




MEMORANDUM

Date: January 21, 2015

To: Lee Feldman, ICMA-CM, City Manager

Via: Susanne Torriente, Assistant City Manager

From: Jenni Morejon, Director 

Re: Building Services Division Budget Amendment/Transfer Authorization Request

Summary

This memo outlines data points that show a continued increase in building permit activity over the past few years. These metrics support a requested budget amendment to provide additional resources in the DSD Building Services Division to maintain a sustained level of service in relation to the increased permit volume. With support of this request, DSD would add 11 FTEs to the Building Division and increase the budget for temporary services used to supplement plan review and permit inspections. Upon approval, we will coordinate with the Budget Division to process a budget amendment on the next available City Commission agenda.

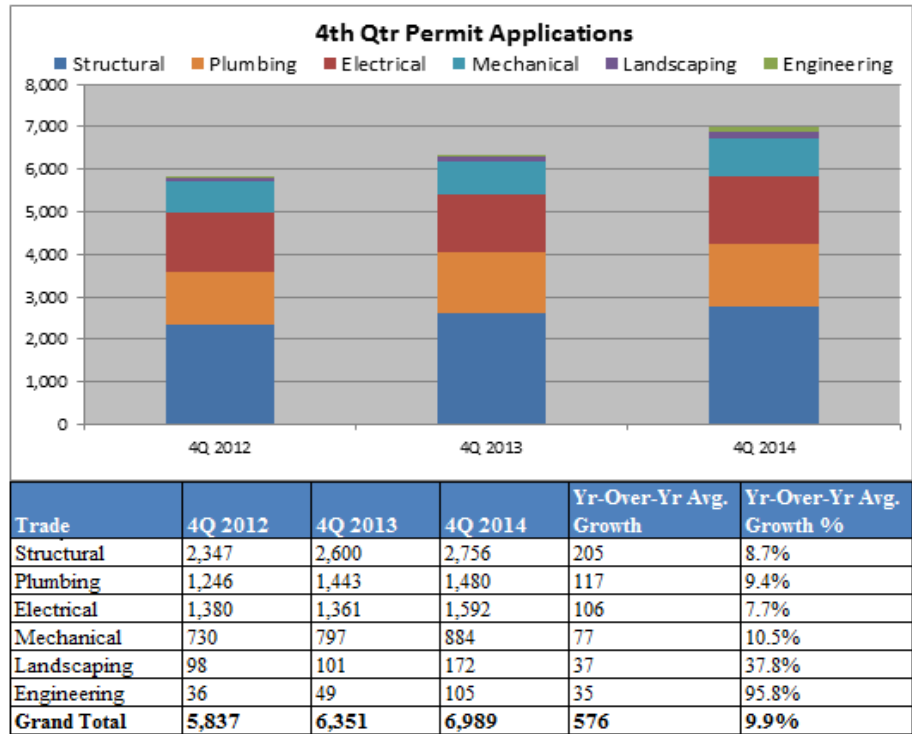
Background

Since FY 2012, permit activity has increased nearly 10% per year with job values of over \$800M in FY 2014, which significantly exceeds performance measures set forth in the City's Strategic Plan. The data below indicates that not only has development skyrocketed, but so too has the associated amount of review and inspection time necessary for these larger valued projects.

