



Office of the City Manager

September 2, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: *DWR* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Re: Planning & Development Department Customer Service Improvements

The Planning & Development Department is excited to announce new features that now allow clients to submit new building permit applications and pay all building permit fees online. Customers can also now schedule specific appointments at the permit Service Center (PSC) online, avoiding lines and wait times. These are part of Planning's ongoing initiatives to improve customer services for clients and the Berkeley community. Planning will also release a customer service survey this month to get feedback on the efficacy of these and other services.

This winter and spring, staff in the Planning & Development Department worked closely with the Finance and Information Technology Departments, in conjunction with a technology consultant and third-party vendors, to expand these online services by establishing new connectivity with the City's online payments vendor, writing new software code, and conducting many hours of user testing. This effort was a direct response to staff and community members' requests to expand online service, including expanding online payment options to include all building permits where previously it was limited to minor permits. Staff are also using the QLess software to provide advance appointments for in-person services and manage walk-in customers by assigning a specified time to meet with a PSC staff member, minimizing wait times inside the PSC. To make an in-person appointment online, customers can visit:

<https://kiosk.na4.qless.com/kiosk/app/home/140>

Additionally, on September 1, 2021, the Planning & Development Department launched its latest customer satisfaction survey. The Department will continue to track customer satisfaction each year to create a robust dataset, to track progress and measure customer service improvements such as the expanded PSC online services that launched this summer. Customer satisfaction as measured in this survey is one of Planning's Performance Measures for 2021-22, as adopted by Council in the latest City budget. Community members can participate in the survey by visiting:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RFWHBT6>

**BACKGROUND**

The Planning & Development Department processes approximately 4,500 building permits each year. Previously, customers could only access these services by phone, by e-mail or in person at the PSC at 1947 Center Street. Since shelter-in-place went into effect, the PSC has offered such services by voicemail and e-mail, but response times could be longer than desired. Customers now have the option to schedule an appointment, apply for a permit, and submit a payment quickly and securely online without having to wait for a return call or e-mail, and without having to come into the PSC. These process improvements save time for customers and increase the PSC's efficiency.

These online service improvements and the customer service survey are part of the Planning & Development Department's ongoing initiative to improve the quality, efficiency and accessibility of its client services. Other customer service projects underway include expansion of online payments to include zoning permits, the Zoning Ordinance Revision Project (ZORP) to improve the usability of the zoning code, and the preparation of land use policy and procedures manuals.

The attached Word document provides a description of how to access the online building permit application, along with links and QR codes to schedule an appointment and access the customer satisfaction survey. Please share this information about the expansion of online services and opportunity to participate in the customer satisfaction survey with your constituents.

Attachment 1: Permit Service Center Expansion of Online Services and Customer Satisfaction Survey

cc: Paul Buddenhagen, Deputy City Manager  
David White, Deputy City Manager  
Jenny Wong, City Auditor  
Mark Numainville, City Clerk  
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager  
Jordan Klein, Director, Planning & Development Department