



**PLANNING DEPARTMENT**  
 Heidi Gudde, Planning Director  
 (360) 354 - 5532

**Department Budget Memo**

To: Community Development Committee  
 From: Heidi Gudde, Director  
 Date: August 23, 2023

As we approach budget planning for the 2024 year the Planning and Community Development Department is looking ahead to some of our biggest projects and expenses which are shown in overview here and additionally described in the following memo.

<b>Project / Expense</b>	<b>Notes re Associated Expenses</b>	<b>Outside Funding Available</b>
Tracking Software	Initial integration \$45,000-\$180,000. Recurring maintenance \$24,000-\$75,000 annually Likely utilized by multiple departments at the city.	Yes – grants from the Dept of Commerce
Comp Plan Periodic Update	Coordination with Whatcom County \$20,000 – \$23,000 Costs associated with County can be covered by our grant allocation.	Yes - \$125,000 already set aside from the State for Lynden
Public Interface	Staff time is the biggest component to improving public interface re ongoing development projects. These tasks are included in the new Admin Assistant position funded in 2023. This position is currently filled by a temp until new Permit Tech completes ‘try-on’ period.	No – but potentially a feature of the new software
Staffing and Training	2024 request will likely be significantly increased from previous years as renewed focus on training opportunities after COVID restrictions lifted. Also, new staff and new software will require training. \$10,000 between both Planning and Building divisions.	None identified at this time
Relocation of Code Compliance	Budget year for this is unidentified and expenses are undetermined at this time, but it would include modifications to City Hall to create office space and replacement vehicle. Code compliance will be a significant user of the new software.	No – if the role shifts from the PD some associated expenses will also shift.

**Permitting Software.** Over the course of the last 7 months the Department along with staff from Public Works and Fire and IT have been reviewing a number of software options for the tracking of applications, permits, and inspections. This software is expected to also provide an applicant portal for application submittal and fee payment. Although the Community Development Department is taking the lead on software research and implementation, we anticipate that the software will assist multiple departments in the following services:

<p>Planning 15% user</p>	<p>Land use applications, critical area monitoring; tracking of the Community Residential Facility Registry; ADU tracking; web updates of applications / project status</p>
<p>Building 40% user</p>	<p>Building, mechanical, fence permits; fill and grade permits; building inspection records; inspection scheduling</p>
<p>Code Compliance 10% user</p>	<p>Violation documentation; case tracking</p>
<p>Public Works 20% user</p>	<p>Civil and stormwater review; site inspection records; street obstruction and tree planting/removal permits; addressing requests; bonding; stormwater/discharge violations</p>
<p>Fire 10% user</p>	<p>Annual inspections; recreation burn permits; firework sales and display permits; (potentially) inventory tracking</p>
<p>City Admin / Police 5% user</p>	<p>Special event permits; dog licensing</p>

Costs associated with this investment include initial setup and annual maintenance costs. To date, the front runners include CivicGov, SmartGov, OpenGov, and Citizen Serve. Initial estimates collected from three of these providers, based on the same general scope of services, have been wide ranging with initial startup costs estimated at \$45,000 to \$200,000 and maintenance costs estimated at \$24,000 to \$75,000 annually. In August we will review the last of the front runners. After that we hope to quickly narrow down the selection and fine-tune the 2024 budget request.

The city will be able reduce our Caselle costs when we discontinue the Comm Dev module by approximately \$3,500 annually. Unfortunately, Planning and Building have found the Caselle module to be poorly suited for permit management and it does not offer a public portal option.

Online interface options for submitting or simply viewing permit activity will be available. In switching to a software that was created for the purpose of municipal permit tracking the City will realize a greater efficiency in routing and tracking and the opportunity to create an online interface for those who are submitting permits or even simply allowing the general public to see recent permit activity. These options will be available to all departments so that individuals can apply online not just for building permit but for other applications such as dog licenses, burn permits, or special events. Once submitted an application is sent to the appropriate person in the organization to be reviewed for completeness and payment and then routed simultaneously to reviewers in various departments as needed.

Bridging between software systems for payments will be required. Any new software we select will be bridged to Caselle to update payments. We anticipate these will be batched daily much like the Parks Department is currently implementing with Forte.

