



Office of the City Manager

September 9, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: La Tanya Bellow, Interim City Manager

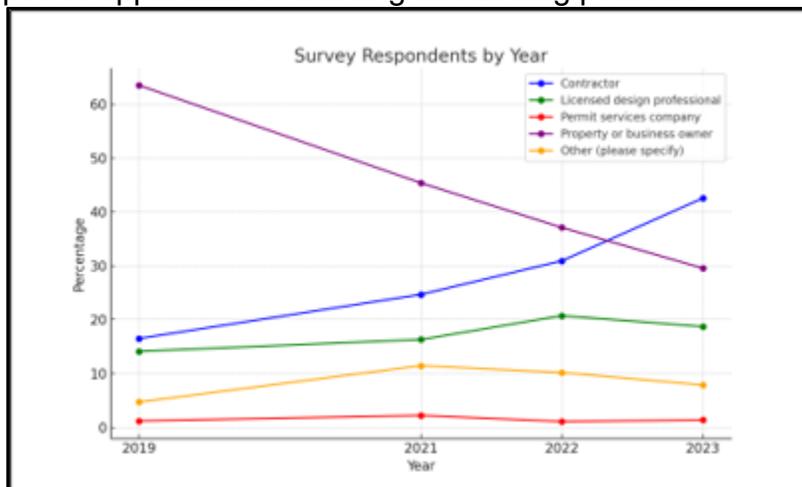
Re: Planning & Development Department Customer Service Survey Results and Upcoming Service Enhancements

Earlier this year, the Planning & Development Department released its fourth annual customer satisfaction survey. The survey was open from February 1 to March 31, 2024, soliciting feedback from customers about their experiences over the past year with the City of Berkeley's building and zoning permit application services. The survey results have been included in the Department's Performance Measures reporting since 2019. Staff shared information with Council about the release of the 2024 survey in an earlier Off-Agenda Memo (Attachment 1).

The 2024 survey results indicate that customer satisfaction with Planning and Development services is continuing to improve. Feedback in the 2024 survey shows significant improvement across multiple aspects of department services, reflecting Planning's ongoing commitment to enhancing the customer experience. Specific results include:

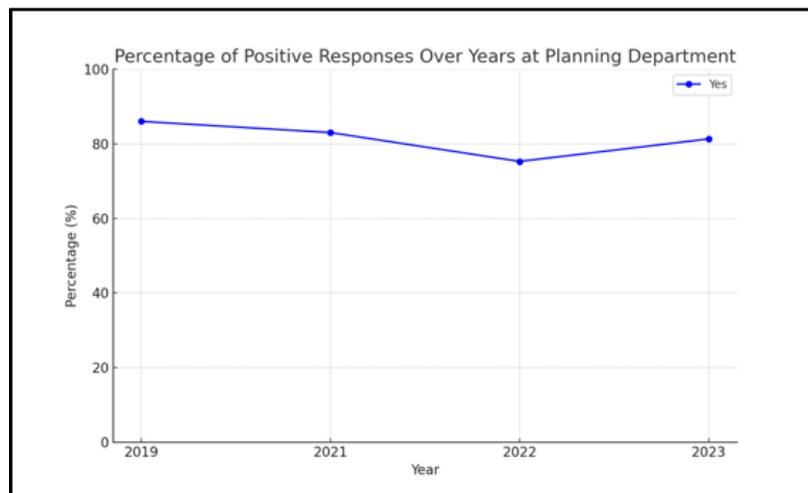
Survey question: *Are you a contractor, business owner, licensed design professional, permit services company, property owner, business owner or other?*

Over the five years of this survey, the respondent pool has increasingly mirrored the proportion of types of applicants for building and zoning permits.



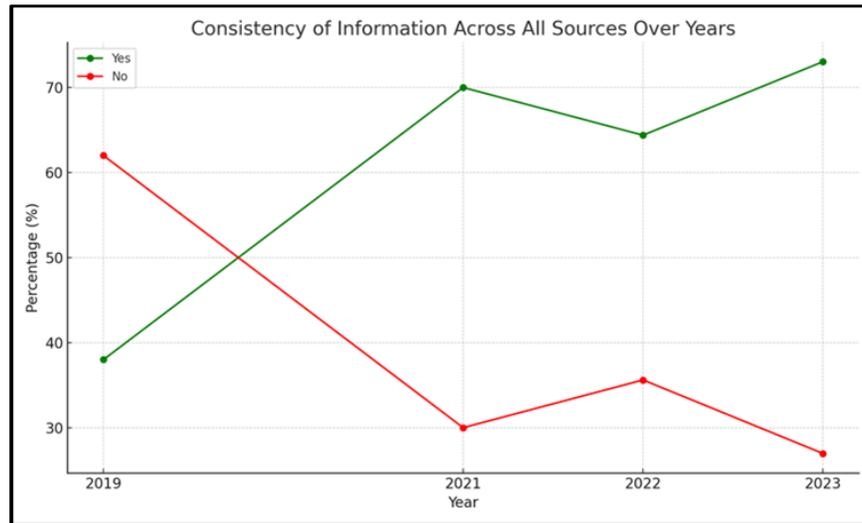
In another question, the survey asked about the method of permit application submittal: in-person, online, or both. At the time of the earliest editions of this survey, online permit applications did not exist. In the last survey covering 2022 permits, about 63% of applicants submitted online, with 37% in-person (no option was offered for both). In this survey, 2023 applicants stated that 52% applied exclusively online. 25% had some online and some in-personal applications, and only 23% of applicants applied exclusively in-person. A trend towards more online applications is not surprising, and continues to inform Planning's allocation of staff and other resources to maximize efficiency of services for all customers.

