

**M E M O R A N D U M**

TO: Jon Jennings, City Manager  
FROM: Julie Sullivan, Chief of Staff  
DATE: October 26, 2015  
RE: Proposed Permitting and Inspections Department

---

With the goal of radically improving the City's many permitting and inspections functions, I reviewed current positions, processes and structures, and am proposing a new one-stop department. To that end, I conducted approximately 40 interviews including several external partners; reviewed the two 2013 studies, one from the University of Southern Maine and the other from the Government Consulting Group; and looked at best practices from Boston, Burlington, VT and Lowell, MA.

The Planning and Urban Development Department has made concerted efforts over the past few years to strengthen these functions and many improvements can be attributed to their hard work. We are now poised to build on these initial improvements and restructure to fully realize the goal of an effective, efficient permitting and inspections department that provides excellent customer service.

Key areas of emphasis from internal and external interviewees are:

- Need to greatly improve customer service focus
- Information and application materials are far too complex
- Need more detailed web-based interface regarding application status
- Need online application capability which feeds directly into the City software system(s) to avoid staff data entry and simplify the process for applicants
- Applications must be triaged so are not all in one queue, but separated by complexity
- Clear, consistent evaluative measures and processes need to be put in place
- Ordinances need to be rewritten for clarity, consistency and brevity

**Summary**

The interviews and research indicate that there are clear efficiencies and improvements to be gained by co-locating Inspections, Housing Safety, Zoning, and Business Licensing. Adding Food Service Inspections in the future also makes sense, given the overlapping involvement with overall inspections and business licensing processes.

Currently, all building permit applications go into the same queue. There is some fast-tracking based on application completeness. Staff stated that at least 60% of application volume is small,

residential rehab projects. I suggest re-tooling the front-end processes to triage applications so that simple projects can move quickly and perhaps have permits issued on the spot, with front-end staff able to work with customers needing assistance instead of entering data and uploading documents. It will also be critical to change the threshold for which projects require a zoning review and which do not. Currently, all projects are subject to a zoning review.

For Events, there are efficiencies and improvements to be made by co-locating all event-related staff within one office in Recreation and Facilities Management, adding contract staff to allow the City to more effectively manage the increasing volume and scope of events, and including all event-related permits and fees into one overarching contract.

Although Planning Department staff are extremely wary of any software changes, it is evident that the current programs and processes maintain a patchwork, band-aid approach and do not allow for cost-savings, efficiencies and good customer service. The IT Department is considering a City-wide software solution that could better link the many departments while providing a seamless experience for our customers.

Recommendations are organized into five areas:

1. Structure and Staffing
2. Processes
3. Ordinances
4. IT
5. Budgetary Impact

## Recommendations

### 1. Structure and Staffing

The departments involved in permitting and inspections are: City Clerk, Fire, Health & Human Services/Public Health, IT, Planning and Urban Development, Parking, Police, Public Services, and Recreation and Facilities. In general, permitting and inspections functions are as follows:

Department	Function	Name	Title
<b>Planning</b>	Plan Review	Tammy Munson	Inspections Division Director
		Jon Rioux	Inspections Division Deputy Director
		Jeannie Bourke	Plan Reviewer
		Laurie Leader	Plan Reviewer
	Front desk – Inspections	Doreen Christ	Office Assistant
		Brad Saucier	Admin Assistant
		Vacant	Office Assistant (half time with Inspections, half time with Planning)
	New construction/rehab inspections	Tammy Munson Jon Rioux Doug Morin	Inspections Division Director Inspections Division Deputy Director Code Enforcement Officer

