

COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ 0177

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
(831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-2131 TDD: (831) 454-2123
ALVIN JAMES, DIRECTOR

February 14, 2001

Agenda: February 26, 2002

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

SUBJECT: Planning Department Fourth Quarter 00/01 and First Two Quarters of 01/02 Report

Members of the Board:

At the conclusion of budget hearings in June 2000, your Board directed the Planning Department to prepare quarterly reports on the permit workload in the Department. Subsequently, on October 17, 2000, 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 quarterly report was filed and accepted by your Board on November 21st, 2000; the second was presented to your Board on March 13, 2001. The most recent was presented to your Board on June 26, 2001. We are pleased to submit our fourth report that combines our fourth quarter 00/01 report (April - June, 2001) with first and second-quarter 01/02 (July -December, 2001) fiscal year report for your Board's 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 in October, 2000. Our achievements in the last 3 quarters are highlighted in *italics*. Geographic teams are continuing to operate; services at our Felton Permit Center have been expanded; the Aptos Permit Center opened the week of June 18, 2001; the pilot One-Stop Program for minor building permits has been implemented; and, departmental training initiatives continue to provide a substantial amount of support to staff. Our emphasis on new employee orientation and training between the third and fourth quarters of FY 00/01 improved the departments' capacity to effectively serve its' various customers. Professional development and in-service training has been an emphasis since July, 2001 and has been occurring within the various program sections of the department. Technology training is also being emphasized which is improving the staff ability to take better advantage of available technologies in the County and is helping staff to provide better

information more expeditiously to the public as well as the various policy bodies supported by the department. Telephone service improvements have been implemented and are monitored on an ongoing basis; we are continuing to evaluate methods for further improving service.

In July, 2001 a new Senior Department Administrative Analyst was hired to oversee the department's Customer Service and Quality Assurance initiatives. She has been working closely with department mid-managers, and staff to identify needed process improvements and to implement enhancements to the department's service delivery systems. She has attended two meetings with customer service stakeholders, consisting of various members of the public, that utilize department services and who have offered suggestions for improving services. She has assumed responsibility for ensuring implementation of telephone service improvements and monitoring performance of the same. She has also begun to look at various department forms and communication templates to insure that they provide timely and accurate information. Finally, she is working with the Planning Director and department management to identify agency strategic goals and objectives intended to facilitate efforts to re-engineer the department's service delivery systems.

PERSONNEL STATUS

Attachment 2 presents, in table form, new hires, promotions, transfers and vacancies since April 1, 2001 through the end of December. The vacancy rate as of December 31, 2001 was 8 positions, or approximately 7 percent.

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 three quarters of fiscal year 2000 -2001 (July, 2000 - March, 2001). This report takes a more expansive perspective and provides comparative data for all of fiscal years 1999/2000, 2000/2001, and the first two quarters of 2001/2002. It also includes the first quarter of fiscal year 2001/2002 in order to provide a three year 1st quarter trend analysis.

The Planning Department received a total of 4,328 Permit Applications (building and discretionary) for all of fiscal year (FY) 00-01. This number compares with 4327 applications for the previous fiscal year. Building permit applications, collectively comprised approximately 89 percent of all applications received during FY 00/01; about the same level as the previous fiscal year (88 percent). Over-the-counter and Minor building permit applications together comprised just under 77 percent of total applications received. This percentage remained unchanged from FY 99-00 totals. Discretionary applications were approximately 11 percent for the current fiscal year and 12 percent the previous fiscal year. In short, permit application totals were essentially unchanged both in the aggregate and across categories between FY 99-00 and 00-01.

Overall permit approval and issuance levels also essentially remained unchanged between FY 99-00 and 00-01. A total of 4770 permits (building and discretionary) were either issued or completed processing during fiscal year 00-01. This compares with 4776 for the same period the year before.

The number of permits issued during the third quarter of FY 00-01 experienced a 10.5 percent decline relative to the same timeframe a year earlier. The decline was largely attributable to the fact that the planning department was experiencing a higher than average staff vacancy rate at the time. The FY 00-01 fourth quarter permit issuance level increased again as vacancies filled and, was only .8 percent lower than the comparable period in fiscal year 99-00.

