

**CITY OF SANTA PAULA  
MEMORANDUM**

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Wally Bobkiewicz, City Manager  
Subject: **Response to Final Report – Customer Service Citizens Task Force**  
Date: June 11, 2003

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**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the City Council receive the response to the Final Report of the Customer Service Citizens Task Force.

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**General Discussion:** On April 14, 2003, the Customer Service Citizens Task Force presented its final report to the City Council (attached). The City Council directed staff to return to the Council this evening with its response to the report.

The responses from the Building and Safety Department and Planning Department are attached. One recommendation was directed to the City Manager: creation of a Development Ombudsman. I am pleased to announce the appointment of Fire Chief Paul L. Skeels as Development Ombudsman for a one-year period beginning July 1, 2003. Chief Skeels will perform these duties in addition to his duties as Fire Chief. After one year, the new responsibilities for Chief Skeels will be evaluated in order to determine if this part-time focus is working or requires a full-time staff member.

Chief Skeels distinguished himself last year as Interim City Manager. During this time, he created a new relationship between the City and the Santa Paula business community. The Chief will serve as an ombudsman with the business community on development issues, working closely with Interim Economic Development Director Charmaine Stouder. Chief Skeels will also chair a new Development Cabinet made up of the Directors of Planning, Building and Safety, Public Works, Economic Development and the City Attorney in order to regularly review all development projects currently being processed by the City.

Building and Safety Director Stephen R. Stuart and Thomas M. Bartlett, Planning Director will present their responses to the City Council and answer any questions the Council may have.

***For the Special City Council Meeting of June 16, 2003***

**Attachments**

1. Final Report – Customer Service Citizens Task Force
2. Response to Customer Service Report from Building and Safety and Planning Departments

# **Response to Customer Service Report**

## **Building & Safety Department**

## **Planning Department**

June 11, 2003

### ***#1 – (Planning Department – review all codes)***

The Planning Department is reviewing and revising the Development Code, which includes Chapters 153, 154, 155, and 156 of the Municipal Code, to improve the Code in several respects: 1) to bring the Code into compliance with most recent court rulings and state legislation; 2) to simplify the Code where possible; 3) to bring the Code into conformance with the General Plan, including the Housing Element; and 4) to improve the readability of the Code. This will be accomplished in the fall of 2003.

### ***#2 – City Manager (create a development ombudsman)***

The City Manager is working on a staffing plan to create a business ombudsman position.

### ***#3 – Planning Department (develop three levels of time review)***

Within five working days the following permit applications will be processed: Sign permits, fence permits, zoning clearances, temporary use permits, and single-family residential plan-checks.

Within fifteen working days the following permit applications will be processed: Second units, minor design reviews, concept reviews, tree removal permits, and home occupancy permits.

All other permit applications will be processed within thirty working days (this does not apply to those projects requiring either a public hearing or review for environmental impacts under CEQA).

(Note: if staff determines that a project application is incomplete, a written notice will be mailed within the timeframes specified above indicating the missing items and requesting the applicant to resubmit the completed application.)

***#4—Bldg. & Safety (develop standard plans)***

The Building and Safety Department currently has a variety of customer handouts. In the past six months we have been working with the City of Fillmore in developing flexible installation standards and details that will include more options to assist the customer in understanding specific requirements and methods of installation that are available to them. These will apply to both Santa Paula and Fillmore. New or revised installation standards and details will include information on the following: 1) accessibility, 2) attic HVAC, 3) concrete block walls, 4) electrical line burial depths, 5) exterior penetrations, 6) lath & exterior plaster, 7) nailing schedule, 8) patio covers, 9) plumbing, 10) T-bar ceilings, 11) tenant improvements, 12) warm-air furnaces, 13) water heater installations, and 14) window replacements.

The department will continue to review situations where standard plans could be utilized in assisting the customers.

Handout materials currently available from the Planning Department include: site sign posting requirements, traffic sight safety area, minimum off-street parking standards, a development standards summary table (for all zones), residential parking requirement summary, zoning district definitions, a miscellaneous statistical data table, a listing of alcohol licenses in the city, and a list of Homeless Service Agencies. Most of the aforementioned documents are also available through the Departmental web site ([ci.santa-paula.ca.us/planning](http://ci.santa-paula.ca.us/planning)). Both the General Plan Land Use Plan Map and the zoning map are available for purchase at the front counter, as are the individual sections of the Municipal Code that pertain to different zoning districts. The department will continue to revise handouts on an on-going basis. Also, the Planning Department is working on a new handout, which would more simply explain the City's sign ordinance requirements, with an emphasis on downtown.

***#5—Both Departments (review/develop informational material)***

The Building and Safety Department recently developed four new informational forms dealing with plan check submittals and permits. We have submitted to the Citywide Customer Service Committee a list of "most frequently asked questions" and answers. These will eventually be printed and distributed to employees and the public. The department will continue to review the need for informational materials on an on-going basis.