Survey question: *Was the service you received from Planning Department staff courteous and professional?*



This customer service rating experience has remained steady over time, a level of consistency to which Planning aspires. The majority of customers find the Planning staff they work with to be courteous and professional. In 2017, a department-initiated audit conducted by a City consultant identified a goal of 85% for this metric, which the current results fall just short of. In order to improve our performance in this area, Planning and Development is developing a training plan for the next two years that is focused on enhancing courteous and professional customer service.

Survey question: *Was the information you received consistent across all sources (e.g., staff, website, forms)?*



In the first customer service survey conducted by Planning in 2019, and anecdotally before that, a common customer frustration was the perception that information and answers varied substantially depending on the source (e.g., staff emails, the Zoning Counter, the City website, and online forms and guides). The department is particularly pleased at the sustained improvement in this metric over the four surveys, covering five years. In conjunction with our City Communications colleagues, customers increasingly trust that the information they get from any City source is consistent and holds true when put to other City sources.

A recurring theme in customer feedback has been the high appreciation for online services. Respondents have highlighted the convenience and efficiency of online permit application submittals, underscoring the value of efforts to expand digital access. Building on the positive feedback and aiming to further improve service delivery, the Planning & Development Department is excited to announce the implementation of two new software programs:

- **Rental Housing Safety Program:** This new software will facilitate the online management and monitoring of rental housing safety compliance, providing a streamlined process for landlords and tenants.
- **Toxics Management Division:** This software will enhance the online reporting and management of toxic substances, ensuring better safety and compliance within the Berkeley community.

These initiatives are designed to make services more accessible and user-friendly, aligning with the feedback received from customers.

The consistent trend of improved customer satisfaction in surveys over five years speaks to Planning's commitment to continuous improvement. The introduction of the new software platforms for the Rental Housing Safety Program and the Toxics Management Division will further enhance online services, meeting the evolving needs of our community.

Attachment

- Off Agenda Memo, Planning & Development Department Customer Service Survey, May 13, 2024

cc:

Anne Cardwell, Deputy City Manager

Jenny Wong, City Auditor

Farimah Brown, City Attorney

Mark Numainville, City Clerk

Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager

Jordan Klein, Director, Planning & Development Department



Office of the City Manager

March 13, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Re: Planning & Development Department Customer Service Survey

On February 1, the Planning & Development Department released the 2024 iteration of its customer service survey, slated to remain accessible for responses through March 31st. This survey gathers feedback from customers who anonymously answer questions about their experience with completed building or zoning permit applications. Invitations to participate have been extended to all customers who provided an email address with an application in the last year, as well as to those who visited the Permit Service Center.

The Planning & Development Department's Customer Service Improvement Initiative also included surveys conducted in 2019, 2021, and 2023. The results are part of the Performance Measures reported to the City Council and the public in the City's bi-annual budget process. Many of the same questions have been asked in each of the four editions of the survey, to create a benchmark for improvement that is tracked over time. Survey questions include:

- Helpfulness of online City resources in preparing an application prior to submittal
- Consistency of information received across multiple City sources
- Professionalism and courtesy of City staff
- Type of customer and number of applications (e.g., single homeowner, frequent contractor, small maintenance project, major renovations, etc.) so we can gauge how well our services are received by different client groups
- Method of submittal: online or in-person

Survey respondents can also offer additional comments. While the survey is anonymous, participants may choose to provide their contact information if they want Planning staff to follow up with them directly about their particular suggestions or concerns.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Planning & Development Department retained an outside consultant with expertise in municipal planning and building operations to assess Berkeley's services through surveys of customers, staff, and their own observations. Later in 2017, and

again in 2018, the Planning Department presented its Customer Service Improvement Initiative at Worksessions of the City Council, focusing on achievable recommendations that would meaningfully improve the customer experience.

In a September 2021 Off-Agenda Memo to the City Council, the Planning Department described service improvements made since the 2019 Worksession, including new online tools for application submittal which had been made available to customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another Off-Agenda Memo to Council in February 2023 provided additional updates.

Since the last update, additional service improvements have been made, including:

- Continued improvements to Planning's online guides and application forms, making them easier to understand and use for customers at all levels of experience. See <https://berkeleyca.gov/construction-development/permits-design-parameters/permit-types/permit-forms>
- Streamlined the way the department reviews and responds to Address Assignment requests, a requirement for many types of new housing units including ADUs.
- Created new reports for persons seeking information on active housing projects, available to anyone at <https://aca.cityofberkeley.info/citizenaccess/Default.aspx>. The new reports (under the Zoning tab) satisfy a frequent area of customer request for data on new housing applications, pre-applications, and zoning permits in the appeal period.
- Enabled submittal of solar permits via SolarApp+, an easy and intuitive way of submitting permit application for near-instant approval of residential solar installation permits.
- Assembled information about all City development impact or mitigation fees in a single place, for the first time ever, at <https://berkeleyca.gov/construction-development/land-use-development/understanding-impact-fees>.

Once the latest Customer Service survey closes and we analyze the data, we will include results as part of the City's performance measurement reporting program, in the budget process and elsewhere.

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