



County of Santa Cruz

213

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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ALVIN D. JAMES, DIRECTOR

June 13, 2001

Agenda: June 26, 2001

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, California 95060

SUBJECT: Planning Department Third Quarter Report

Members of the Board:

At the conclusion of budget hearings last June, your Board directed the Planning Department to prepare quarterly reports on the permit workload in the Department. Subsequently, on October 17th, your Board considered a comprehensive report on Planning Department operations, which included a series of recommendations to improve our services to the public. We indicated that our quarterly reports would include an update on our progress in implementing these recommendations. Our first quarter report was tiled and accepted by your Board on November 21st, 2000; our second quarter report was presented to your Board on March 13, 2001. We are pleased to submit our third quarter report for your consideration.

STATUS REPORT ON CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Attachment 1 to this letter, entitled "Implementation of New Initiatives", is a table which summarizes our continued progress in implementing the various customer service improvements which your Board approved last October. Our achievements in the most recent quarter are highlighted in *italics*. Geographic teams have been established and are operating; services at our Felton Permit Center have been expanded; the Aptos Permit Center will open this month; the pilot One-Stop Program for minor building permits has been implemented; our staff training program has been developed and a substantial amount of training has already occurred; an Urban Designer has been hired; the initial phases of our telephone service improvements have been implemented; a number of physical space projects have been completed; and numerous personnel appointments have been made over the past seven months. We will be completing interviews for our Customer Service/Quality Control program manager in the next few weeks, and we anticipate making an appointment in July. Our future quarterly reports will include ongoing progress updates in all of these program areas.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED BY YOUR BOARD

During your Board's discussion of our last quarterly report, there were a number of inquiries and requests from individual Board members about various organizational issues. The following information provides a response to those concerns.

Personnel Status- Your Board requested that we include a listing of current vacancies in addition to the personnel appointment information. Attachments 2 and 3 presents this information. Attachment 2 summarizes our new hires and promotions since last October through the end of February. This is the same information which was included with our last quarterly report. Attachment 3, in table form, lists new hires, promotions and vacancies as of June 18th. The vacancies verify a current vacancy rate of approximately 12%.

Comparative Building and Discretionary Permit Statistics - Your Board requested that we provide prior year comparative information, along with the current year's statistics. This information is included in Attachments 4 - 14. Prior year data is presented for all permit categories except for discretionary permit processing times. An examination of the data revealed some inaccuracies and gaps in key information which distorts the statistical results. We will address these problems and include comparative data for discretionary permits in our next report.

Feedback from New Planners- Your Board inquired about whether there was a process for soliciting feedback from new hires. As discussed in greater detail in Attachment 1, we have initiated a series of brainstorming sessions with our staff to solicit their ideas for streamlining and improving our application processing procedures.

Application Completeness - Concern was raised about whether we are accepting applications which do not have all of the required information necessary to process the application, which results in inevitable delays for staff and applicants. We are in the process of reviewing our application submittal checklists and intake procedures, and expect that these efforts will result in a reduction in "incomplete" applications. Our next report will include a summary of our progress in this area.

PERMIT WORKLOAD STATISTICS

As your Board is aware, there are two distinctly different permit processing systems which are coordinated by the Planning Department- the Building Permit process and the Discretionary Permit process. In our last report, we presented building permit and discretionary permit statistics for the first two quarters. During discussion, your Board requested that we show comparative data information for the previous year along with the current year's information. Attachments 4 through 8 show summary statistics for the first three quarters of this fiscal year (July 2000 March 2001), along with the prior year information as available.

The Planning Department received a total of 3,140 Permit Applications (building and discretionary) during the first three quarters of fiscal year 00-01. This number compares with 3,159 applications for the same period last fiscal year. Building permit applications consisted of 2,771 applications collectively comprising approximately 88 percent of all applications during the first three quarters of the current fiscal year as compared with 2757 applications or about 87 percent for the same period in fiscal year 99-00. Over-the-Counter building permit applications and Level 1-3 discretionary applications together comprised approximately 50 percent of total applications received. This compares with about 52 percent during the first three quarters of Fiscal year 99-00. Discretionary applications approximated 12 percent for the current fiscal year and 13 percent during the same time period the previous fiscal year.

A total of 3,605 permits (building and discretionary) were either issued or completed processing during the first three quarters of the current fiscal year. This compares with 3602 for the same period last year. Final actions related to discretionary permit applications comprised approximately 8.5 percent of all permits either issued or completed. Such actions comprised approximately 10 percent of the total for the first three quarters of last fiscal year. There were 53 fewer discretionary applications completed by the end of March than for the same period a year ago. More than half of the drop-off appears to have occurred during the most recent quarter. As shown in attachment 6, building permit application activity dropped off after the first quarter of the current fiscal year

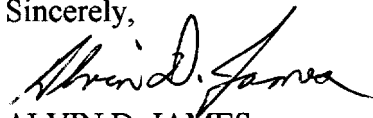
as it did during fiscal year 99-00. In fact, the pattern of activity, as reflected by the number of applications received during each quarter, is almost identical for the two time periods.

The average processing time for Levels 1-3, 4, and 5 discretionary applications declined during the third quarter of the current fiscal year relative to the second quarter-they essentially returned to the average processing time for these application levels reflected during the first quarter. Statistics were not available for the same time period last year. The average processing time for Level 6 applications increased during the third quarter of the current fiscal year relative to the second quarter. It had dropped during the second quarter relative to the first quarter but rose sharply again between January and March of this year. A combination of factors may have contributed to the increase including the fact that vacancies were still in the process of being filled in the Development Review unit, the impact of increased time commitments to staff training, reallocation of workload related to the new geographic team assignments. We will continue to monitor this category to determine if the change represents an aberration or is reflective of a more systemic problem.