A comparison of first quarter statistics for FY 01-02 with earlier periods suggests that overall permit activity may be slowing. There were 1,260 applications received in the first quarter of 00-01 and 1,255 in 99-00. However, only 1,090 applications were taken in during the first quarter 01-02. This number represents an 8.2 percent decrease relative to the immediately preceding quarter, and a 13.4 percent reduction compared to the 1st quarter of FY 00-01. Second quarter FY 01-02 overall permit activity levels reflect a marked decrease (18.3 percent) relative to the first quarter. Essentially all of the decrease occurred in building permit activity. Building permit activity declined 21.1 percent relative to the first quarter, (90 percent of which occurred in the Over-the-counter and Minor permit categories. The 1st quarter 01-02 building permit application level represents an 11.8 percent decline relative to the same time period during the previous fiscal year. Discretionary permit applications were off 28.5 percent compared to the 1st quarter FY 00-01. Permit approval and issuance levels also dropped during the 1st quarter of the current fiscal year with discretionary permit and building permit final actions experiencing a 15.3 percent and 22 percent decline respectively relative to the first quarter of FY 00-01.

Average processing times edged down across all permit intake categories for building permits during the second quarter of FY 01-02 relative to the immediately preceding quarter. However, the average processing time for all discretionary permit application review levels except 7 increased during the second quarter of the current fiscal year relative to the first quarter. The dramatic rise in Level 7 processing time relates to a single project and, therefore, represents an aberration. A slight increase in the Levels 3, 4, and 5 processing times reflects what appears to be a seasonal trend consistent with historical movement for these categories. The continued increase in processing time is not a normal pattern for Level 6 (Planning Commission) permit applications. The processing time for Level 6 applications is erratic due in large measure to the fact that there were no applications reported for the 1st quarter and only two for the 2nd quarter. Therefore, the upward trend in processing time for this atypical small universe of cases also represents an aberration. Each Level 6 application is unique. Most require environmental review, design review, special studies, and are typically the more complex development applications. We would expect periodically to see such fluctuations in Level 6 applications.

Average processing times for Level 7 applications continue to defy reasonable predictability. A very small number of applications typically comprise this category (14 applications during FY 00-01 and 20 during FY 99-00). The average processing time tends to fluctuate significantly from application to application and from quarter to quarter.

A variety of factors beyond planning staffs' control typically contribute to the long processing time for applications in the Level 7 category including prerequisite legislative acts such as rezoning, actions by other levels of government (coastal permits), culmination of other processes (such as plan line studies or park designation consideration), detailed environmental investigation, negotiated

project revisions etc. Staff is continuing to work 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.

It is therefore Recommended that your Board accept and file this fourth quarter 00-01 **and** first and second quarter 01-02 report from 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 for the Two Quarters Ending September 30, 2001
3. Discretionary Permit Applications Completed by Type – Graph Last 10 Quarters
- 4. Building Permit Applications by Type – Last 10 Quarters**
5. Building Permits Issued by Type – Last 10 Quarters
6. Discretionary Permit Applications by Type – Last 10 Quarters
- 7. Average Building Permit Application Processing Times by Type – Last 10 Quarters in Calendar Days**
- 8. Average Discretionary Permit Processing Times in Weeks by Type – Last 6 Quarters**

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF NEW INITIATIVES

0182

Geographic Teams:

- A new Planner was hired in August (01-02) and the geographic teams are now fully staffed.

Satellite Permit Centers:

- **Felton Permit Center**

“One Stop Appointments” for expedited processing of very minor building permit projects, such as interior remodels, began as a pilot program in February 2001. Due to the success of this pilot program, staff made the program permanent and expanded the category of eligible projects to include minor room additions in May 2001.

- **Aptos Permit Center**

The Aptos Permit Center opened on June 18, 2001.

The Center has been popular with the public and has experienced heavy traffic. Full services are available five afternoons a week. “One Stop Appointments” became available to the public at the Aptos Permit Center in August 2001.