<b>Department</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
		Brian Laflamme Duane Hanson	Code Enf Off (electrical) Code Enforcement Officer
	Housing complaint inspections/sidewalk issues including outdoor dining, street artists, accessibility issues, etc.	Chuck Fagone	Code Enforcement Officer
	Zoning Review	Ann Machado Christine Stacy	Zoning Administrator Zoning Specialist
	Historic preservation	Deb Andrews Rob Wiener	Historic Preservation Manager Preservation Compliance Officer
	Planning/development	Tuck O'Brien Barbara Barhydt Rick Knowland Christine Grimando Caitlin Cameron Shukria Wiar Jean Fraser Nell Donaldson Phil DiPierro Jennifer Munson Vacant	Planning Division Director Development Review Manager Senior Planner Senior Planner Urban Designer Planner Planner Planner (PT) Development Review Coordinator Office Manager Office Assistant (half time with Inspections, half time with Planning)
<b>City Clerk</b>	Business licensing	Janice Gardner	Business License Administrator
	Event permits	Janice Gardner	Business License Administrator
<b>HHS</b>	Food service inspections	Mike Russell Eric Cobb Tom Williams	Program Manager Inspector Inspector
<b>Fire</b>	Plan review	Keith Gautreau Craig Messinger David Petrucelli	Asst Fire Chief, Fire Prevention Lieutenant Captain
<b>Public Services</b>	Events	Ted Musgrave Rusty Groh	Event Coordinator Event Assistant
	Street opening permits	Carol Merritt	Account Clerk
	On-street parking permits	Gretchen Gagnon	Office Assistant
	FOG/Water Resources	Ben Pearson	Assistant Engineer
	Plan review	Kathy Earley	Director of Engineer Services
		David Margolis-Pineo	Deputy Engineer
		Jeff Tarling	City Arborist
		Jeremiah Bartlett	Transportation Engineer
		Rhonda Zazzara	Inspection Coordinator
<b>IT</b>	Urban Insight, Civic Plus, ePlan	Dan Boutilier Vicki Bourret	IT Dept Director Deputy IT Director
<b>Rec &amp; Facilities</b>	Events	Sally DeLuca Andy Downs	Rec & Facilities Dept Director Director of Public Assembly Facilities
<b>Parking</b>	Events	John Peverada	Parking Manager

<b>Department</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Police</b>	Events	Sgt. Mike Rand	Traffic
<b>Housing Safety Office</b>	Rental housing inspections	Art Howe	Administrator
		Ian Houseal	Program Coordinator
		TBH – 3 positions	Code Enforcement and Life Safety Inspector(s)

Initially, the following components were considered for inclusion in the new one-stop department:

- Inspections
- Business Licensing
- Events
- Parking Permits
- Zoning
- Food Service Inspections
- Housing Safety

These components were presumed to stay under Planning:

- Housing and Community Development
- Transportation
- Planning and Historic Preservation

Because the Housing Safety Office (HSO) is just starting up, I believe it is best to allow the HSO to achieve its own short-term deliverables without having to be caught up in the trials and tribulations of a new, combined department. I suggest bringing the HSO into the new one-stop 3 to 6 months after implementation. The Food Service Inspections program in the Public Health Division is functioning well and also can be brought into the new one-stop at a later date.

On the other hand, I do not recommend bringing Events into this one-stop. There is enough complexity in combining all building-related permitting and inspections as well as business licensing functions; the best practices review did not yield any other municipalities who combine these functions with events; and interviews with Events staff indicate several improvements that can be made to streamline event-related permitting within an improved events one-stop:

- Bring Event Coordinator and Event Assistant from Public Services into the Events office under the Director of Public Assembly Facilities.
- Fill the Deputy Director of PAF position, as the Director has too many direct reports.
- Contract with event coordinators to allow the City to respond more efficiently and effectively to the increased volume and scope of events.
- Combine all relevant permits under one event contract, so that customers are paying one fee at one time.