Processing times for Level 7 applications have also increased. While the increase is less dramatic the processing times for this category are already far beyond desirable targets. It should be noted that a very small number of applications comprise this category (9 applications this year and 15 last year). The average can fluctuate significantly from application to application and from quarter to quarter. Level 7 applications comprise only 4 percent of the total number of discretionary applications completed by the third quarter of the current fiscal year and 3 percent during the comparable period for the previous year. A variety of factors can contribute to the long processing time for applications in the Level 7 category including prerequisite legislative acts such as rezonings, actions by other levels of government (coastal permits), culmination of other processes (such as planline studies or park designation consideration), detailed environmental investigation, negotiated project revisions etc. Staff is currently working with all appropriate review agencies to determine if and where administrative steps may be contributing unreasonably to the long processing times and, to identify ways to improve processing efficiency. Data was not available for fiscal year 99-00 discretionary permit average processing times. Therefore, a comparison with the previous fiscal year for this category was not possible. We will incorporate such information in future reports as it becomes available.

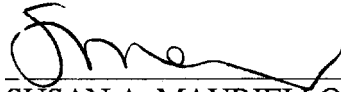
It is therefore Recommended that your Board accept and file the third quarter report for the Planning Department.

Sincerely,



ALVIN D. JAMES
Planning Director

RECOMMENDED:



SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
County Administrative Officer

Attachments:

1. Implementation Status of New Initiatives
2. Personnel Actions From March, 2001 Through Mid-June, 2001
3. Personnel Actions From October, 2000 Through February, 2001
4. Total Number of Applications By Type - Graph
5. Total Number of Permits Issued/Approved By Type - Graph
6. Total Number of Permit Applications By Type - Table
7. Total Number of Permits Issued/Approved By Type - Table
8. Permits Issued/Approved With Average Processing Times - Table
9. Building Permit Applications - Chart
10. Building Permits Issued - Chart
11. Average Building Permit Application Processing Times In Calendar Days - Chart
12. Discretionary Permit Applications - Chart
13. Discretionary Permit Applications Completed - Chart
14. Average Discretionary Permit Processing Times In Weeks - Chart

●IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF NEW INITIATIVES

Geographic Teams:

- Geographic Teams have been established and service area boundaries have been established
- Team Leaders have been selected
- Existing Development Review Project Caseloads have been re-allocated by Geographic areas, except for projects which are nearing completion, which are still assigned to the original Planner
- Management in process of reconciling caseload imbalances
- New applications are being assigned by geographic area
- A recent resignation by one of the team leaders has necessitated some changes in geographic assignments.

Satellite Permit Centers:

● **Felton Permit Center**

The Felton Permit Center is now open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Individuals can stop in at any time during these hours to obtain general land use information, make appointments to submit permit applications, check on the status of a permit and drop off electronic or paper application materials or revisions to plans. Staff are available each afternoon to provide general information and to issue building permits for projects which do not require construction plans such as replacing a hot water heater, repairing a deck, re-roofing a house or doing minor repairs. For more complex types of building permits that have approved applications, staff is available to issue permits by appointment. A planner is available to assist with more complex zoning matters three afternoons a week.

- A Plan Checker was relocated to Felton in May to improve our availability to provide technical assistance to the public and to our assigned building inspection, code compliance, and planning staff. The physical presence of a member of the technical plan check team is also essential to the success of the one-stop process for building permits, which is discussed in greater detail below. Most recently, physical modifications were made to the Permit Center to make more efficient use of the available space.

● **Aptos Permit Center**

The Board of Supervisors approved the lease for the Aptos Permit Center on February 13, 2001. The lease documents have been executed. Permits for tenant improvement by the landlord were issued in the first week in March.

- The physical modifications have been completed and all necessary furniture and equipment have been installed. We were poised to open the Aptos Permit Center in early June, but the statewide data transmission line maintained by ATT crashed, which is preventing electronic communication with the County's network which resides on the mainframe. The inability to access any of the County's land use information or records is currently rendering the Center inoperable. This problem on June 14th.

The Aptos Permit Center opened for limited service the week of June 18th. The services available at the Aptos Office will be essentially identical to those provided at the Felton Permit Center. Building inspectors, code compliance staff, a plan checker, and planners will be permanently stationed at the Aptos Office. Space has also been provided for Environmental Health staff

One Stop Permit Processing for Minor Projects:

- Two projects are in the planning and development stages, one for “minor” building permits, and one for discretionary projects.
- Discussions have commenced with reviewing agencies regarding minor building permits. As noted earlier, a Plan Checker is now stationed at the Felton Permit Center. This additional staffing resource is key to a successful program.
- Anticipated implementation of this new service is the end of May at the Felton Permit Center.

MINOR BUILDING PERMITS

- The pilot one-stop process for minor building permits was implemented in early May. Residential additions under 500 square feet, minor remodels and small accessory structures which do not require any discretionary permits or review by environmental planning, a fire agency, or DPW are eligible for this expedited permit process. The staff at the Felton Permit Center review the plans “on-the-spot” while the applicant is present. A planner checks the plans for consistency with zoning requirements, a structural plan checker reviews them for technical adequacy, and an environmental health representative checks for conformance with septic regulations. A building permit technician is available to prepare the permit if all plan requirements are met. Since the inception of this program, several permits have been issued the same day. These are applications which would have taken 2-3 weeks or longer under the normal permit process. Other permits have been issued within a couple of days where plans required routing to an agency not present at the Felton Permit Center. We are very pleased with the initial program results. The goal is to implement this one-stop service at both satellite Permit Centers and at the Government Center, once the program is further refined

MINOR DISCRETIONARY PERMITS

- The one-stop concept for minor discretionary projects is also being refined. In the coming quarter, we will select a few projects in the San Lorenzo Valley as test cases for the new program. The program will generally model the Development Review Group (DRG) process for larger projects.
- No substantial progress was made this past quarter on the development of a similar program for minor discretionary projects, in part due to turnover in our San Lorenzo planning assignments. We anticipate implementation of a pilot program this summer.