One Stop Permit Processing for Minor Projects:**MINOR BUILDING PERMITS**

- As indicated in the third quarter report, 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, other than drainage, 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. If additional impervious surface is proposed, Public Works drainage section reviews the plans on the next business day. A building permit technician is available to prepare the permit if all plan requirements are met. Some permits are issued on the same day and many are issued within a few days. These are applications that 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

0183

- Staff is currently exploring the development of a similar program for minor discretionary projects and will update the Board next quarter.

Technology Advances:

- Work has been progressing on three major technology initiatives. The first would improve access to the County's GIS by staff and the public. On January 9, 2001, your Board approved the concept of making available to the public land use information of the kind offered by the Zoning Counter. That effort is moving forward and we expect that the GIS on the Internet will be available during the next quarter. The Intranet application has recently been made available by Information Services Department for use by all County Departments. The Zoning Counter staff is utilizing information from it to increase their effectiveness in assisting the public.
- The second involves preparation of a Request for Proposals for an off-the-shelf vendor system to replace the mainframe based Automated Land Use System (ALUS) permit tracking system. The RFP is being prepared by ISD in consultation with Planning staff. We expect that the RFP will be released during the next quarter.
- The third technology initiative is the significant expansion of information available on the Planning Department's web page. The following has been added:
 - Many additional brochures and handouts
 - Phone numbers and e-mail addresses of all staff
 - An annotated flow chart of the building permit process
 - The Building Permit Application routing matrix used by staff to determine the different agencies that would review plans
 - Screens that allow applicants to check the status of their building or discretionary applications at any given time

Recent comments from various members of the public suggest that these additions, and especially the ability to check application status of an application on the Internet, are being favorably received.

Customer Service / Quality Control:

- The Department hired a new Senior Department Administrative Analyst in August. Her focus has been to assist the Department in dealing with a variety of customer service issues and to improve Quality Assurance measures. Relative to customer service, the new analyst will work directly with the Planning Director to: devise systematic methods to review departmental performance, measure customer service and identify areas where departmental systems and tools are in need of update or change. The quality assurance aspects of her work involve conducting quantitative and qualitative review of the Department's work-products and assisting with the establishment of workload standards.

Staff Training:

- The Department provided training in three of its training tracks: New Employee Orientation, Professional Development, and Office Technology. Communication and Interpersonal Dynamics track has sessions scheduled in the next quarter. Trainings consist of:
- New Employee Orientation track: Thirteen new employees completed this program consisting of 12 two-hour sessions in differing formats on a diverse selection of topics over a 7-week period. This program began in the first week of April. A second session of the New Employee Orientation Program began in mid-August for a new group of 10 new employees.
- Professional Development track: Six classes have been conducted since April, which have each been attended by 33 or more staff members primarily from the Development Review and Code Compliance sections. The first three sessions dealt with report writing and analysis. Topics included "CEQA and How to Write a Good Initial Study", "Effective Staff Report Writing" and "How to Make Legally Defensible Findings". The second three sessions consisted of a series of trainings on the County's environmental protection regulations for non-Environmental Planning section staff. Topics included "Grading and Erosion Control Practices, Policies and Regulations" and similar subjects. In addition, Zoning Ordinance training was provided to newer staff in the Development Review section two afternoons/week for several weeks in two separate sessions.
- Communication and Interpersonal Dynamics track: A department-wide training has occurred in late August with the Sheriff's Department. The focus of the training was on office and field security. The training was implemented in early October. Sessions in "Conflict Management" and "How to Deal with Difficult People" will be offered in the future when we are not engaged in so many other trainings.
- Office Technology track: Regarding computer use, the change from Corel WordPerfect to Microsoft Word necessitated training in new word processing for the majority of staff: The needs assessment indicated that data processing was also needed. Eight staff needing data base skills learned the Access data base program at New Horizons Computer Learning Center in April. In June 47 staff members completed the Word full day class session at New Horizons Computer Learning Center. Staff was enrolled in one of three class levels for Word that met their skill level. New Horizons provided a follow-up half-day Word class for 25 staff in July without an additional charge.
- Trainings Scheduled Are: GIS staff provided training on the new land use mapping on the Internet in September and October for all Planning staff GIS staff will provide this training to other County staff outside the Planning Department and eventually to the public. Training is currently being scheduled for Project Planners in digital presentation technology.