Grant funding is available. Recent Washington legislation is geared specifically toward assisting municipalities in the implementation of electronic plan submittal and permit tracking. The goal of this assistance is to increase efficiency and reduce builders' carrying costs associated with long permitting timelines. If grant funding is awarded, the city must commit to specific timeframes for building permit review and we will be obligated to provide monthly reports of the average turnover time for permit review. Planning and Building staff are confident that the turnaround goals set by the State can be met in Lynden. Additional details of this grant are expected later this summer from the Department of Commerce. Funds will not be awarded until after the 2024 budget is approved so this request will come forward without assuming grant funds.

**Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.** Due on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, initial work related to the City of Lynden Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update has begun. To date this has included resolutions related to the schedule for Urban Growth Area review and the city's public participation plan.

The State of Washington has mandated a significant number of updates related to housing and climate change under the Growth Management Act. Thankfully, funding has been allocated to cities to provide support in these efforts. At the end of June, we were notified that the Department of Commerce (DOC) has set aside a Periodic Update Grant in the amount of \$125,000 for the City of Lynden. This funding is dispersed by the Department of Commerce based on specific deliverables. Half of the funding may be used between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024 the other half between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

The city will be coordinating with Whatcom County and other jurisdictions within the county to coordinate regional planning efforts. Staff anticipates that the city's share in this work will likely be approximately \$20,000 - \$23,000.

Grant funding can be utilized to recoup staff time or consultant costs. The Community Development Department is currently reviewing the task checklists provided by the DOC which will assist in identifying elements absent or needing update.

**Public Interface – Web Presence.** The Community Development Department has a goal of providing a more robust web presence. Specifically, this includes updates to the Department’s webpage that will display the status of ongoing land use and development projects within the city. These updates will be a resource to residents and businesses within the city and will facilitate a more transparent permitting process. Additional 2024 costs associated with this update except for when / if assistance is needed from CivicPlus our website provider / designer and the larger cost of the permit tracking software and the portal it can provide. The primary cost outside of the permit tracking software will be staff training and time. This responsibility is one that is included in the Administrative Assistant position that was created at the start of 2023 and is expected be permanently staffed in 2024 after the employee

Current <b>Planning</b> Positions	Full Time Equivalents	Current <b>Building Division</b> Positions	Full Time Equivalents
Director	1.00	Building Official	1.0
Planner – Current	0.87	Building Inspector	0.5
Planner – Long-Range	1.00	Building Permit Tech	1.0
Administrative Assistant	0.50	Administrative Assistant	0.5
Total	3.37	Total	3.0

in that position was promoted to Permit Tech.

**Staffing and Training.** The Community Development Department is currently staffed by 3.37 full time equivalent (FTE) in Planning and 3 FTE positions in the Building Division (appearing in the Budget as “Housing and Community Development”).

As the City continues to grow, the Department anticipates that a greater code compliance effort will be needed. Additional code enforcement efforts within the Planning and Community Development Department may be a logical step toward maintenance of an established community standard and provide for greater staff efficiencies. Cost associated with shifting this position to Community Development will include physical reorganization / addition of office space and a mobile and desktop workstation setup.

## Looking Forward – Planning & Community Development Department:

State legislative mandates that affect City’s Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code will occupy a significant amount of planning staff’s time in the next two years. Consultant assistance to complete the impending 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update will be needed but costs will be covered by grant money from the State.

Other future goals for improvement and growth in the Planning and Community Development Department include an economic development role to support local businesses, an urban tree program, a stronger critical area monitoring program to support the updated critical areas code, a continued planning role in the City’s expanding park and trail network, a wetland banking or advanced mitigation program, and continued review and update of the development code.

A synopsis of potential projects and their timeframe are listed below:

City Planning Future Projects	Building Division Future Projects
<p>2024 Permit tracking software implementation.</p> <p>2022 – 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update (consultant assisted) with the potential to include Sub-Area Plan for West Lynden Gateway</p> <p>2024 Critical Areas Monitoring Program (included as an aspect of the permit tracking software).</p> <p>2024 Urban Tree Program (a green infrastructure component of PW’s stormwater management plan)</p> <p>2024-2025 Advanced Wetland Mitigation Program (in house, legal counsel, consultant if needed).</p> <p>2024-2027 Code enforcement moved to Comm Dev</p>	<p>2023 Major projects: Cobblestone Hotel, PeaceHealth Facility, Alliance Freeze Dry, Premier Packing Freezer projects.</p> <p>2024 Permit tracking software implementation</p> <p>2024 Website updates that include digital permit submittal, permit payment, and permit tracking.</p>