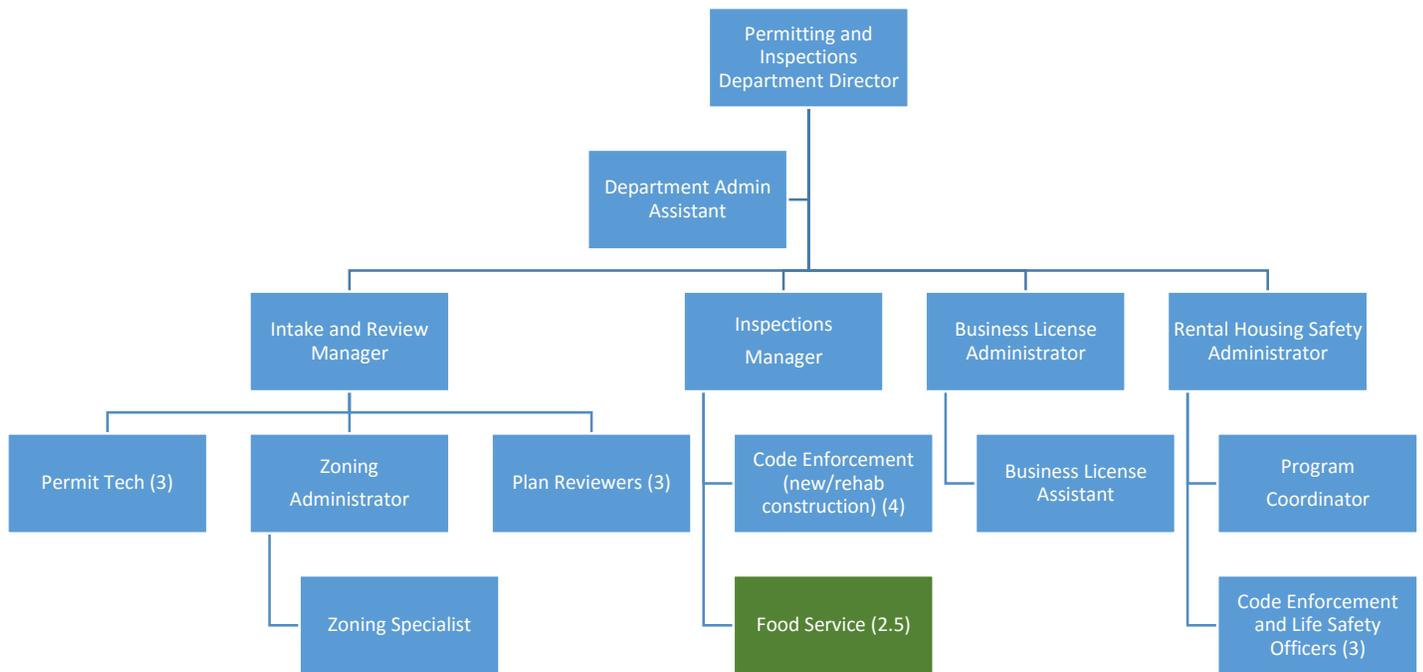
- Set a threshold above which an event needs to have its own organizer or we will charge them for the cost of an organizer.
- Consider enforcing deadlines such that fees increase for late requests.
- Tent permits should go through admin review and not zoning.
- Set a threshold above which an event needs Fire Department involvement.
- Consider a threshold for types of events that should have City Manager approval at the outset.
- Fully utilize City software systems, either Urban Insight or a new software solution.

I also do not recommend bringing Parking into this one-stop. While Parking is involved with events permitting as well as some construction-related permitting, it is a relatively isolated process that works well as it is.

However, there are advantages to moving the street opening and on-street parking permits related to construction from Public Services to the one-stop, and either the Department Admin Assistant or the Permit Techs could issue those permits. In addition, it make sense to incorporate the Fats, Oils and Grease permits into the one-stop, as they are a significant challenge for the food service industry and part of the building review process.

The new Permitting and Inspections Department would incorporate the following changes:

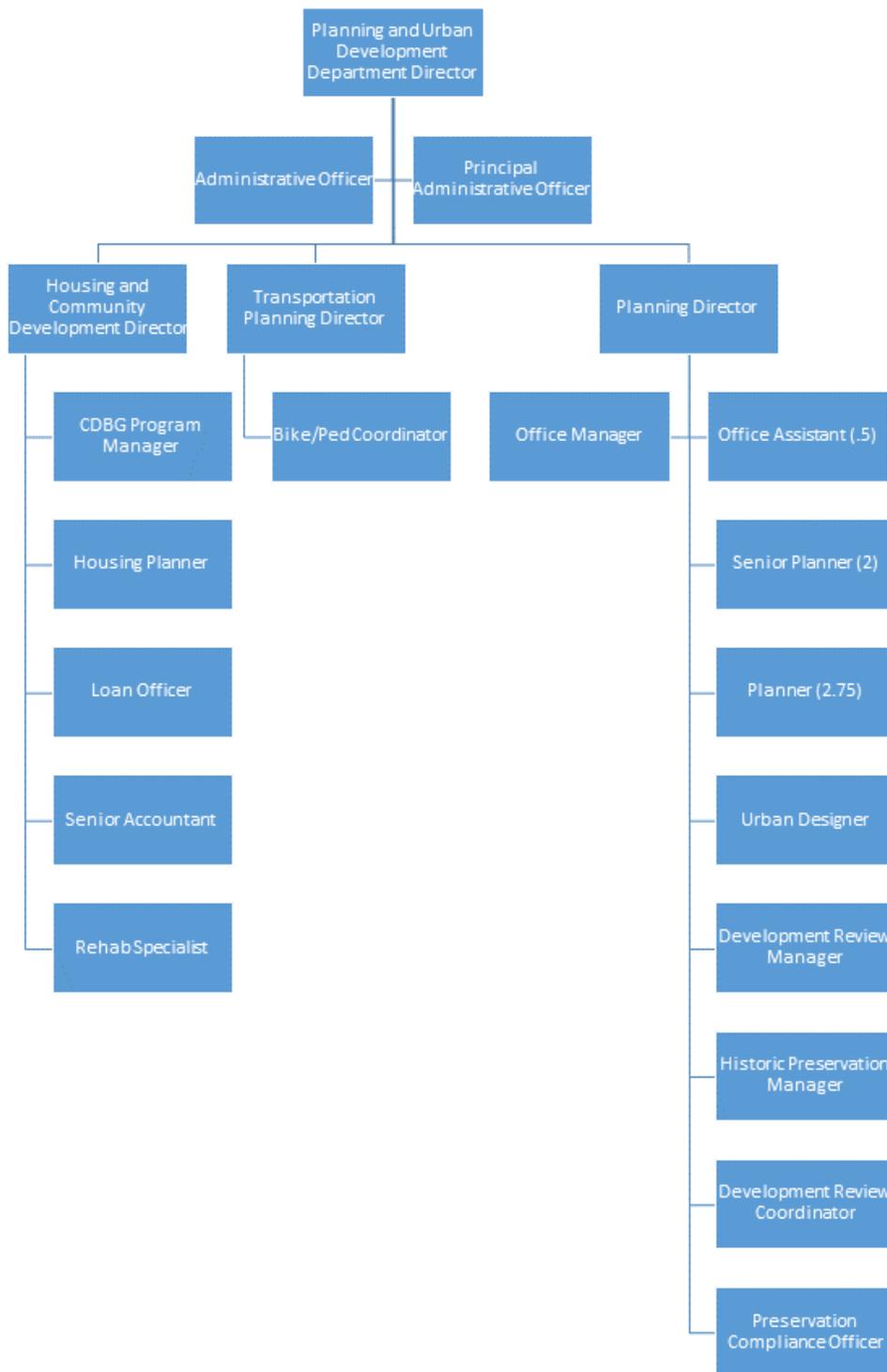
- New department head
- New front-end position: Permit Tech - Quickly reviews all incoming applications, works directly with applicants on completeness and accuracy, issues same-day permits, queues more complicated projects, serves as point person for applicant questions throughout the process, and ensures an excellent customer service experience.
  - Currently, there are 2.5 front-end positions: 1.5 Office Assistants and one Administrative Assistant
  - I suggest eliminating these positions.
  - Given the volume, I recommend three Permit Tech positions to comprise the front end.
  - I also recommend a senior-level administrative position to report to the Department Director, support the entire department, and answer phones.
- Additional life safety plan reviewer funded by HSO revenues and reporting to the Intake and Review Manager. This position should also conduct ADA reviews; currently, the State Fire Marshal does so, which has not been an effective process.
- New Intake and Review Manager and Inspections Manager positions
- Elimination of Inspections Division Director and Deputy Director positions



This approach allows for management by function for intake, review and inspections. The green shading shows that Food Service Inspections would join the department in the future.