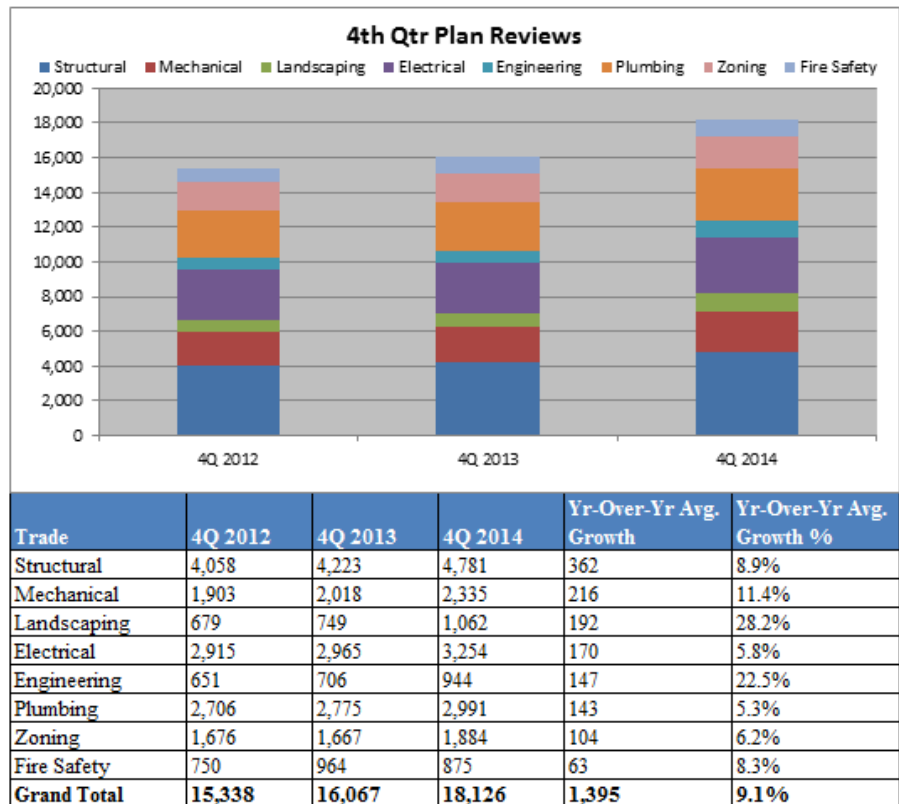
Our forecast based on the below data indicates that over the next five years, our Building Services Division will be extremely busy. Additionally, the Call Center is already showing a significant increase in call volume activity. The Division's current permitting activity exceeds workloads in comparable neighboring municipalities. The total number of general building permits issued in the reporting period highlights an output activity level that is four times higher than similar cities throughout the nation with populations of 100,000-250,000.

Unless otherwise noted, the numbers outlined below provide a comparison of the fourth quarters from fiscal years 2012, 2013 and 2014.

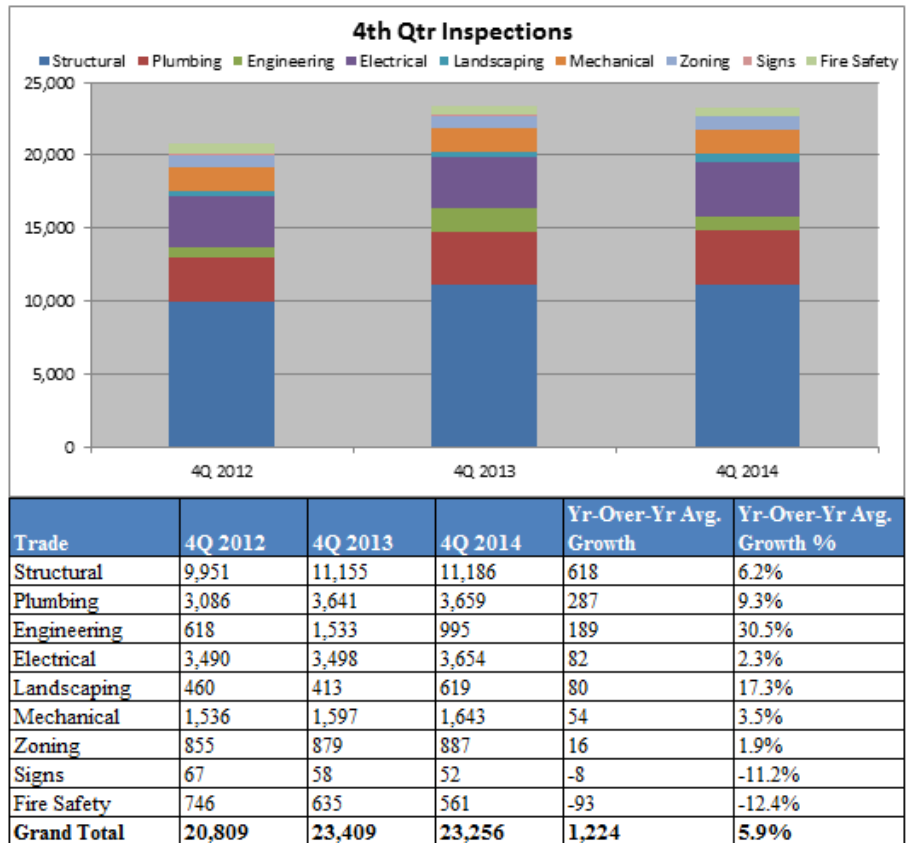
Permit Applications: Since FY 2012, 4th Quarter permit applications have increased by an average of 9.9% (approximately 576 applications) per year. The growth is heavily concentrated in the disciplines of Structural (+205 applications per 4th Quarter of each year), Plumbing (+117 applications per 4th Quarter of each year), and Electrical (+106 applications per 4th Quarter of each year).



