



March 22, 2023

Six Year Plan Summary - Planning and Community Development Department Proposal

Future Goals: Future goals for improvement and growth in the Planning and Community Development Department include 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, completion of development code updates, and an economic development role to support local businesses.

As a whole, the Department will strive to provide a more complete online presence and provide useful, up-to-date resources for residents and applicants. Specifically, the Building Division will would like to provide an online interface for permits submittal, payments, and inspection requests. Likewise, the Planning Division should include easy online access to land use applications and information, current information about pending projects, and options to submit public comment regarding pending projects.

Staffing: With the 2023 Budget, the City Council approved a proposal to add administrative support so that higher level staff can focus on specialized tasks. This materialized in the request for a part-time inspector, which frees our building official to conduct permit review, and the request for a planning tech position, which frees planners to review land use applications, address planning initiatives, and work on long-range documents. Additional code enforcement action, potentially pared with inspector duties is anticipated. Timeline for additions as shown.

2022: Part-time inspector position. Position staffed as of October 1, 2022.

2023: Full-time administrative assistant position. Planner job descriptions revised to include a reduction of administrative tasks and an increase in responsibility regarding project review, critical area monitoring, and critical area initiatives. Position filled – to begin March 27, 2023.

2027: Code enforcement staff transition and addition. Code enforcement functions moved to Planning and Community Development. New staff position has the potential to function with an overlap of roles between code enforcement / building inspector.

Resources and Training:

Permit Tracking Software

Planning Director for the City of Aberdeen, Lisa Scott, cites her permit tracking software as one of the reasons they have been able to process building permits and manage code enforcement with only 6 staff members.

While there are merits to managing only one software system for the city as a whole, the Caselle software adopted by the Finance Department, has fallen short of expectations for community development needs. It's capacity for permit tracking is far from what other software systems can offer. To better utilize staff time and to provide a higher level of customer service, I've proposed that the City invest in specialized permit tracking software and implement this software within the next 2 years. Initial research has shown that tracking software could encompass a broad spectrum of permits and actions including code compliance cases, wetland monitoring, annual fire inspections, special event permits, and outdoor dining permits. This type of tracking could benefit not just the Planning Department but several others and create a uniform process throughout the organization.

Office Furniture and IT Support for new Inspector and Administrative Support

Resources to provide in-office workstations for both of these positions were fulfilled and implemented with the 2023 budget. Public Works vehicles have been used for the part-time inspector and sharing of costs and use has gone reasonably well.

Training and Cross-training

Training opportunities are critical to stay up to date on the latest planning and building issues. The addition of staff will make it possible to schedule more training into each staff members yearly goals.

The ability of a staff member to cross over and perform tasks associated with another position in the department is critical for the efficient functioning of a small department.

Professional Services

The Department anticipates the need for professional services in the form of planning consultants and legal counsel related to, at a minimum, the update of the Comprehensive Plan including new requirements related to the Housing Element. Other projects could include:

- The writing of sub-area plans to focus on specific areas of the City such as the West Lynden Gateway; or
- Updates to existing sub-area plans;
- Consider / develop the use of stock plans as a service to our residents or a "Missing Middle" initiative; or
- Exploration / implementation of a wetland banking or advanced mitigation site.