

CITY OF CHATTANOOGA DIVISION OF CODES & INSPECTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CURRENT OPERATIONS

- This division is staffed by a director and 28 positions divided into 6 sub-units. It is responsible for enforcing the building codes, construction related ordinances and zoning requirements, staffing 7 different boards and testing and licensing contractors. It works with trade associations, other city departments and divisions and non-city owned utilities.
- The number of permits issued in recent years has been relatively flat although projects may involve greater complexity. The division is self-supporting through permit fees.
- The division conducts its inspection operations in a manner that makes no distinction between residential and non-residential construction. Multiple inspectors handle inspections for both residential and non-residential construction.
- Plans review for non-residential construction requires involvement of multiple persons.
- Current operations are not efficient/effective and do not render excellent customer service. These problems are related to organizational structure, lack of leadership, systems problems with workflow and lack of technology to aid data management and communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hire a new director. This division needs a manager and a visionary leader. The success of other recommendations in this report is dependant upon the division's management and leadership. The current director is an excellent technical resource. However, he is immersed in the day-today technical operations, and has failed to address the long-term needs of the division.
- Create a new organizational structure. The proposed organizational structure is shown in Exhibit D.

For plans review, we recommend: (1) creating a position of assistant director for plans review with managerial, not coordinating, responsibilities; (2) creating a customer service position for plans review and letting it be the first point of contact for the unit; and (3) designating and placing permanent reviewers within the unit to be managed by the assistant director. This includes both the building/ life safety reviewers and the environmental reviewers. Cross training is essential.

For inspections, we recommend (1) creating an assistant director for inspections. This assistant would be the chief building official (CBO) for the city and would manage all of the inspections operations; (2) creating a customer service position to serve as the first point of contact for the inspections units; (3) creating combined inspectors certified for all residential (new and modifications), sign and zoning inspections, (4) retaining the chief building inspector who would manage the combined inspectors, plus two building inspectors dedicated to commercial and industrial building inspections, (5) retaining the chief electrical inspector with two electrical inspectors who would be responsible for all commercial and industrial electrical inspections, and (6) retaining the chief plumbing, gas and mechanical inspector and two plumbing and one gas/mechanical inspector who would be responsible for commercial and industrial plumbing, gas and mechanical inspections.

As a result of the creation of two customer service positions (plans and inspection) and transfer of duties, we recommend reducing the staff of the office manager to three positions – the office manager and two clerks. They would be responsible for permitting, collections and records management.

- The proposed organization outlined above adds two new positions to the division.
- Reconfigure office design for the new location to accommodate the proposed organizational structure discussed above. Place assistant directors and customer service representatives near their respective staff.
- Acquire technology (software and hardware) that will accommodate data management, storage and retrieval for all aspects of codes and inspection activities. We recommend a comprehensive evaluation of the division's operations by a computer analyst before purchase. It is important for the division to acquire a data management system that accommodates the entire operations (or as much as possible) and to avoid another piecemeal approach.

- Provide technology for field inspectors that allow them to file field reports electronically and perhaps remotely.
- Acquire technology and equipment – such as an interactive voice response system to expedite communications between customers and inspectors.
- Other recommendations relate to: (1) modifying the pay structure to compliment and enhance the success of the above recommendations, especially the combined residential inspectors, (2) transporting deposits, (3) enhancing the plans review process, (4) discontinuing or reducing conditional zoning, (5) professionalizing the image of the department, (6) requiring design by an architect or design engineer for all non-residential construction (new or modified) over \$25,000, (7) requiring first time users to attend pre-submittal meetings and (8) requiring up to date codification of the zoning ordinance.

These recommendations result in a net increase of two positions and the associated costs of those positions. Other costs associated with these recommendations include salary and benefit costs to enhance interest in the combined inspector positions and the costs relating to technology improvements. The latter item could be significant. But, the long-term return - enhanced production, improved customer service and reduction in operational costs will more than offset the investment in technology.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- Improve workflow, shorten plan review time, enhance communications (internally and externally) and improve the quality and consistency of plan reviews.
- Enhances customer service.
- Focus customer service contact to a few individuals within the division.
- Provides staff with leadership, management and technology support.
- Provide management with real time information about division operations.
- Provide more accountability.
- Allow for more efficient use of existing personnel.

- When fully implemented, will cut operational costs significantly. Will cut operational costs marginally in early years mostly by reducing multiple inspection trips.

The recommendations outlined above will take time to implement. Change is difficult for all organizations. Staff will have to change the way they do business. Inspectors will have to see a benefit to becoming certified in multiple disciplines. Customers will have to change the way they do business with the division. If these recommendations are enacted, we strongly recommend development of a change process plan.