

Metropolitan King County Council

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MANAGEMENT LETTER

DATE: December 12, 2005

TO: Metropolitan King County Councilmembers

FROM: Cheryle A. Broom, County Auditor

SUBJECT: DDES Performance Monitoring

A proviso in the 2005 Budget Ordinance required the Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) to follow through on recommendations from the King County Auditor's 2004 Performance Audit of DDES Workload and Staffing. Specifically, recommendations from that report called on DDES to develop one or more performance measures to track the department's efficiency in processing permits, similar to the approach taken by the auditor's office in the performance audit.

In response to the proviso, DDES reported to the council on May 3, 2005 on two measures:

- the average review hours per permit; and
- the average number of permits processed per staff.

The new information provided by DDES was for 2004, and updated the information from the audit report which covered the period 2000-2003.

Upon further review by this office, we found that the updated performance information submitted by DDES was not calculated and portrayed in a manner consistent with the approach taken in the performance audit. The problem consisted mainly in inadvertently mixing measures calculated for all staff with information for production staff only. Either discrete way of reporting the performance information would have been appropriate, but mixing the information, as was done, is inaccurate.

Accordingly, we worked with DDES to correct the information, and the results of this effort are shown in the following two tables:

	Average Staff Review Hours Per Permit				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Corrected	8.87	9.11	8.67	7.46	7.19
1st Qtr Rpt	8.87	9.11	8.67	7.46	4.8

	Average Number of Permits Reviewed Per All Staff				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Corrected	193	187	181	221	238
1st Qtr Rpt	193	187	181	221	276.6

After making the necessary corrections, the overall trend being reported is still the same: increased efficiency is indicated by both measures. However, the corrected values portray a trend that is more realistic.

Since the information provided indicates that the number of permits processed per staff has risen, and the total hours spent per permit has declined, we asked DDES to comment on whether there are any negative consequences to this continuing trend. For example, we asked if the backlog of permits has grown, or if there has been an increase in the number of permits contested. The response we received from the agency is as follows:

DDES does not feel there have been any negative consequences as a result of the efficiency gains. The backlog has not grown and there has been no increase in the rate of permits contested. There is one danger that we are watching out for, however. That is there may be a temptation for individual permit reviewers to take shortcuts in their reviews or reduce the quality of their reviews. We have reports which show average numbers of hours a task should take. We, therefore, use these reports to track individual reviewer's time to make sure they are spending the proper amount of time per review.

We are quite confident this has not happened thus far and will stay vigilant to make sure it does not occur in the future.

We appreciate DDES working with us to resolve the reporting inconsistency, and we are pleased to see that the trend in staffing efficiency, evidenced over the last few years, is continuing.

CB:jl:Year End Management Letter

cc: Scott White, Chief of Staff, King County Council
Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director, King County Council
Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council
Bob Cowan, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Stephanie Warden, Director, Department of Development and Environmental Services
Jonathan Eytinge, Business and Finance Officer, Administrative Services, DDES