Urban Designer Services:

- e The Urban Designer is currently involved in the review of pending development proposals subject to design review including residences, commercial complexes and subdivisions. He is also in the process of finishing public information materials on Residential Design Guidelines that is going to the Planning Commission and Accessible Parking Lots that is going to the Commission on Disabilities. He has been closely involved in various advanced planning projects including the Seacliff Village Plan, amendments to the Design Review Ordinance and the Subdivision Ordinance.

Phone Changes:

- e Voice mail messages for most Development Review and Environmental Planning staff have been revised to include an option allowing callers to speak directly to Planning Technicians. Many of the caller's questions are being answered on the spot.
- e The Zoning Counterphone line has been reconfigured into a "mustanswer" line. If a Planner is not available to answer the incoming call, it will automatically transfer to Planning Technicians assigned to phone coverage. The Planning Technicians have been trained to answer the caller's basic inquiries; if the Planning Technician cannot answer, a message is taken for a Planner to return the call. On many occasions, research is needed before the Planner is able to return the call. Callers to the Zoning Counter will rarely encounter voice mail. These change have resulted in more questions being answered "live" and fewer messages being left plus, they enhance customer service.
- e The telephone routing system for code compliance described previously has been implemented; the new analyst is monitoring this improved service to both look for opportunities for refinement and to ensure its continued satisfactory operation.

Organizational Management:

- The Felton Home Elevation Project was transferred to Emergency Services July 1, 2001.
- Four Planning Technicians have been hired to complete staffing of the General Information functions at the Government Center and the Permit Centers and to support the Abandoned Vehicle and Code Compliance Programs.
- An Assistant Planning Director recently resigned to become the County's new Emergency Service Administrator. The vacancy has necessitated some organizational changes pending recruitment and selection of a new executive manager.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS FOR THE THREE QUARTERS ENDING DECEMBER, 2001

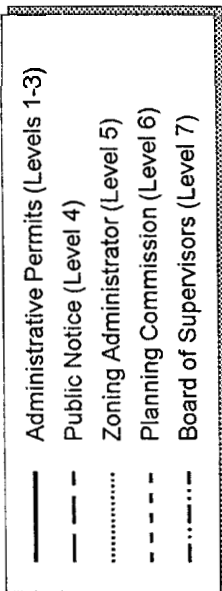
01 86

New Hires	Promotions (P) / Transfers (T) / Retirement (R)	Vacancies as of 12/31/01
Administration:		
		1 Assistant Planning Director
Support Services:		
1 Senior Dept. Admin. Analyst	2 Accounting Technicians (T)	
2 Records Clerks	1 Senior Account Clerk (R)	
2 Accounting Technicians (T)		
1 Senior Account Clerk		
GIS:		
1 Dept. Info. Systems Analyst -- Limited Term	1 Senior Dept. Info. Systems Analyst (P)	
Building:		
1 Building Plans Checker	1 Building Plans Checker (R)	1 Typist Clerk II
1 Building Inspector I	1 Building Permit Technician I (P)	1 Associate Civil Engineer
1 Building Permit Technician I	1 Senior Building Inspector (P)	1 Building Inspector
Code Compliance:		
1 Typist Clerk II		
2 Planning Technicians		
Environmental Planning:		
1 Resource Planner I		
1 Typist Clerk II		