The Planning Department has recently developed informational material for publication in the quarterly Community Services Recreation Guide. Also, a lengthy "frequently Asked Questions" document has been prepared for inclusion with FAQs from other departments in a citywide document. Within the past two years a Departmental web page has been developed. Application forms and a variety of policy guides and documents are available through this web page. Also, users are afforded a variety of links to related state sites, county sites, and others.

***#6—Both Departments (develop form for memorializing public contact)***

The departments within the Community Development Building have jointly developed a duplicate form for counter use that will track interaction between customers and employees. The new form offers an improved format, to include space for diagrams or drawings, and a copy will be available to the customer. The Building and Safety Department now uses this form when information is given that is not already memorialized by a permit or other document. The Planning Department now uses this form for any interaction not involving an active project application. (Interaction with customers has been tracked in a similar fashion in the Planning Department -- without duplicates, however -- for the past two years.)

***#7—Both Departments (review communication between departments)***

Project Review is being restructured. Instead of a duplicate process of having projects routed for written comments, and occasional inter-departmental meetings for discussion of pending projects, there will be weekly project review meeting where every newly filed project will be discussed.

***#8—Both Departments (develop and advertise guarantees for timeliness & scheduling and keeping appointments)***

The average workload for field inspectors is 10 to 15 inspections a day. The Building and Safety Department honors morning and afternoon inspection requests. We are able to provide this service 99% of the time. It is very difficult, however, to guarantee the exact time of the inspections because time needed for each inspection varies.

- Morning inspections between 8:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.
- Afternoon inspection between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Customers may call the office at 933-4218 between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. the morning of the inspection for an estimated time of the inspection. After- hours and weekend inspections may be available by appointment upon the customer's request (a fee is charged for this service).

Santa Paula offers one-stop service for processing plan checks for building permits. The Building & Safety Department assumes the responsibility to route plans through the Fire, Planning, and Public Works Departments in addition to the Building & Safety Department. (Most other Building and Safety Departments require separate Planning and Public Works approvals prior to accepting plans for plan check.) This service allows customers to receive a comprehensive list of corrections/concerns or approval from the departments.

- Large projects should be reviewed within 4 weeks
- Small projects such as patios and carports should be reviewed within two weeks, depending on the number of plans already in the process.

***For the Special City Council Meeting of June 16, 2003***

- We also offer “fast track” plan checks with a turn-around time of one week for the initial plan review.

The Planning Department staffs the front counter between 9:00am and 3:00pm daily. After new planners have been hired to help the Department meet increasing workloads, the availability of staff at the front counter will be expanded to 9:00am to 5:00pm. Project submittals for General Plan amendments, Specific Plans, zone changes, conditional use permits, and planned development permits should be accomplished by appointment. Likewise, all re-submittals should be handled by appointment.

***#9—Both Departments (develop a listing of local service providers/professionals)***

A 3-ring binder will be maintained at the front counter, which will include the contact information for professionals in the real estate and building industries who have sought inclusion through the Chamber of Commerce. The binder will be organized by profession and/or trade categories for ease of use.

***#10—Both Departments (develop a regular schedule of training on customer service and dealing with difficult people)***

Training will be provided to all staff in the Building & Safety and Planning Departments annually. Training for 2003 will be scheduled in the fall.

***#11—Both Departments (develop/enforce identification policies)***

Field inspectors in the Building and Safety Department will wear shirts everyday with the City logo to help with identification and they will wear a picture ID attached to their clothing. Inspectors will carry business cards to distribute if requested or when appropriate.

Planning Department personnel are expected to dress professionally, and they do so. Uniforms are not used or required. All planners carry City identification, and will wear official identification when working in the field.

***#12—Both Departments (develop customer service post cards)***

Customer Service post cards will be available from a display stand at the front counter, and they will be handed out with all final inspection approval documents by staff in the field. The cards are presently being designed, and will be in use no later than August 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

**#13—Both Departments (develop procedures for training)**

The Building and Safety Department is responsible for having knowledge of over 3,000 pages of state-mandated codes and regulations in addition to the municipal code. This makes it impossible for one individual to have a complete understanding of all the codes and regulations. Each staff member has an area of expertise and it is our goal to have staff sufficiently trained to direct customers to the appropriate person that can help them.

The Planning Department staff is responsible for understanding and putting into practice a wide variety of state-mandated codes and regulations (including CEQA, Subdivision Map Act, Planning and Zoning Laws, Cortese-Knox Local Government Reorganization Act, and the Permit Streamlining Act), which total more than 1000 pages of state code. Also, staff is responsible for interpreting and implementing city regulations in more than one-third (250 pages) of the Municipal Code, implementation of the policies and guidelines set out in the General Plan (365+ pages), and implementation and/or monitoring of the many unique project-specific conditions of approval or mitigation measures relating to either a conditional use permit, a planned development permit, or an approved IS/MND. Finally, with regard to all of these various laws and regulations, staff is expected to be aware of all applicable judicial proceedings that impact how these regulations and procedures may legally be applied. This makes it impossible for any one individual to have a complete understanding of all the codes and regulations. Each staff member has certain areas of expertise, and it is our goal to have staff sufficiently trained to direct customers to the appropriate person that can best help them. Also, in an attempt to improve staff knowledge and customer service, some funds are set-aside in the annual Planning Department budget to help train staff. However, training funds are limited, and it means having to be away from the office, so it is not done as frequently as it should.