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Customer Service / Quality Control:

- The Senior Department Administrative Analyst position assigned responsibility for Customer Service / Quality Control is currently under recruitment.
- Three meetings have been held with field representative users of the department's services since October, 2000 to discuss customer service / quality control issues. Additional meetings will be scheduled.
- A new recruitment was completed this month for the Senior Departmental Analyst position. We anticipate making an appointment to this position by mid-July.
- Management staff have initiated a series of meetings with development review and environmental planning staff to identify areas where we can simplify our work efforts on permit applications to improve our efficiency. As a result of these efforts, staff have developed new word processing templates for simple permits, which saves preparation time and ensures greater consistency in the findings and conditions. Routing and intake procedures are being improved to streamline the avulication review process. These are quick "first steps" in an ongoing process to streamline our procedures.
- As a result of the meetings, staff have developed a list of suggestions for further simplifying the permit process. This list of ideas will be provided to the new senior departmental analyst once that person is hired. Part of the analyst's responsibilities will be analyzing our permit procedures and identifying areas for improvement.

Staff Training:

- Two comprehensive orientation training programs have been conducted for new employees.
- New Planners are presently participating in an intense in-service training concerning the County's development regulations.
- Professional staff have attended or are enrolled in classes on land use law, subdivisions, CEQA, and similar courses.
- Recently, the department appointed a training coordinator; department training needs are being assessed.
- The Department completed the initial Department-wide needs assessment and immediately launched the new training program in April. The program has four training tracks: New Employee Orientation, Professional Development, Communication and Interpersonal Dynamics and Office Technology. Twelve new employees have been through a complete orientation program consisting of 9 two hour sessions in differing formats on various topics over a period of 6 weeks. Three of the most recent hires began their orientation program on June 8. Five main Professional Development training classes have been conducted since April 5, which have each been attended by 33 staff

members. Topics include: "The Permit Process in Detail", "CEQA and How to Write a Good Initial Study", "Effective Staff Report Writing" and "How to Make Legally Defensible Findings".

- In addition, zoning ordinance training is being conducted by an experienced manager two afternoons/week for all new employees in the Development Review Section. Regarding computer use, the move-from Wordperfect word processing to Microsoft Word has necessitated a focus on learning Microsoft Word to begin the Office Technology training. Forty-seven staff members are scheduled for one of four scheduled class days at New Horizons Learning Center during the last two weeks of June. Staff has been scheduled for a training level that meets their needs. The remaining staff will receive this training in August. Sessions in Communication/Interpersonal Dynamics will begin this fall. Topics now under consideration are "Conflict Management" and "How to Deal with Difficult People".

- **Urban Designer Services:**

- Initial interviews were conducted in December, 2000, for the existing list. A new recruitment was conducted and interviews are scheduled for the week of March 5th.
- The Department hired an Urban Designer, Larry Kasvarowitz, who started in May. He is a licensed architect and landscape architect, and has experience in private practice and local planning agencies. He is involved in the review of current pending development proposals subject to GSI review, is in the process of developing public information materials on design topics, and will be closely involved in various advanced planning projects including community plans, amendments to the design review ordinance, landscape requirements, and other projects.

Phone Changes:

- Three meetings have been held with ISD Telecommunications staff to review options for improving staff's telephone responsiveness. Training related to equipment usage is being planned for existing staff. Physical modifications to accommodate new staff specifically assigned to improve phone response are being implemented. Recruitment for the new positions has recently been concluded and the new hires are expected to arrive shortly. Response standards will be evaluated when the Senior Department Administrative Analyst position is filled.
- Appointments were made to the Planning Technician positions. Also, physical modifications were completed to develop a central phone area. The telephone improvement plan have been implemented. Planning technicians and clerical staff are assisting callers with code compliance issues. Planning Technicians are also assisting with general zoning telephone inquiries. The next phase will be to improve our responsiveness in our project review and environmental planning sections. This will be accomplished by the end of June. As noted above, we expect the new analyst to evaluate and monitor our telephone capabilities and responsiveness and make further recommendations to improve our service to the public in this important area.

Organizational Management:

- Support Services staff and Planning Technicians have been reassigned to the Planning and Building Divisions.
- Responsibility for the **Felton** Home Elevation project has been assigned to the Building Division.
- Space and Personnel issues are being coordinated to support Planning Department new initiatives.
- Numerous *space* modifications have been completed in recent weeks to create work stations to accommodate the new positions authorized last October. to create a central phone room, and to make *more efficient use of our existing space.*
- As discussed in greater detail under “Satellite Permit Center.” space modifications have been completed *for the Aptos Permit Center.*

PERSONNEL ACTIONS FROM MARCH, 2001 THROUGH MID-JUNE, 2001

New Hires	Promotions	Vacancies as of 6/08/01
Support Services:		
1 Planning Tech	1 Typist Clerk III	1 Snr Dept Admin Analyst
		1 Records Clerk
GIS:		
		1 Snr Dept Info Sys Analyst
Building:		
1 Typist Clerk IT		1 Assoc Civil Engineer
1 Bldg Permit Tech I		
Code Compliance:		
		.75 Planning Tech
		1 Typist Clerk II
Environmental:		
1 Res Planner I		1 Assoc Civil Engineer
		1 Planner IV
		1 Planning Tech
Dev Review-Counter:		
1 Planner I	1 Planner III (Transfer)	
1 Planner III		

New Hires	Promotions	Vacancies as of 6/08/01
Dev Review-Projects:		
1 Typist Clerk III	.75 Planner IV	1 Planner IV
1 Planner III		
1 Urban Designer		
1 Typist Clerk II		
Advanced Planning:		
1 Planner III		1 Housing Manager
		1 Planner IV
		1 Typist Clerk II
Resources Planning:		
		1 Res Planner IV