To underscore, the success of this structure relies in large part on the Permit Techs, an effective triage process based on project complexity, and a robust customer service orientation.

The Planning and Urban Development Department would then look like this, assuming no additional changes to current staffing:



To summarize, proposed staffing changes entail:

- Planning and Urban Development
  - Inspections Division moves to proposed Permitting and Inspections Department (PID)
  - Zoning moves to PID
  - Housing and Community Development, Transportation Planning, and Planning
- City Clerk
  - Business License Administrator (and possibly part-time assistant) move to PID
- Housing Safety Office
  - Moves to PID
- Health & Human Services, Public Health Division
  - Food Service Inspections moves to PID in the future
- Public Services
  - Event Coordinator and Event Assistant move to Rec and Facilities
  - Determine how best to handle FOG permits in the new department
- Recreation and Facilities Management
  - Consider adding Deputy Director of Public Assembly Facilities to ensure Director is positioned to handle the ever-increasing scope and volume of events
  - Add Event Coordinator and Event Assistant from Public Services
  - Consider adding contract Event Coordinators to help meet demand

## **2. Processes**

Perhaps the clearest priority heard from nearly all interviewees was the need to revamp the front-end processes for all application types. Currently, the process is supposed to entail:

1. Applicant completes PDF form and sends it via email as an attachment, along with drawings
2. Staff review materials for completion, legibility and accuracy
3. Staff enter all the data into Urban Insight and upload plans to Archive and ePlan plan review software
4. Invoice is created and sent to applicant to pay online
5. When payment is posted, plan review begins
6. Permit issued and final approved plans are stamped

I recommend the following front-end process changes:

- Ideally, an effective software solution eliminates the need for staff to enter data, upload documents, scan documents, save them to multiple places, etc. I address this issue more fully in the IT section.

- Without having to enter data and upload documents to different places, and direct phone calls, we can eliminate the 1.5 Office Assistant positions (.5 is currently vacant) and replace with three Permit Techs.
  - Move the Admin Assistant to report to the new Department Director, support the entire department, and answer phones. This allows the Permit Techs to focus on customers and applications.
  - The Permit Techs would work with walk-in applicants and review electronic submissions.
    - They would follow up with applicants to ensure that all needed materials are submitted, serve as a single point of contact for applicants, and eliminate the need for Zoning or Plan Review to have to chase down applicants for missing information.
    - They would triage applications based on complexity and strive to issue same-day permits for simple projects with all information submitted.
  - The Permit Techs would have enough knowledge to work effectively with applicants and would be required to use solid customer service skills to ensure positive, productive interactions with all applicants at all times.
- The invoicing process should be reconsidered so that all fees are clear and simple, known to applicants up front, combined from the many different possible departments that could be involved, and due at an appropriate point in the process.
  - I suggest a full review of our fee structure, especially given prior recommendations to use Burlington, VT and Lowell, MA as key comparables. Fee amounts have already been reviewed; I believe the number of separate fees currently assessed should be considered now, with the goal of simplifying.
  - Some interviewees suggested we consider providing credits for any required third-party reviews against building/permit fees. It is my understanding that such reviews were primarily if not entirely life safety reviews. Thus, with the addition of a dedicated life safety plan reviewer, there should no longer be a need for such reviews on a regular basis.
- A new software package should allow us to more easily create simple, clear, streamlined information and application materials. Currently there are far too many kinds of forms and they are extremely difficult to understand. Prior studies have recommended looking at Burlington as an example here as well. Regardless of software implementation, this information and materials needs to be revamped entirely.