*\* The Planning Department is required to process development applications in a manner consistent with the California Permit Streamlining Act (refer especially to Section 65943 of the California Government Code). Under this state law, all development applications must be reviewed for application completeness within 30 days. The Act also governs the timetable for project approvals (refer to Sections 65950, et. seq.). For example, a final decision must have been made no later than sixty days following the date of application completeness for any project deemed to be exempt from CEQA.*

**FINAL REPORT  
CITY OF SANTA PAULA  
CUSTOMER SERVICE CITIZENS TASK FORCE  
APRIL 14, 2003**

**BACKGROUND**

On January 21, 2003, the Santa Paula City Council established a five member Customer Service Citizens Task Force to develop recommendations for improving customer service in the Planning and Building and Safety Departments. This task force met four times (February 19, March 13, March 26 and April 1, 2003) which included one public hearing on March 13, 2003 to receive citizen input. During the March 13 hearing, ten individuals testified about their experiences with the two departments.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The Planning and Building and Safety Departments provide important functions in the development of the City of Santa Paula. At a time when the City needs to attract and retain businesses, the interactions that the public have with these departments sets the tone for the success or failure of these efforts. Therefore, staff should be supportive of improvements to Santa Paula, rather than discourage them.

The task force believes that there are serious problems in the tone that the Planning and Building Safety Departments set with businesses that want to expand or locate within Santa Paula. These departments are believed to be unfriendly, give conflicting information about the laws or rules required for development in Santa Paula and seem to work to discourage applicants to do business in Santa Paula, rather than propose ways to help customers accomplish what they want to get done.

The task force also encountered a very disturbing issue: people being unwilling to talk in public about the work of these departments because of fear of retaliation or retribution against them by the staff members in these departments.

The task force believes one of the root causes of the problems, especially with the Planning Department, is that current Santa Paula ordinances may no longer reflect community standards. The staff is required to enforce some code requirements that may no longer make sense for the community.

Overall, the Task Force believes that the Planning and Building and Safety Departments must be reminded that they work for the citizens of Santa Paula, rather than the other way around. Efforts must be made to ensure greater courtesy and helpfulness of staff in all aspects of their jobs as well as provide consistent, accurate and timely information to customers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **FOR CITY COUNCIL**

1. Direct staff to review all current codes to ensure that they meet community standards and authorizing the City Manager to waive certain code requirements when in the best interest of the City.

### **FOR CITY MANAGER**

2. Create a development ombudsman position to allow customers an individual to reach if they are having difficulties with a process or staff person.

### **FOR PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

3. Develop three levels of time review for applications, rather than processing all applications within thirty days. A first level of review should be for simple ministerial applications that could be processed within five working days. A second level of review would be for intermediate projects to be processed within ten to fifteen working days. A third level of review for complex projects to be reviewed within the required thirty days.

### **FOR BUILDING AND SAFETY DEPARTMENT**

4. Develop sets of standard plans for everyday projects (like the one that exists for “retaining walls”) to make available to customers for their use.

### **FOR BOTH DEPARTMENTS**

5. Review all informational materials currently available for pick-up by applicants and develop additional informational brochures that answer common questions or explain regularly used procedures.
6. Develop a form that memorializes every contact at the public counter to allow the customer to take away a form that describes the information discussed and the date, time and staff person information was discussed. City staff for reference would keep a copy of these forms.
7. Review how they communicate within their departments and between their departments on individual applications and the processes for documenting this communication and communications with applicants to ensure consistent direction on all projects.

8. Develop and advertise to the public customer service guarantees that address timeliness for scheduling and keeping appointments with staff, minimum and maximum time schedules for review of documents and other procedures and a commitment to help find solutions to customer problems for good customer service.
9. Work with the Santa Paula Chamber of Commerce to develop a listing of local service providers/professionals who have expertise in various construction trades to be made available at the counter.
10. Develop a regular schedule of training for its employees on customer service issues and dealing with difficult people.
11. Develop and/or enforce policies on identifying their employees when in the field. This would include immediate identification as a City staff member at all field contacts, the wearing of City identification cards and clothing identifying who they are and presentation of business cards (which should contain direct dial phone number/voice mail for individual) at all field contacts.
12. Develop customer service post cards that are given to all customers and would be returned to the City Manager that would allow customers to document their experiences with the departments.
13. Develop procedures to ensure that all staff have sufficient training to either answer questions that are posed to them or understand where to go to get the information if they themselves do not have it.

Respectfully submitted,

Customer Service Citizens Task Force

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