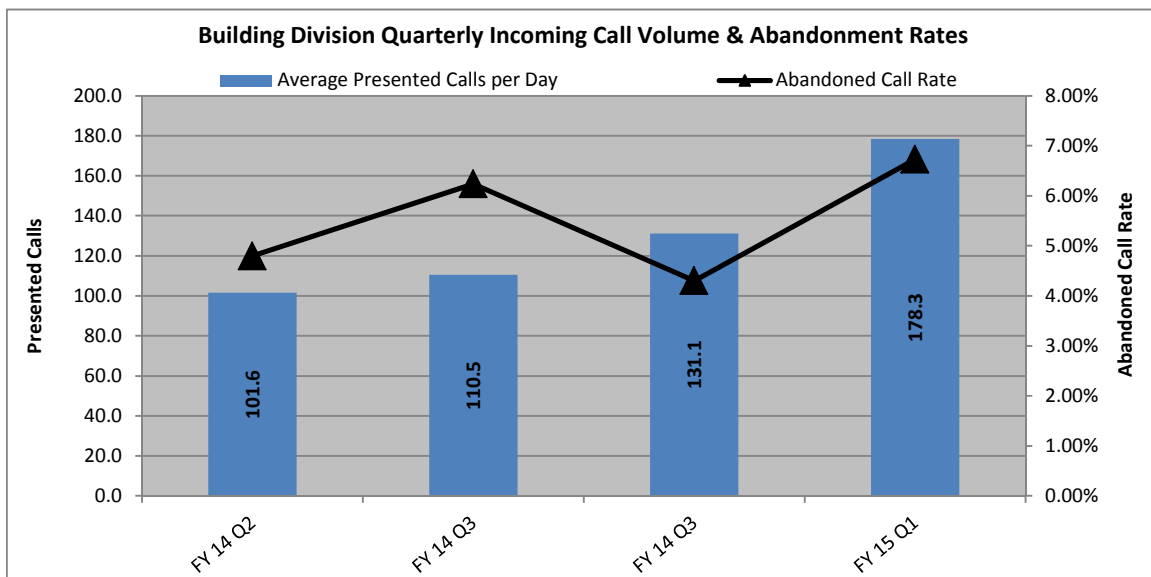
Plan Reviews: Total plan reviews have increased 9.1% per year, which equates to an additional 1,395 reviews in one quarter alone! The biggest driver in absolute terms is Structural reviews, which have increased 8.9% (362 reviews) per 4th Quarter of each year. Landscaping plan reviews are up the most in terms of percentage, with a 28.2% average increase. To address an increasing demand in floodplain review (averaging 165 per month); a need for a second flood examiner is essential in supplementing the additional volume.



