electronically to the responsible inspectors, and the permits are available for viewing on the internet. Just over 50 percent of all permits issued by the Development Center are now issued by the ePermits system.

Communication

Inter-departmental communication about projects is dramatically improved since the creation of the Development Center. The inclusion of several staff people who previously worked for the Department of Public Works and the Milwaukee Water Works within the Development Center staff has helped plan examiners gain a much wider understanding of what DPW plan reviewers are looking for when they evaluate projects. Pre-development conferences, which bring the customer's development team to the table with representatives of all the departments that will have an impact on large development projects, have also been very helpful to sensitize departments to each others' concerns, and to understand how their reviews have an impact on the customer experience.

In the last six months or so, Development Center plan examiners have begun joint training sessions with DNS construction inspectors. These sessions, led by managers from each unit, are meant to standardize code interpretations between plan examiners and inspectors.

Code changes

The State of Wisconsin adopted the International Building Code in 2002. The state has subsequently adopted more recent versions of the IBC, and the City of Milwaukee also adopted the International Fire Code. Each of these changes has required plan examiners to become familiar with a broad range of code provisions, and to review items of particular emphasis in these codes. (For example, the IFC places a great emphasis on the detailed review of hazardous materials that may be involved in particular occupancies.)

The City of Milwaukee adopted a new zoning ordinance in 2002, and one result of the new ordinance is a significant increase in the number of planned development zonings. Each PD creates a custom set of zoning and design parameters for a particular property. Plan examiners must evaluate the conformance of plans involving PDs to the custom zoning, in addition to the normal building code requirements.

Customer experience

A key mantra of the Development Center is "Move plans, not people." Prior to the creation of the Development Center, customers whose projects required reviews by multiple departments were expected to take their plans to those departments themselves for review. Even as something as basic as getting a house number for a new building was considered the customer's responsibility. However, throughout its brief history, the Development Center has served as the "traffic cop" to route all plans to appropriate departments and to collect and collate the results of multi-department reviews.

Does the Development Center work as it was originally envisioned?

The Development Center was intended to place a variety of knowledgeable staff in a single location to handle the breadth of issues involved in property development. This strategy was driven by the City's desire to make development easier and more predictable. We believe that much, but not all, of the promise of the Development Center has been realized. We are confident that the customer experience is vastly improved over the 1999 experience. Information is far more available to the customer, far more issues are identified at the beginning of the review process rather than after the fact, and the departments involved in development have a much closer working relationship than they did previously.

At the same time, there is room for improvement. Among the most significant difficulties in recent years are instances in which DNS inspectors have questioned the code interpretations made by plan examiners in approving plans. Joint training is underway to resolve these differences. Also, budget cuts and retirement have reduced the number of employees within the Development Center from 25 staff in 1999 to 18 positions in 2012 -- a 28 percent reduction. The smaller, less-experienced staff has struggled with a growing backlog of plans.

Comments from customers

The Development Center plan reviewers serve as agents of the State of Wisconsin when they evaluate plans and issue permits. Milwaukee is one of a handful of cities in which municipal staff have the power to review and approve plans for commercial construction. When our customers are constructing buildings elsewhere in the metro area, they deal with local officials for review of zoning, public way, local building code ordinances, and stormwater management issues. They mail their plans to State of Wisconsin plan reviewers for building code review. State reviewers have no personal interaction with the designers submitting plans.

Many of our customers have commented that they appreciate being able to work directly and personally with our plan review staff. The Development Center offers phone consultations, walk-in service and face-to-face appointments with plan reviewers -- these services are not available in nearby municipalities or at the State of Wisconsin. Our customers also appreciate the convenience of ePermits, which allows electrical, plumbing and HVAC permits to be issued in minutes over the internet.

The criticisms we hear from customers generally mention two concerns:

- 1) Plan reviews that take too long. A letter sent to the Finance and Personnel Committee and distributed to all Common Council members in April 2012 regarding measures being taken to ensure prompt service to plan review customers is attached.
- 2) Plan examiners and inspectors having different interpretations of certain sections of the building code, with the result that inspectors, on rare occasions, halt work on a job while the differences are worked out.

Changes and improvements to the plan review process

The following changes have been implemented by the Development Center manager to improve plan review efficiency and accuracy.