Other process changes should include:

- Develop training and evaluative measures to ensure consistency across reviewers and inspectors. Numerous interviewees cited issues with inconsistent approaches.
- Continue the pre-application and pre-development meetings, and consider how to streamline them so they are less of a time commitment for staff.
  - Implement a brief evaluative process for applicants to garner ideas for improvements

- Perhaps with the role of the Permit Techs these meetings may be less critical than they are now
- Consider increasing the threshold for projects required to have a Planning Board review. There are too many items going before them, such that simpler projects are delayed and the Board has perhaps an untenable workload.
- Consider increasing the threshold and clarifying the requirements for projects to have a Zoning review. It appears that all projects get a zoning review now, and it is likely that is unnecessary for a large portion.
- Building (and housing safety) inspections staff need to follow same summons practice as Fire has begun using, as a result of the Fire/Code Task Force recommendations.

### **3. Ordinances**

The many sections of the City Code of Ordinances pertaining to permitting, licensing and inspections fall under numerous chapters, are in PDF form, and often are confusing or contradictory. The Planning and Urban Development Department Director is well aware of these challenges and the need for a full rewrite. He has already set priorities for the Zoning code in case a full rewrite is not able to happen in the short term.

I would also suggest that the code be presented in a user-friendly, online format which would allow users to search quickly and easily for relevant topics, and find cross-references and definitions. Many municipalities use Municode for this.

### **4. IT**

The Planning and Urban Development (PUD) Department has worked hard to implement recommendations from prior studies, especially in this area. PUD leadership have collaborated closely with IT leadership to improve Urban Insight and ePlan, as well as to move toward a more paperless system. PUD staff and leadership were, understandably, very frustrated by the time wasted and data lost during the City's efforts to implement One Solution a few years ago.

While software packages are not a magic bullet, all interviewees and best practices research indicate that there are significant improvements and efficiencies to be gained by moving away from the current system. It is critical that internal stakeholders are involved in a collaborative decision-making process around a possible new software solution.

- We lack IT capacity to continue to improve the homegrown software in a timely fashion. Even contracting for programming support continues a piecemeal, band-aid approach.
- While submitting electronic versions of application materials reduces paper, it has not led to a significant process improvement or elimination of backlog, and interviewees commented that they were still required to provide multiple sets of paper plans.

- We need a robust web-based interface for applicants, including information, forms, and detailed information on status tracking and reviewer conditions/requests for additional information.
- We must strive for simplicity and clarity in all information and materials. There are too many forms which are too difficult to understand. A new software solution may take care of this for us; if not, and perhaps regardless, it would be productive to have a cross-section of applicant types review new forms and materials and provide feedback before implementation.
- Inspectors' time must be used as effectively as possible. While tablets were purchased for all of them, they are not using tablets in the field because they find the process far too slow and has too many steps. They choose to return to office for all data entry. There are significant concerns regarding this process; their notes must be timely, detailed, and accurate and contain only professional language.
- I suggest moving away from using a general email inbox, or at least requiring staff responding from that inbox to insert their name and contact information. Customers need to know who they're hearing from.
- Finally, I am optimistic regarding the possibility of a new City-wide software package which would integrate efficiently across departments, require far less IT staff programming time, and allow for a simple, effective, transparent process for applicants. It is critical that decisions regarding new software be reached by a collaborative process involving internal stakeholders.

## 5. Budgetary Impact

- Estimated personnel costs are:

<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Union</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Union</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Inspections Office Asst	CEBA 9	1.5	\$ 51,509	Permit Technician	TBD	3	\$ 150,000	\$ 98,492
Admin Assistant	CEBA 8	1	\$ 34,105	Executive Assistant	NU 4	1	\$ 40,833	\$ 6,728
				Department Director	NU	1	\$ 104,000	\$ 104,000
								<b>\$ 209,220</b>

## Conclusion

The Planning and Urban Development Department staff and those performing permitting, licensing and inspections functions throughout the City are to be praised for their commitment to process improvement, and for working under stressful conditions for a long time. Creating a new department encompassing these many functions will allow for an invigorated approach focusing on streamlining processes, managing by functional area, and ensuring excellent customer service.