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PERSONNEL ACTIONS FROM OCTOBER, 2000 THROUGH FEBRUARY, 2001**Support Services - New Hires:**

- 3 Typist Clerk IT
- 1 Clerical Supervisor II
- 1 Records Clerk
- 1 Imaging Technician
- 1 Accounting Technician
- 1 Dept Info Systems Analyst

Support Services - Promotions:

- 1 Planner IV to IV/B - Trainer
- 1 Typist Clerk III

Building - New Hires:

- 1 Bldg Permit Tech I
- 1 Bldg Inspector I

Building - Promotions:

- 1 Bldg Permit Tech I
- 1 Sr Bldg Permit Tech
- 1 Planning Tech

Code Compliance - New Hires:

- 1 Code Compliance Investigator I - Code
- 1 Code Compliance Investigator III - Code
- 1 Planning Tech

Development Review - Counter - Promotions:

- 1 Planner I (Transfer)
- 2 Planner IV
- 1 Principal Planner

Development Review - Projects - New Hires:

- 1 Planner II
- 3 Planner III
- 3 Planning Tech

Development Review - Projects - Promotions:

- 3 Planner IV
- 1 Principal Planner
- 2 Planning Tech

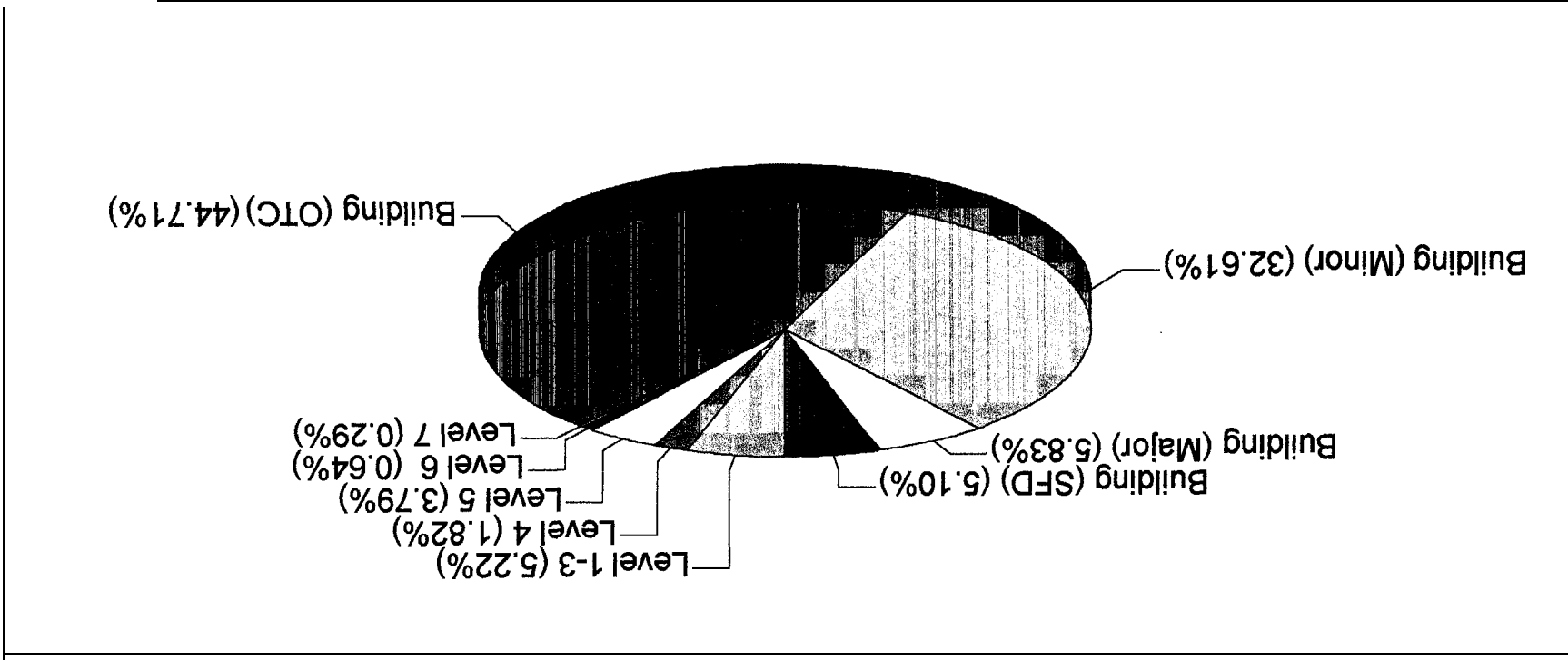
Advanced Planning - New Hires:

- 1 Planner III

Resources Planning - New Hires:

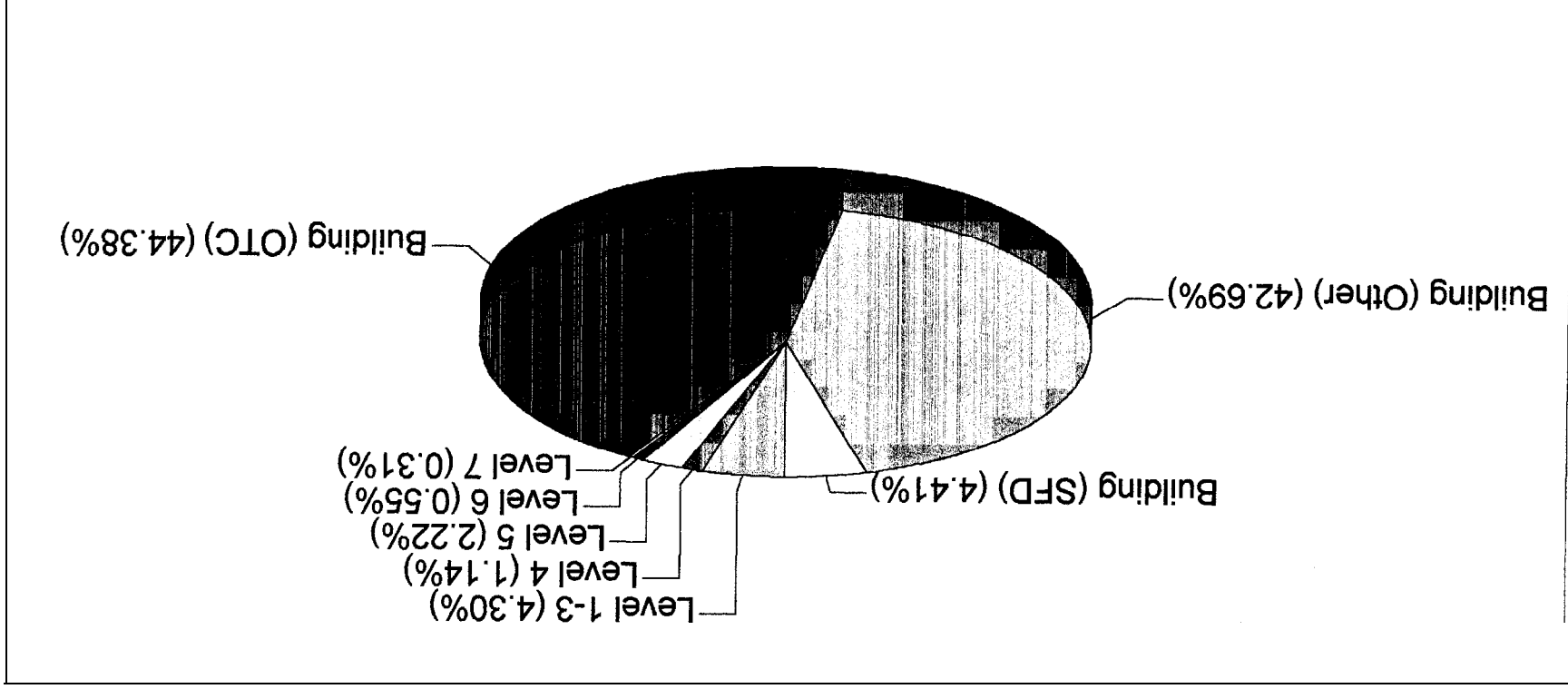
- 1 Res Planner II

Total Number of Applications By Type



1st Through 3rd Quarters - Fiscal Year 2000-01

Total Number of Permits Issued/Approved By Type



1st Through 3rd Quarters - Fiscal Year 2000-01

Total Number of Permit Applications By Type

	1 st Qtr 00-01	2nd Qtr 00-01	3rd Qtr 00-01	Total
Level 1-3	61	53	50	164
Level 4	19	20	18	57
Level 5	40	42	37	119
Level 6	5	7	8	20
Level 7	1	3	5	9
Building (OTC)	587	436	381	1404
Building (Minor)	397	329	298	1024
Building (Major)	84	43	56	183
Building (SFD)	66	42	52	160
Total	1260	975	905	3140

Level	1 st Qtr 99-00	2nd Qtr 99-00	3rd Qtr 99-00	Total
1 to 3	66	48	79	193
4	14	13	21	48
5	45	38	44	127
6	8	6	5	19
7	1	10	4	15
OTC	639	434	395	1468
Minor	370	321	293	984
Major	60	46	51	157
SFD	52	43	53	148
Total	1255	959	945	3159

1st Through 3rd Quarters

Total Number of Permits Issued/Approved By Type

	1st Qtr 00-01	2nd Qtr 00-01	3rd Qtr 00-01	Total
Level 1-3	64	52	39	155
Level 4	11	17	13	41
Level 5	37	26	17	80
Level 6	5	10	5	20
Level 7	1	6	4	11
Building (OTC)	644	561	395	1600
Building (Other)	654	490	395	1539
Building (SFD)	64	64	31	159
Total	1460	1226	699	3605

Level	1 st Qtr 99-00	2nd Qtr 99-00	3rd Qtr 99-00	Total
1 to3	70	59	56	185
4	17	15	8	40
5	33	30	35	98
6	11	5	9	25
7	4	6	2	12
OTC	702	468	411	1581
Other	567	484	440	1491
SFD	82	44	44	170
Total	1486	1111	1005	3602

1st Through 3rd Quarters

Permits Issued/Approved With Average Processing Times

	1st Qtr 00-01	2nd Qtr 00-01	3rd Qtr 00-01	Total
Level 1-3	64	52	39	155
Level 4	11	17	13	41
Level 5	37	26	17	80
Level 6	5	10	5	20
Level 7	1	6	4	11
Building (OTC)	644	561	395	1600
Building (Other)	654	490	395	1539
Building (SFD)	64	64	31	159
Total	1460	1226	899	3605

Level	1 st Qtr 99-00	2nd Qtr 99-00	3rd Qtr 99-00	Total
1 to3	70	59	56	185
4	17	15	8	40
5	33	30	35	98
6	11	5	9	25
7	4	6	2	12
OTC	702	468	411	1581
Other	567	484	440	1491
SFD	82	44	44	170
Total	1486	1111	1005	3602

Level	1st Qtr 00-01	2nd Qtr 00-01	3rd Qtr 00-01	
1 to 3	4	5	3	Weeks
4	9	14	8	Weeks
5	16	24	17	Weeks
6	37	29	45	Weeks
7	0	55	64	Weeks
Minor	22	23	22	Days
Major	36	43	43	Days
SFD	49	50	57	Days

