



P.O. Box 278, St. Helens, OR 97051
Phone: (503) 397-6272 Fax: (503) 397-4016
www.ci.st-helens.or.us

BUILDING DIVISION REPORT

July 1st - December 21st, 2021

Greetings Council,

We are pleased to present this semiannual Building Division report. This report will highlight some of the milestones we have crossed in this last term, a look at what to expect in the next term and provide permit statistics.

Customer service continues to be a top priority for the Building Division. We believe this is what will set us apart and, in part, will encourage folks to continue to build in St. Helens. The foundation to this is our committed staff. Heidi Davis and Christina Sullivan keep our office and permitting in order and moving. This includes receiving customers in our office, responding to customer inquiries, ensuring fees are applied and collected accurately. They have even on occasion delayed taking breaks or lunches in their commitment to ensure customers have been completely taken care of before they leave. Our inspector John Hicks, on top of being a thorough inspector and maintaining an excellent level of building code safety, looks to be a resource to our customers, by providing not only an exceptional knowledge of code but of the building industry as a whole. Making himself available for questions and guidance both onsite and over the phone. Their hard work and commitment give our customers experiences they don't find elsewhere.

Other ways we are improving the customer experience is implementation of electronic plan review software. The e-Plan Review Project is moving forward, and we have an implementation schedule for going live in January 2022. This software project will provide the following services: Online customer portal for document upload and download of approved plans, plan reviewer features such as tools for markup, comments, scale, automated comment reports and a new feature allowing for concurrent department plan review. In November, we procured an agreement with DigiPlan software and the implementation team at TruePoint Solutions. They begun configuration of our Accella ePermitting software in December. In January, we will be training and going live to the public. The cost of this implementation project is \$9,990. After speaking with the State about newly required electronic requirements, they amended our IGA to reimburse the City for the implementation costs up to \$7,500. This reimbursement will reduce the City's burden to \$2,490. For our customers, they will be able to save in printing and transportation costs for printed plan submittal.

With the new e-Plan Review software we are able to continue to explore ways to improve our customer's experience. One of the primary concerns customers have, is how much time is needed for permit review and approval. It is important to note that our current timelines for review are within the timelines allowed by statute. However, it is our intention to improve, where we are able, even where we already meet the minimum standard. The new ePlan Review Software changes how we manage customer's submittal documents and plans. This will allow us to move forward to a concurrent plan review program. Currently, we use a



P.O. Box 278, St. Helens, OR 97051
Phone: (503) 397-6272 Fax: (503) 397-4016
www.ci.st-helens.or.us

sequential program, where an applicant must submit two or three paper copies of their construction documents and plans for their project to our offices downtown. These copies are physically routed to each department for review. In general, the documents must be approved by the reviewing department before it advances to the next department. The submittal documents must be approved by all four review cycles before being approved for issuance. This sequential process has worked for paper submittals for decades. By contrast, a jurisdiction providing a concurrent plan review program, allows our customer to use our current online ePermitting software to upload their documents from any internet connection. The software keeps the documents in one location where multiple reviewers can access for review at any time and from any computer. In this way, all the reviews can happen without being dependent on the approval from another department. If there are comments or revisions needed to the plans, one plan check sheet would be sent to the customer containing comments from all reviewers. Likewise, the customer will only need to provide one complete response, rather than the possible cycles of revisions in our current program. When we compare these two, we begin to understand the opportunity we have in addressing a primary concern for our customers...time. In initial multidepartment conversations, to determine the high-level priorities for this concurrent plan review program, we determined overall building permit review times could be reduced by as much as fifty percent. We are going to begin this concurrent plan review program using only select types of building permits. This will include New Single-Family Dwellings and Commercial Mechanical. As we implement this program, we will refine as needed and eventually will seek to expand it to other type of building permits. The Building Division would like to thank our Planning Division, Engineering Division and Public Works Department for their continued collaborative efforts in improving our customer's experience.

The Building Division is collaborating and building relationships outside our organization as well. The State requires the local building department to coordinate with the local fire district. In some regions this is a challenge, to the point that the State created additional rules, providing the very minimum requirements for Building and Fire Officials must communicate. We are pleased to report that these rules, while applicable, are not our current trajectory in regard to the relationship between St Helens Building and Fire Officials. We intend to go above and beyond in our collaborations with each other. While our roles and authority differ for various purposes, our goal of public safety is unified. In meeting with CRF&R Fire Marshal, Tad Pedersen, we are going to be working together on an agreement conveying the desire of the two organizations to work together, and detail what this collaboration would look like with regards to making plans available for fire district review and comments, joint meeting to discuss current projects and local conditions, and electronic access to plans and permits. We look forward to preparing this agreement to present to council in 2022.

The authority the City has to administer the building codes is delegated by the State of Oregon. In this term, we have been working on training and an updated operating plan. The various building codes are updated every three years and is typically referred to as the code cycle. Earlier this year, the State adopted 2021 editions of the residential, plumbing,



P.O. Box 278, St. Helens, OR 97051
Phone: (503) 397-6272 Fax: (503) 397-4016
www.ci.st-helens.or.us

and energy codes. After adoption, the code cycle moves into a 'grace period' where focus shifts to distribute the new information to all the stakeholders. For Oregon building code official, this comes in the form of training provided by the state, respective to each newly adopted code. This included classes, related to the Structural, Residential, Plumbing and Energy Efficiency codes. The building division staff has completed the required training. This validates the various State certifications we are required to maintain to continue the City's Building Program. Also, the last part of the year we have been updating our operating plan for our building program with the State. This process has been in limbo since 2016. In October of 2021, the state was able to determine a pathway moving forward and has required all local jurisdictions to provide their updated operating plan by the end of January 2022. We will also be completing this process for Columbia City as they delegate their program administration through an IGA.

Earlier in 2021 City Council directed the Building Division to seek legal counsel to update chapter fifteen of the St Helens Municipal Code. This was in part address changes in delegable authority from the State. The changes, of which the impacts are still not fully understood, dramatically changed the authority the state could delegate to local municipalities through the building codes. This left local jurisdictions to determine what to adopt locally, especially those items a community regulated under the authority of the state delegable authority. Since that discussion legal counsel has produced a draft that is currently under staff review. We are anticipating presenting the final draft to City Council Spring of 2022.

With 3.4 FTE's the Building Division has issued 298 permits from July 1st, 2021, to December 21st, 2021. In that same time, 166 Plan Reviews. We performed 3,038 inspections (avg 117/week). Please note, that this does not reflect all the reviews or inspections performed by all departments with regard to building permits.

Some of the projects and subdivisions to highlight within the community are 7th Street Container Homes, High School Renovations, Broadleaf Arbor Apartments, Popeye's Chicken, and Elkridge phase 6.

Thank you.

Michael De Roia
Building Official
City of St. Helens
Office: 503-366-8228
Fax: 503-397-4016
miked@ci.st-helens.or.us