- 1) We have brought in a limited-term employee to supplement permanent plan review staff during times of peak demand for plan review service.
- 2) Walk-in service hours have been reduced to make more plan review time available.
- 3) Formalized plan review check lists have been developed to ensure thorough and accurate reviews. This is particularly critical given the periodic updates to the International Building Code adopted by the State of Wisconsin.

- 4) DCD and DNS have instituted joint training between plan reviewers and inspectors to "get on the same page" regarding interpretation of certain sections of the International Building Code.
- 5) Since 2010, customers have been given the option of sending plans to the State of Wisconsin for review if they have concerns about the speed of a local review. (Less than 10% of plans have used this option.)
- 6) "Model" plan reviews are now developed as a template for individual buildings in projects involving multiple buildings. This speeds the review of new subdivisions, Habitat for Humanity homes, Housing Authority single-family new construction, etc.
- 7) Some plans are being submitted without appointments. A college student intern will join the plan review staff in summer 2012 to undertake zoning checks and evaluate the documentation submitted with such plans.
- 8) In light of the pending retirement of the senior mechanical plan examiner, the job description has been changed to expand duties to include review of fire protection plans

For the last several months, at the request of Mayor Barrett, DNS Commissioner Dahlberg and I have led a series of discussions involving DNS, DCD and DPW staff and development customers to evaluate customer service improvements in the full range development permitting and inspection processes. We anticipate that additional suggestions for change will emerge from the work of this group. In addition, the Land Management System approved in the 2012 budget will significantly improve technology support and communication with customers and among staff of multiple departments. The implementation of the software, anticipated in 2013, will reduce administrative tasks related to all aspects of the plan review, permitting and inspection processes.

I look forward to further exploring your questions at the meeting of the Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee.

Sincerely,



Rocky Marcoux
Commissioner

Attachments

C: Members of the Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee





Department of City Development

City Plan Commission
Neighborhood Improvement
Development Corporation
Redevelopment Authority

Rocky Marcoux
Commissioner

Martha L. Brown
Deputy Commissioner

April 12, 2012

Ald. Michael Murphy
Chair, Finance and Personnel Committee
Common Council
City Hall, Room 205

Dear Ald. Murphy:

This letter responds to your request for a written report on measures being taken to ensure prompt service to plan review customers at the Development Center.

As I indicated when I spoke to the Finance and Personnel Committee on Thursday, April 5, the ability of Development Center staff to complete plan examination quickly enough to meet customer needs and expectations has been compromised by multiple retirements and other personnel changes in the last several years. There are seven authorized plan examiner positions. In the 18 months between May 2009 and October 2010, three plan examiners with a combined total of nearly 50 years of experience opted to retire. After an application and examination process, the Dept. of Employee Relations certified 56 individuals as meeting minimum requirements for the plan examination position. Of these, 30 were not residents of Milwaukee.

The department filled two of the vacant positions in late 2010. (The third vacancy was left open because of budget constraints.) The new hires, both registered architects and non-residents, made excellent progress during their initial four months of training. Unfortunately, prior to the end of their six month probationary periods, both these individuals chose to leave their positions for other situations that did not require Milwaukee residency. The department returned to the eligible list and interviewed additional candidates to fill the vacancies. One new hire had been working as a DNS inspector. A second offer was made to a highly-qualified individual from Appleton, who, upon further consideration, decided not to take the job. The department then offered the position to a DNS inspector who had previously held a position with the Development Center and provided an immediate benefit because of his past experience with the Center's processes. He was hired through internal promotion.

A new plan examiner generally requires from 18 months to two years of training to become fully productive. The Development Center's new staff began their jobs and training in May 2011, just as the construction season was entering its peak. Their status as trainees, and the loss of the highly-experienced plan examiners they replaced, formed a "perfect storm" that resulted in some delays for the plan examination function. In addition, on September 1, 2011, the suite of codes that regulates buildings in Wisconsin was upgraded to a new version, requiring training of the entire plan exam staff. While it may have been the experience of some of the Development Center customers that they had not received the level of service to which they were accustomed, it is important to note that a vast majority of customers experienced no significant delays.

In light of these challenges, the department instituted multiple measures to minimize the impact on customer service.