Inspections: Compared to FY 2012, 4th Quarter inspections have increased by 5.9% (1,224 inspections) per year. By any measure, this is a significant increase. However, it should be noted that with big projects ramping up, the numbers will most likely increase even more. As with plan reviews, the largest inspection increase has been seen in the Structural discipline, which has increased 6.2% (618 inspections) per 4th Quarter of each year. Regarding flood inspections, they are averaging around 30 per month.



Call Center: Total DSD call center volume increased 20.8% from the start of 2014 to the end of last year (Jan–Mar 2014 = 322 calls per day vs. Oct–Dec 2014 = 389 calls per day). Almost all of this increase can be attributed to calls into the Building Division: Jan–Mar 2014 = 102 calls per day vs. Oct–Dec 2014 = 178 calls per day, a 75.6% increase.



Other Development Factors: The market forces indicate a growing number of mid and high-rise mixed-use development in Downtown, along major corridors and on the Barrier Island. Statistics from the Urban Design & Planning Division indicate that there are approximately 4,224 residential units, 506,939 square feet of commercial, and 974 hotel rooms that have received development approvals or are in the development permit review pipeline for the Central Beach and Downtown alone. Projects such as Icon Las Olas, Marina Lofts, The Wave, All Aboard Florida Rail Station, Wisdom Village Crossing, Aloft/Element Hotel, Ocean Wave Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Complex, and Bayshore Club are all examples of the increase in complexity and intensity of the types of development slated for Fort Lauderdale. The maps showing some of these key projects are included as an exhibit to this memo. Increasing our number of permit intake staff (service clerks) and plans examiners, particularly in Structural and Flood is the immediate concern. Furthermore, as these projects obtain permits and commence construction, our inspection team will begin to see the impact on their daily inspection requests.

Budget Amendment Requests

In an effort to ensure adequate staffing to meet the development demands outlined above, below are our requests listed by priority:

1. Flood Plain Development Review Specialist - this is a working title for a Structural Plans Review Examiner. Currently there is a Flood Plain Manager that oversees the daily activities of providing flood hazard data to interested parties, reviewing requests for letters or map change, communicating floodplain development requirements, inspecting development work, etc., with an average of 165 reviews a month (this number is based on the dedicated Flood Plain Manager start date and ordinance change). An additional Plans Reviewer would significantly improve the ability of the Floodplain Manager to concentrate on developing and implementing a holistic floodplain management program and to manage, and enhance, the position of the City within the CRS program.
2. Building Inspector III - lead the "Walk-Thru" permitting program by reviewing single discipline permits to ensure an expedited service to Neighbors. Currently one Inspector III completes over 30 "walk-thru" permits daily and completes 10 to 15 inspections in addition to answering emails and calls for building inspection appointments and assists with expired permits and renewal inquiries from the Building Compliance team. Industry standards indicates the Walk-Thru permitting program is only completed on average once a week at other municipalities, while the City offers this program Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.
3. Chief Building Compliance Inspector - this is the working title of a Chief Structural Inspector assigned to the Building Compliance Team responsible for overseeing the building compliance cases (e.g., expired permits, work-without-permits, 40-year inspections, review plans for after-the-fact permits, and verifying violations have been complied). In addition, the supervisor will oversee all inspectors and administrative staff supporting the building compliance team by scheduling staff inspections and overseeing the administrative support staff. This position also serves as the liaison for Fire and Police by assisting with open investigations and verifying building structural inquiries for open cases and working with the Police Department to schedule

board-up inquiries. Currently there are over 2,000 open cases with violations and 217 open 40-year inspection cases with a backlog since 2009. At this time, a Building Inspector is performing the supervisory functions in addition to his day-to-day responsibility of completing investigations and working with Neighbors to comply open building violation cases. He has a case log of over 900 cases.