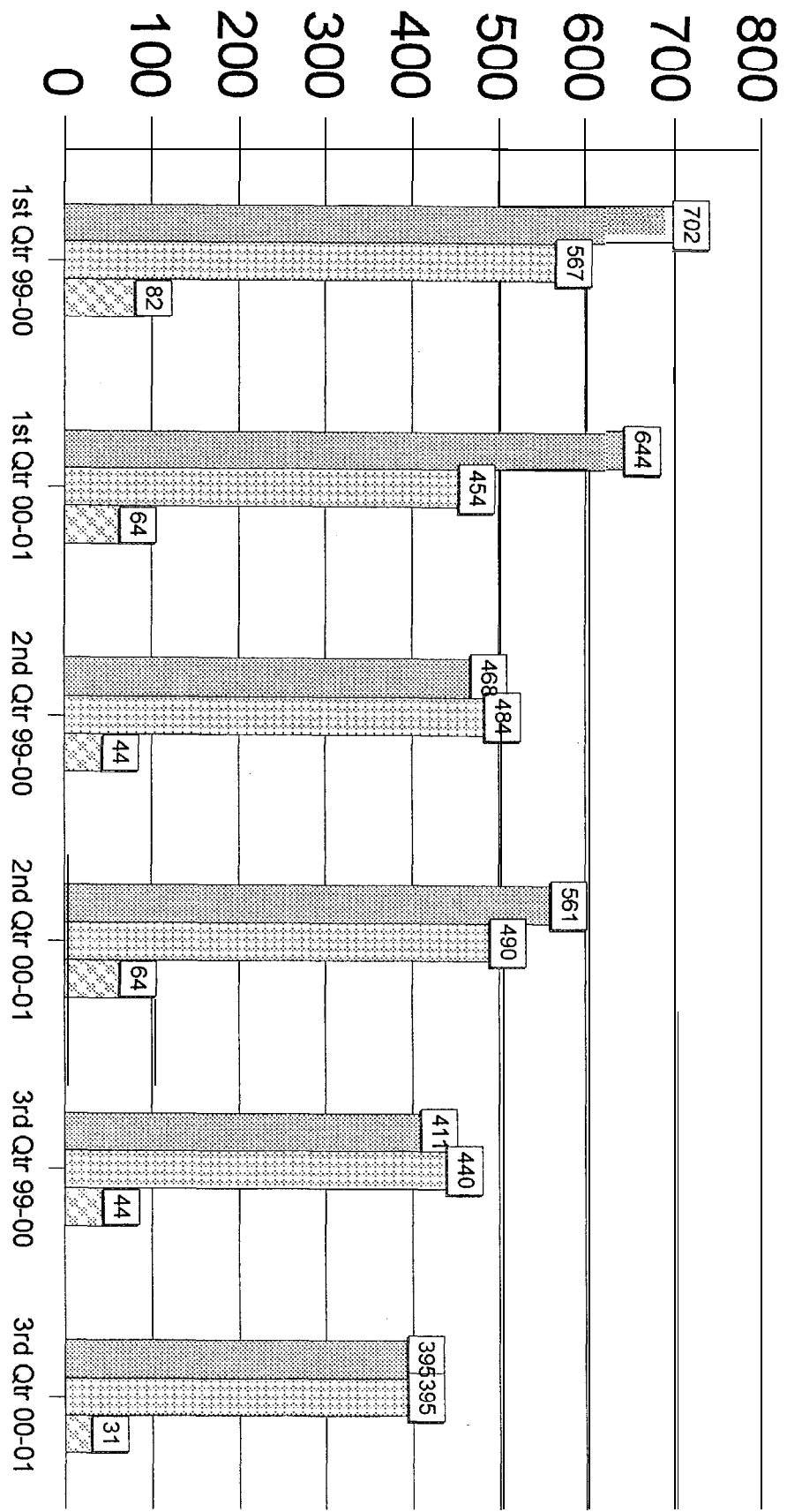
Level	1st Qtr 99-00	2nd Qtr 99-00	3rd Qtr 99-00	
1 to3	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Weeks
4	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Weeks
5	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Weeks
6	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Weeks
7	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Weeks
Minor	21	20	20	Days
Major	40	41	32	Days
SFD	46	45	41	Days