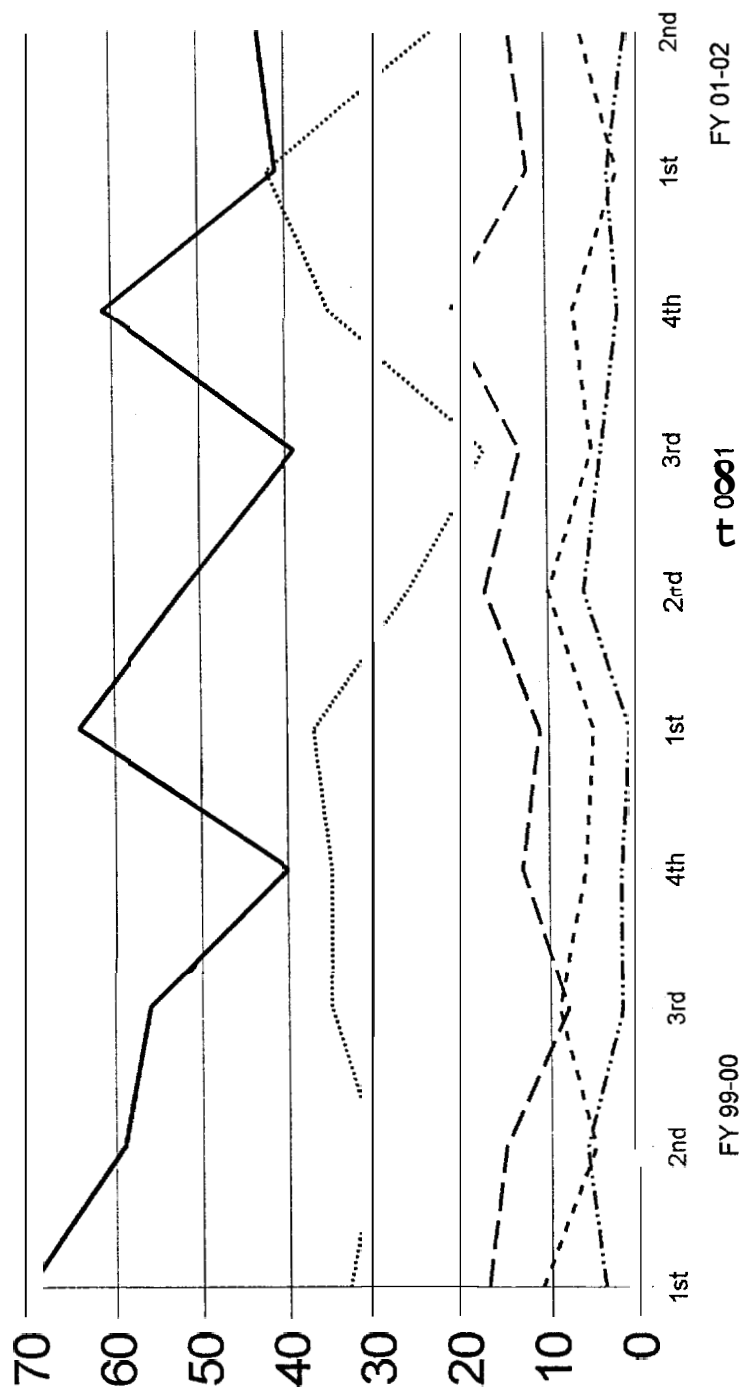
1 Asst. in Civil Engineering		
1 Planner IV		
1 Planning Technician		
Dev. Review – Counter:		
1 Planner I		
Dev. Review – Projects:		
1 Clerical Supervisor II	1 Planner I (P)	1 Planner IV
1 Typist Clerk II	1 Planner III (T)	1 Planning Technician
2 Planner III's		
1 Typist Clerk III		
Advanced Planning:		
1 Typist Clerk II		1 Housing Manager
Resources Planning:		
1 Resource Planner III		1 Resource Planner IV

