



Permitting and Inspections Department

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Permit Reform Advisory Committee

Wednesday February 16, 2022

Draft Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Committee Members present: Tiki-Jon Archambeau, Celia Daly, Steve Lipkin, Steve Offenhartz, Bob Duncan, Tiki-Jon Archambeau

Staff: Bill Ward, Director and Patti Wehman, Housing Manager

Meeting called to order at 1202 p.m.

Motion to amend and approve an amended agenda by Bob Duncan adding Item 6 to discuss the connection between Trades and Fire Marshal responsibilities. Seconded by Celia Daly. Approval was unanimous.

Motion to approve the draft minutes from the prior meeting made by Celia Daly and seconded by Steve Offenhartz. Approval was unanimous.

Item 3) No members of the public in attendance.

Item 4) General Department update

Bill Ward gave an update on the department status. He noted that rental registration letters were due to go out by the end of February to over 3000 rental property owners. This year's registration is moving the process to an online format. Property owners will be registering their properties in the OpenGov permitting software with a due date of April 1, 2022. Steve Offenhartz asked to confirm that payments would also be made on line. Bill confirmed that online payments are preferred but we would accept traditional payments by check or cash for anyone who did not want to pay the processing fees. Patti Wehman noted that the credit card processing fees were \$0.99 + 2.99% of total, E-Checks had a \$5.50 flat fee with no charge for in person check or cash.

The department is also working on the weatherization ordinance compliance for 2022. Bill provided the update that 31 properties are in the first group required to comply because the properties use more than 90,000 BTUs per square foot of finished space. The first step requires the property owners to complete a free energy audit with Vermont Gas. Properties that have not scheduled the audit will be sent a written order from the Department of Permitting and Inspections giving them 30 days to comply.

The department is working on a statistical update for rental housing to complete the inspections that were partially completed or delayed completely during 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. The department received many requests from tenants for delayed housing inspections because occupants were not willing to let visitors into their rental units. All requests were accommodated. The 2022 rental housing inspection schedule will be one of the busiest ever to accommodate those inspections and the properties with a compliance certificate that will expire in 2022.

The staffing update include the ongoing search for a Zoning Permit Technician. The position has been open for several months and interviews to date have not been successful in finding the right candidate.



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Additional interviews are proceeding and the department hopes to have an update for the next committee meeting. The Permit Clerk position was vacated in September and will not be filled. The position was eliminated when the Board of Finance and City Council approved the second electrical inspector position which will be updated as agenda item #5.

Item #6 Trades and Fire Marshal responsibilities. The Fire Marshal and Building inspector joined the meeting for this time certain item which came prior to #5. Bill explained that Chapter 8 (Trades Permitting) and Chapter 13 (Fire Protection and Fire Prevention) provide the city ordinance distinctions between the Trades and Fire Marshal responsibilities. Generally speaking – New construction is the responsibility of Building Inspectors/Trades and existing structures are the responsibility of Fire Marshal.

Fire Marshal Matt Stone provided an overview of his office which is responsible for inspecting all the Burlington Schools, residential care facilities, bars, and changes of use. He has three people in the office. When they go into the building for an inspection they are looking at the entire building for compliance with all the codes, not just the fire safety systems. Most of his focus is on egress and exit paths like windows, doors. Contractors sometimes call him first when looking to start a project but he is always thinking about his potential concerns and the Trades inspectors' concerns so he makes regular referrals to Brad and his team. Brad Biggie explained that construction, alterations, renovations, or a change of use trigger his review of any code requirements. When those projects require a sprinkler system or alarm system, the Fire Marshal's office gets flagged in the permitting software. Outside of those activities the structure falls within the purview of the Fire Marshal's office.

Item #5 Addition of 2nd Electrical Inspector for the Department

The department hiring panel interviewed applicants 2 weeks ago and finalists for the position last week. The additional electrical inspector position has been offered to Nathan Fields, a Master Electrician who runs his own business and has worked regularly in Burlington. Bill said they are working out the starting details with an anticipated first day of March 14th.

Item #7 Update on eliminating some permit requirements

Steve Lipkin asked for an update on the status of eliminating some permit requirements as discussed in previous meetings. Bill explained that he expects the timing to coincide with the new budget cycle starting July 1. The work is expected to be linked to the revenues expected for next year and the reduction in fees from projects eliminated will be offset by the permit fee increase that Bill discussed at the last meeting. The current fee for a base permit is \$20 and has not been increased in many years. We previously heard from several electricians that increasing that fee is a reasonable step if the inspection wait time is reduced.

Bill noted that the first half of the fiscal year revenues have been less than 40 % of anticipated revenues. The revenue projections are better for the coming months since the pandemic is shifting and larger construction projects are expected as the winter ends. The ordinance changes can be submitted to the New City Council after Organization Day in April. The department budget will be presented to the Board of Finance in May.

Item 8 - There were no committee updates

Item 9 - Celia Daly made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Bob Duncan. The vote was unanimous.