1st Through 3rd Quarters

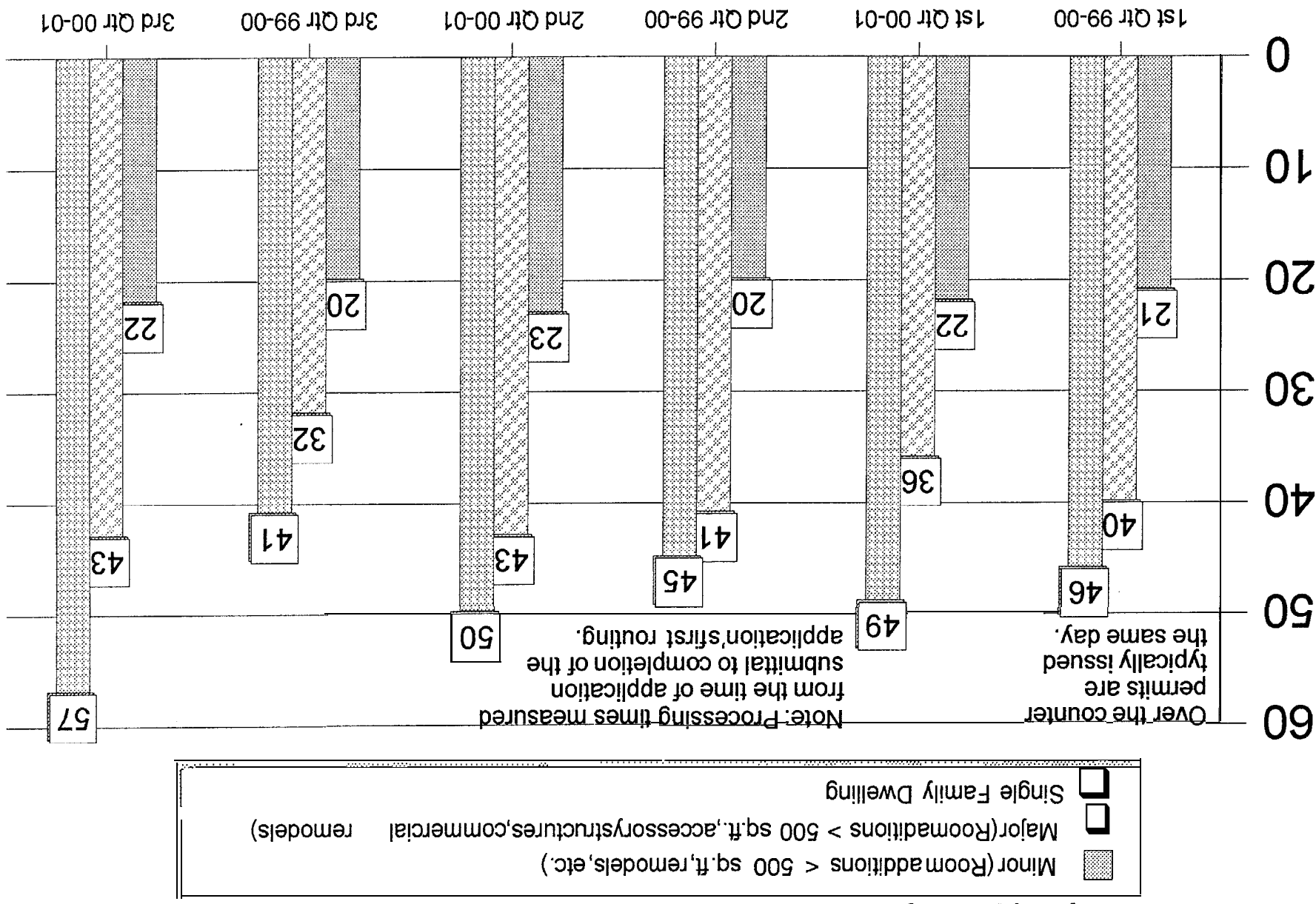
BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED

By Type, By Qtr FY 99-00 & 00-01

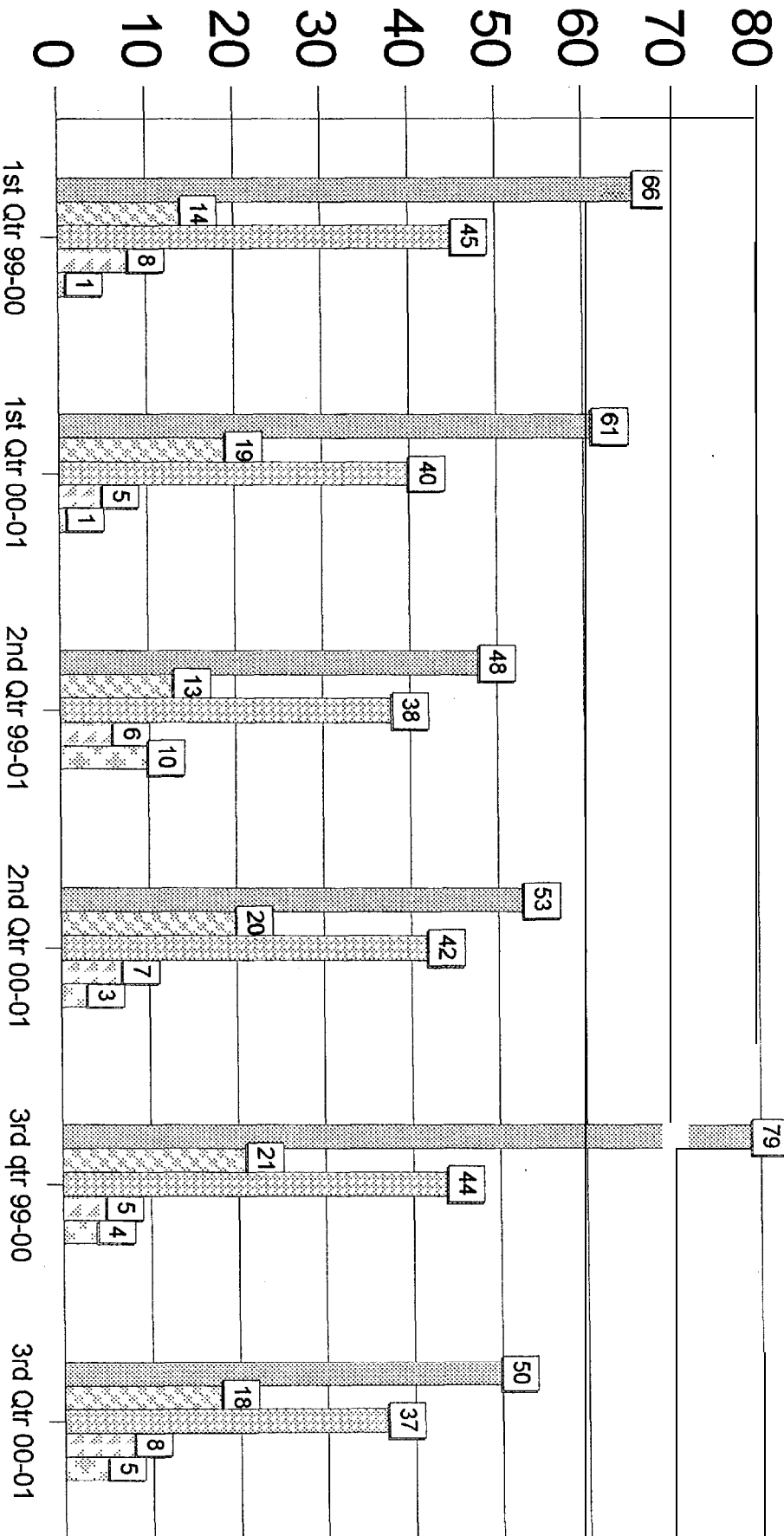
- Over-the-Counter (Permits with no plans, such as re-roofs, water heaters, or wood stoves)
- Other (Room additions, remodels, accessory structures, commercial remodels)
- Single Family Dwellings



