

SULTAN CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

ITEM NO: C-12
DATE: December 12, 2009
SUBJECT: Permit Efficiency Task Force
CONTACT PERSON: Deborah Knight, City Administrator

ISSUE:

The issue before the City Council is to consider ending the permit efficiency task force until there is stronger community interest.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Discontinue the permit efficiency task force until there is stronger community interest.

SUMMARY:

The purpose of the task force was to develop recommendations for improving the City's procedures for issuing planning and building permits.

The task force met 4 times between October 13, 2009 and November 24, 2009. With the exception of planning board members, the meetings were only sparsely attended.

Members of the permit task force used the draft permit application checklists as the tool for reviewing the city's development regulations. Fence permits, single family residential building permits and conditional use permits were presented to the task force. Kurt Latimore and the city's planning intern, Kevin Nowadnick attended the meetings to take feedback. Suggestions from the task force were used to adjust the checklists.

Since only planning board members were present at the last meeting on November 24, 2009, staff recommends discontinuing the task force until there is stronger community interest.

BACKGROUND:

The decision to form a permit efficiency task force was based on a request from a local resident and business owner to evaluate the City's land use and building permit process. There was interest from the business community to serve on a permit task

force. The City Council had envisioned the task force would recommend ways to improve the permit process.

At the council meeting on July 9, 2009, the City Council direct staff to advertise and take applications for appointment to a permit efficiency task force. The city advertised the opportunity, but did not receive any applications. On July 24, 2009, the City Council left the opportunity open to serve on the task force.

On September 16, 2009, at the meeting with property owners in the industrial park, several property and business owners expressed concerns regarding city development regulations and the process to receive land use approvals and building permits. City staff asked if anyone was interested in serving on the permit task force. The following appointees' volunteered:

- CH Rowe – Sultan business owner and former Mayor
- Tom Lochmann - Director of Operations Romac Industries
- Nathan Porter – Sultan business owner
- Steve Harris – Developer
- Jerry Knox – Planning Board member¹

DISCUSSION:

Accepting applications, assisting residents and business owners through the permit process, reviewing proposed plans, and issuing land use and building permits is one of the city's primary functions. Permit processing involves the community development department, public works department, finance and economic development departments.

Because the permit process frequently requires coordination between city departments and approvals from outside agencies, there are always opportunities and new ways to improve the way the city processes permit applications. Although some of the regulations are mandates from outside agencies, the city has significant leeway in how permits are processed.

Over the last twelve months, the city has made significant improvements in the permit process. These improvements include the following:

1. Implementation of the Latimore Dashboard (computerized permit tracking system) used internally by staff to schedule completion of permit tasks. The dashboard viewable by the public on the city's web site. Applicants can track where their permit is in the review/approval process,

Note – the city is in the process of converting the dashboard to the Springbrook software permit tracking system. The Springbrook system will be connected to

¹ Jerry Knox was appointed by the Planning Board on July 21, 2009.

the city's financial system and will be the city's primary permit tracking system effective January 1, 2010.

2. New centralized filing system for quick access to customer contacts and permit filing
3. Re-vitalizing the practice of weekly Development Review Team meetings to provide coordinated development review
4. New permit intake checklist procedures so that any staff in City Hall can help an applicant submit a complete and approvable application
5. Increasing the number of permit applications and other documents accessible on-line to reduce the need for trips to City Hall
6. Increased use of digital approval of permit applications by staff members to reduce the need for paper flow through the system

The purpose of a permit task force is to review the city's regulations and work flow and seek opportunities to make the system more efficient and effective.

If attendance at the recent meetings is any indication, it appears concern or interest in making changes to the city's permit system is limited at this time. Staff recommends discontinuing the task force until there is stronger community interest.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to discontinue the task force. Staff time will be redirected to other priorities.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Gauge community interested and discontinue the task force until there is stronger community interest. The council can direct staff to re-initiate the task force at anytime and advertise for community members to volunteer.
2. Take public comment and gauge community interest. The council may direct staff to contact the current task force members to or seek new members and continue the current work.
3. Postpone making a decision. Direct staff to contact current task force members and find out why interest has fallen following the initial appointment. Report back to council

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Discontinue the permit efficiency task force until there is stronger community interest.