4. 40-Year Inspection Coordinator - this is a working title for an Administrative Aide leading the administrative functions of the 40-year inspection process. Currently there are 7 staff members in Building Services that support the 40-year inspection process, however, no dedicated administrative staff ensuring compliance. The employee will be responsible for reviewing the annual list of properties from the County, contacting owners, follow up and maintaining an internal tracking mechanism for properties within the City. At this time, there are over 217 open 40-year inspection cases with a backlog since 2009.
5. Call Center/Records Coordinator - this is a working title for an Administrative Assistant I to spearhead the digitization of all files within the Building Services Division. This employee will manage the Call Center and Records clerks, develop policies and procedures for record keeping and digitization and manage any contracts with consultants as it relates to digitizing and record consulting services. As mentioned above, calls have increased within the department Call Center and a dedicated staff person leading the call center efforts, ensuring calls are being received within an industry average and managing call center agents and back up agents is necessary to continue to provide and maintain the demands of call inquiries.
6. Clerk II - clerical support for the Management Analyst/Fleet Liaison to assist with vehicle maintenance follow-up, Neighbor survey coordination, special projects and a variety of other clerical responsibilities to include but not limited to filing, filtering customer complaints and inquires, schedule staff meetings, preparing agendas, taking minutes, back-up call center clerk, assists with keeping records and purchasing on behalf of the division.
7. Clerk III - clerical support to the Building Compliance team by handling Neighbor complaints, preparing a variety of legal notices for expired permits, notice of violations and coordinating and preparing documentation for building inspectors for various hearings.
8. Clerk III - clerical support to the Building Compliance team by answering all inquiries via phone and in person, opening cases for expired cases (currently a backlog of 19,000 cases from 2000-2014), assisting with researching cases on behalf of building inspectors, and sending correspondence, preparing cases by providing administrative support in coordinating documentation, correspondence and communication to Neighbors.
9. Business Outreach Coordinator - this staff person will be the ombudsman for permitting and stakeholders of the Department's Economic and Community Reinvestment Division. This position will manage communications and access to information to external customers, acting as an internal communication liaison between the Building Division and City Officials. The incumbent will monitor planning/zoning/economic development to guide developers through the approval process, making all resources available to expedite handling. In accordance with the City's

Economic Development Strategic Plan, this position will spearhead communications regarding changes to the Florida Building Code, analyzing and making recommended changes of information to the Building Services website, impacting informational pieces available to assist Neighbors and the development community with building services.

10. Building Inspector – this staff person will lead unsafe structures and support the building compliance team with other areas to include but not limited to expired permits and work without permits.
11. Urban Engineer – this staff person will review engineering plans under the development review for permitting. This employee will also help alleviate the Engineering Supervisor to focus on high level strategic planning for the engineering team. Since development and submittals have increased dramatically this has in turn increased the level of engineering reviews.
12. Supplemental Contract Staff – a request to increase the temporary staffing budget by \$396,000 to alleviate the projected fiscal year demand in plan reviews and inspection services.

The total cost for the requests outlined above is \$946,000.00. A budget amendment transferring this amount from the Building Fund reserves to this year's Building Fund operating budget will be coordinated with the Budget Division of the City Manager's Office following the outcome of our meeting.

Conclusion

While some of these requests could and should have been made over the past few years, we now have the right leadership with the right management approach in place at the Building Division. It is because of the careful planning and analysis by many staff within DSD that we have been able to articulate our needs based on sound data. I am confident that with the approval of this budget amendment and the addition of key staff in the Building Division, we can continue to provide the high level of permit service that our neighbors and the development community expect. We look forward to your favorable approval and thank you for your continued support.

cc: Alfred Battle, Deputy Director
John Travers, Building Official
Alex Hernandez, Assistant Building Official
Mark Leibowitz, Management Analyst