## Interviewees

### Internal

Who	Dept	Role
Andrews, Deb	PIng	Historic Preservation
Barhydt, Barbara	PIng	Development Review Services Manager
Bourque, Jeanie	PIng/Inspex	Plan Reviewer
Bourret, Vicki	IT	Deputy Director
Boutilier, Dan	IT	Department Director
Cameron, Caitlin	PIng	Urban Designer
Christ, Doreen	PIng/Inspex	Office Assistant
DeLuca, Sally	Rec & Facil	Department Director
Dobson, Lannie	PIng/Inspex	Office Assistant (former)
Downs, Andy	Rec & Facil	Director of Public Assembly Facilities
Fagone, Chuck	PIng/Inspex	Code Enforcement Officer
Gardner, Janice	City Clerk	Business License Administrator
Gautreau, Keith	Fire	Asst Chief, Fire Prevention
Grimando, Christine	PIng	Senior Planner
Hanig, Nelle	Eco Dev	Business Programs Manager
Kelly, Desiree	PIng	Principal Admin Officer
Knowland, Rick	PIng	Senior Planner
LaFlamme, Brian	PIng/Inspex	Electrical Inspector
Leader, Laurie	PIng/Inspex	Plan Reviewer
Levine, Jeff	PIng	Department Director
Machado, Ann	PIng/Inspex	Zoning Administrator
Merritt, Carol	Pub Serv	Account clerk (Street openings)
Meserve, Tori	Fire	Fire Prevention admin
Messinger, Craig	Fire	Lieutenant, Fire Prevention
Mitchell, Greg	Eco Dev	Department Director
Moon, Troy	Pub Serv	Environmental Programs and Open Space Manager
Munson, Tammy	PIng/Inspex	Inspections Division Director
Munson, Jennifer	Planning	Office Manager
Musgrave, Ted	Pub Serv	Event Coordinator
Needelman, Bill	Eco Dev	Waterfront Coordinator
Pearson, Ben	Pub Serv	Wastewater Engineer (FOG)
Petrucci, David	Fire	Captain, Fire Prevention
Peperada, John	Parking	Parking Manager
Rand, Sgt Mike	PD	Traffic
Rioux, Jon	PIng/Inspex	Inspections Deputy Director

### External

South Portland Planning staff	
Veroneau, Vin	JB Brown
Munroe, Tom	CAP Services
Sanborn, Heather	Rising Tide
Ghanekar, Gillian	JB Brown

Russell, Mike	HHS/PH	Program Manager, Food Service Inspections
Saucier, Brad	Plng/Inspex	Admin Assistant
Soma, Toho	HHS/PH	Public Health Division Director
Stacy, Christine	Plng/Inspex	Zoning Specialist

## Proposed Building Permit Fee Change

### Current Fee

\$25 per first \$1,000 of construction costs then 1.1% above that

### Proposed Fee

\$25 per first \$1,000 of construction costs then 1.6% above that

		Current Fee	Current Exp Revenue	Proposed Fee	Est CY 16 Revenue	Est Increase
<b>Expected Revenue Increase</b>						
Est CY 15 Total Construction Costs	\$116,163,549	1.1%	\$1,277,813	1.6%	\$1,858,626	\$580,813

### Additional Costs for New Department

Staffing Changes (salary difference plus fringe)	\$ 276,756
Technology Improvements	\$ 295,557
Training Budget (3 Permit Techs, continuing ed for others)	\$ 8,500

### Building Permit Fees - Comparisons

Portland - current	\$25 for first \$1,000; 1.1% above
Portland - proposed	\$25 for first \$1,000; 1.6% above
Bangor, ME	\$38-55 minimum plus \$7 per \$1,000 of construction costs (.7%)
Burlington, VT	\$30 min plus \$8.50 per \$1,000 of cost of work (.85%)
Lewiston, ME	\$25 min plus \$6 per \$1,000 of cost of work (.6%)
Manchester, NH	\$30 min plus 1% of cost of work plus \$.02 per square foot plan review fee
Portsmouth, NH	\$50 min plus \$.25 per gross square foot of floor area for new construction; \$7 per 1,000 of residential renovation cost (.7%); \$10 per \$1,000 of commercial renovation cost (1%)
South Portland, ME	1.5% per \$1,000 of construction costs