- 1) Plan examiner vacations were cancelled in June and July.
- 2) Customers whose projects involved commercial alteration were given the option of submitting their plans to the State of Wisconsin Safety and Buildings Division for code review. About 8 percent of plans processed by the Development Center in 2011 received State review. While local review was still required to ensure compliance with Milwaukee zoning ordinances, this strategy significantly reduced review time for those customers who chose to take advantage of it.
- 3) The Development Center hired a limited term employee to review a large number of single-family and two-family home plans that were being constructed at the Westlawn public housing development. The Housing Authority covered the costs of this hiring.
- 4) The Development Center accepted reviews done by a certified third-party individual who contracted directly with several developers facing strict construction deadlines driven by low income housing tax credit financing requirements.
- 5) The Development Center instituted voluntary and then mandatory overtime for plan examiners in the last half of 2011, in order to reduce the review backlog.
- 6) Walk-in service hours were reduced. This change allowed plan examiners to devote two afternoons per week to plan examination, rather than dealing with walk-in customers. The plan exam staff served more than 8,800 walk-in customers during 2011.

Throughout 2012, we will continue to improve plan review time using measures such as those listed above. We also are evaluating the possibility of adding staff. In accordance with the instructions we have received from the budget office, DCD's 2013 budget submittal will assume the current level of staffing. However, we will work with the budget office throughout the development of the Executive Budget to consider other staffing options.

We would be happy to respond to any additional questions you have.

Sincerely,

Martha L. Brown
Deputy Commissioner

Chris Rute
Development Center Manager

C: Members of the Finance and Personnel Committee



New Commercial Buildings & Additions

809 N. Broadway, / Milwaukee, WI 53202 / 414-286-8211

The City of Milwaukee is a Wisconsin certified first class municipality. This means that City government has assumed the responsibility of reviewing plans for all commercial construction projects. (Except Federal or State owned buildings, and Hospital and Nursing Homes). The Milwaukee Development Center's plan examiners review plans for compliance with the International Building Code as well as municipal building and zoning codes. Once the plans have been reviewed and approved, the construction permit will be prepared and issued.

Submitting plans for review

Plan submittal is done on an appointment basis, to provide the personal attention that your project requires. To set up an appointment with a plan examiner for plan submittal, call (414) 286-8210.

Submittal requirements

Provide the following items for plan review. An incomplete submittal may delay plan review.

- Four (4) sets of construction documents. Plans must be prepared and sealed by a design professional, a Wisconsin registered architect or engineer, if the volume of the proposed building is 50,000 cubic feet or greater. The seal must be an original stamp and signature of the design professional on each set.
An additional set of plans will be required if the project requires Health Department review (such as a restaurant or tavern), or if the project is in a special district such as a redevelopment district, historic district, or an overlay district.
- Seven (7) copies of the Plat of Survey. These surveys should show the proposed improvements and have an original stamp and signature of the registered land surveyor who prepared it.
- The Certificate of Supervision of the design professional if the volume of the proposed building is 50,000 cubic feet or greater.
- One (1) copy of specifications.
- Erosion control plans, completed worksheet, and the required surety deposit.
- IBC plan review worksheets. (Available at www.mkedcd.org/build)

- One (1) copy of structural calculations stamped and signed by the design professional who prepared them.
- Energy worksheets from COMM 63 of the state building code for the building envelope.
- Before permits can be issued for new buildings, additions that are slab on grade construction, or footing and foundation work, or plumbing plans must be submitted to the plumbing plan reviewers in the Development Center. Those plans need not be approved prior to the release of the building permit, but they must be submitted.
- Four (4) sets of landscape drawings are required for projects involving (1) industrial and manufacturing uses near residential zoning districts, (2) parking areas within 25 feet of a street, (3) motor vehicle display or storage, (4) outdoor storage, (5) Dumpsters/ Mechanical Equipment. Provide landscape sheets with details demonstrating compliance with s. 295-405 of the Zoning Code.
- Plan examination fees (see fee schedule) and a completed plan review application form.

The permit

During the plan review, the plan examiner will complete the permit application and, in most cases, produce a plan review letter indicating significant code issues that must be addressed during construction.

Upon completion of the review, the applicant is notified that the permit is ready and told what the permit cost will be. The applicant should sign, pick up and pay for the permit at the front desk of the Development Center, 809 N. Broadway. The office is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Quick Facts

Application fee: See fee schedule

Approval by: Plan examination staff

Review and approval time: 15 working days

For more information: (414) 286-8210

Rvsd 041709