AVERAGE BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES By Type, By Qtr FY 99-00 & 00-01 in Calendar Days

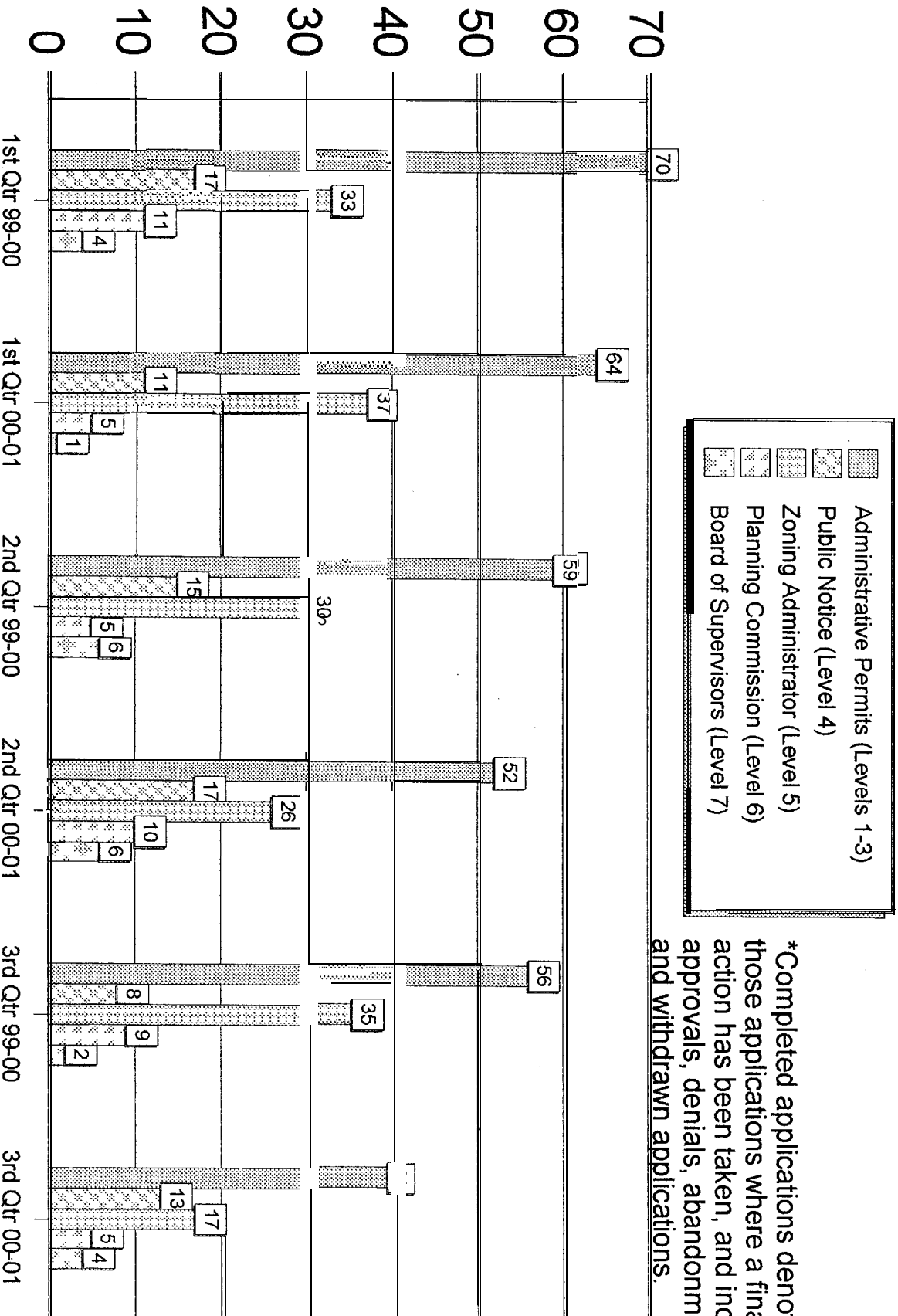


DISCRETIONARY PERMIT APPLICATIONS By Type, By Qtr FY 99-00 & 00-01



DISCRETIONARY PERMIT APPLICATIONS COMPLETED*

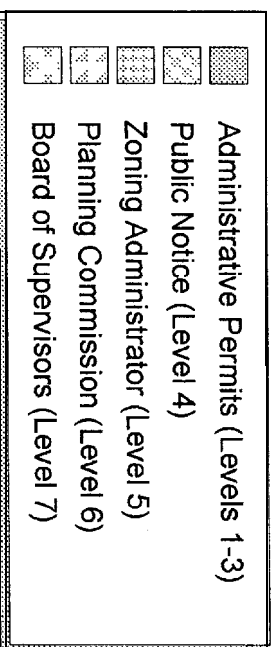
By Type, By Qtr FY99-00 & 00-01



*Completed applications denote those applications where a final action has been taken, and includes approvals, denials, abandonments, and withdrawn applications.

AVERAGE DISCRETIONARY PERMIT PROCESSING TIMES IN WEEKS

By Type, By Qtr FY 99-00 & 00-01



Note: Processing time measured from the time an application is deemed complete until a final action has been taken.

