

Neighborhood Drainage Assistance Program Coordination of Work Among Agencies

Report No. 97-07 -- Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The special study of work coordination among the Surface Water Management (SWM) Division, Roads Services (RS) Division, and Land Use Services (LUS) Division was requested by the Metropolitan King County Council and included in the Auditor's Office 1997 work program. The request was made as a result of concern over the Neighborhood Drainage Assistance Program (NDAP). It was perceived that weakness in coordination between SWM, Land Use, and Roads Services adversely impacted the timeliness of response to citizen complaints and, thus, problem resolution.

Subsequent to the initiation of the study, the Department of Natural Resources was reorganized and functions of Surface Water Management, including the NDAP, were absorbed by sections of the new Water and Land Resources and Water Treatment Divisions. Thus, references to Surface Water Management and NDAP in the study should be understood to pertain to the surface water function, not the organization.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objectives of the study were to review the work flow among Surface Water Management, Land Use Services, and Road Services Divisions, determine efforts initiated to improve coordination between the agencies, review a sample of completed NDAP projects, and evaluate NDAP responsiveness to drainage complaints.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The study concludes that while the NDAP work flow may have encountered start-up problems, current coordination between agencies appears to be reasonable. The study did not find material problems or difficulties with work coordination among Surface Water Management, Land Use Services, and Roads Services.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1. Drainage problems on private property originally not eligible for County assistance qualified for assistance under the Neighborhood Drainage Assistance Program.

A majority of drainage complaints received by the County are on private property. Prior to the adoption of Ordinance 10187, the County was not allowed to spend SWM fee revenues to fix drainage problems emanating from private property. Thus, many complaints were not eligible for County assistance. The ordinance expanded the responsibilities of SWM to include off-road drainage systems that are on private property or public easements. The NDAP was established to deal with drainage problems on private property.

As a result of the ordinance and the establishment of the NDAP, many complaints not previously eligible for SWM assistance received help through the NDAP. The NDAP addressed drainage complaints received as far back as 1978.

The audit recommended that SWM should continue to review drainage complaints previously rejected as "private property problems," and not eligible for County assistance, for possible assistance through the NDAP.

Finding 2. King County Ordinance 12196 implemented legislation that required jurisdictions to establish integrated and consolidated permit processes.

King County Ordinance 12196 adopted April 12, 1996, implemented the requirements of ESHB 1724 through use of existing rules and of amending relevant ordinances. The ordinance relates to permit requirements, new permit processes and administrative appeals, judicial review, and SEPA/GMA integration. ESHB 1724 requires local governments planning under the Growth Management Act (GMA) to establish an integrated and consolidated project permit process. The ordinance included requirements and changes designed to improve the permit process.

The audit recommended that DDES evaluate the impact of Ordinance 12196 in 1998 to determine whether the intent of the legislation is being met and to determine amendments which may be necessary.

Finding 3. Procedural changes implemented appear to improve work flow and could result in more timely response to drainage complaints.

During the course of the study, we noted several initiatives implemented by the County which appear to have improved the drainage complaint response process and coordination of work. Some of these initiatives were mandated by Ordinance 12196 and include.

- Pre-application review
- Use of video recorder

- Change in SEPA thresholds for condition requiring grading
- Early filing of application
- Funding of a position in Land Use Services by the Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources

Finding 4. NDAP files reviewed did not contain consistent project documentation.

Audit staff reviewed the documentation of a sample of CIP, Maintenance, and "Quick-Fix" projects. The sample reviewed showed that project documentation was not consistent by project. Although there is no requirement for specific documentation to be maintained, it is audit staff's opinion that sufficient documentation should be maintained to provide a reasonably complete picture of project history - from complaint to resolution.

The audit recommended that

(1) SWM should determine and define documentation required to be maintained for each type of project.

(2) SWM should include in each file a chronological summary of activities related to the project.

A checklist of what should be included in the project files would be helpful in assuring complete documentation.

Finding 5. Complainants/Recipients of NDAP assistance appear to be generally satisfied with the final outcome. However, a recurring comment was the delay in response.

We selected a limited sample of thirteen (13) NDAP assistance recipients from the projects that we reviewed to be interviewed. The purpose of the survey was to determine recipient experience with the NDAP.

In general, the respondents appeared to be satisfied with the assistance provided by the NDAP. Dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the response may stem from the fact that prior to the adoption of Ordinance 10187, SWM was precluded from using SWM fees to fund solutions to drainage problems on private property.

Finding 6. Complaints received via the Ombudsman's office appear to have been resolved satisfactorily.

The King County Office of Citizen Complaints-Ombudsman received 21 drainage-related complaints for the period between June 1990 and April 1996. All of the complaints had been previously received by either SWM or by Land Use Services and not addressed to the satisfaction of the complainant. At the time of this study, according to records of the Office of Citizen Complaints, all complaints have been resolved.

Updated: 06/24/02