DISCRETIONARY PERMIT APPLICATIONS COMPLETED*

By Type Last 10 Quarters

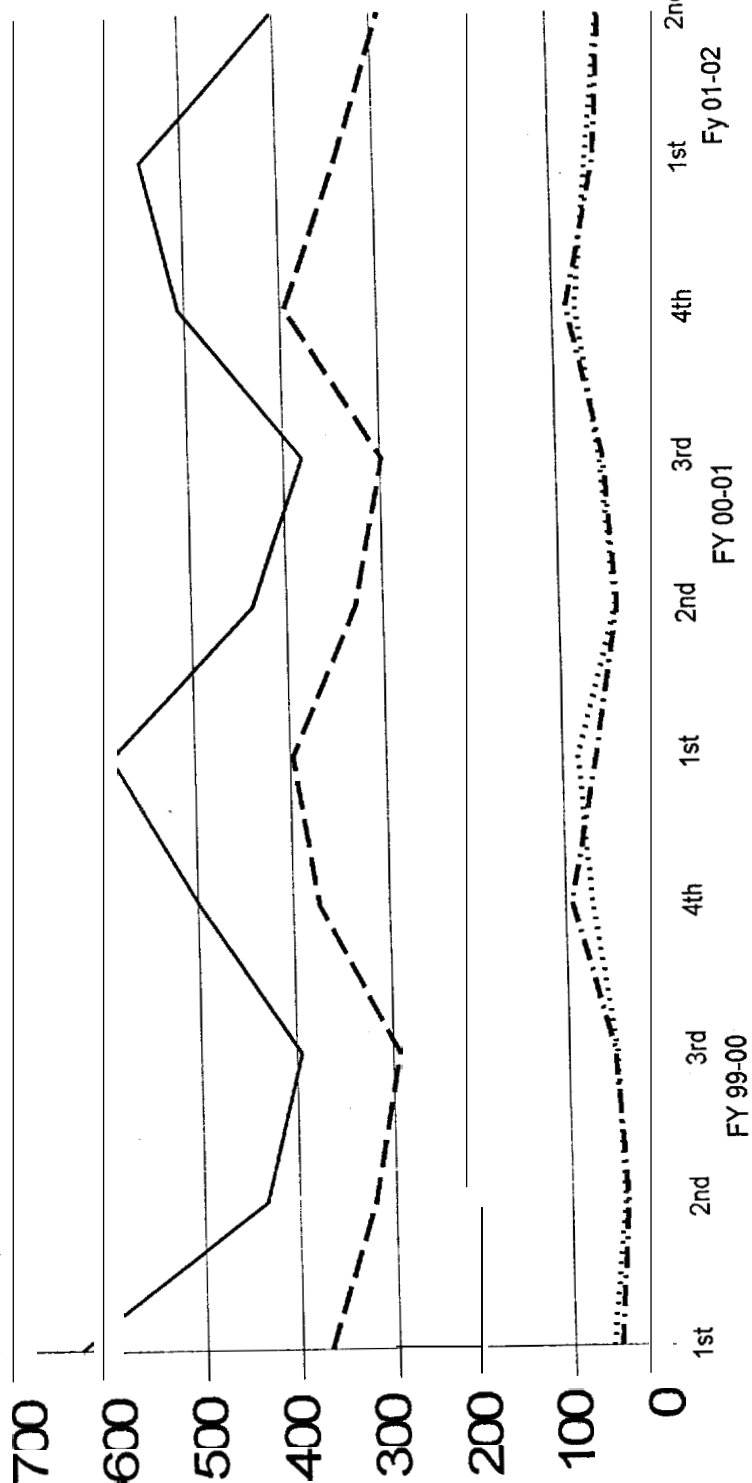
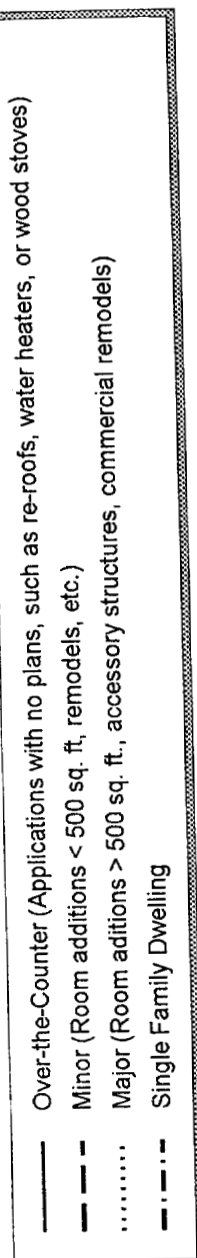


*Completed applications denote those applications where a final action has been taken, and includes approvals, denials, abandonments, and withdrawn applications.

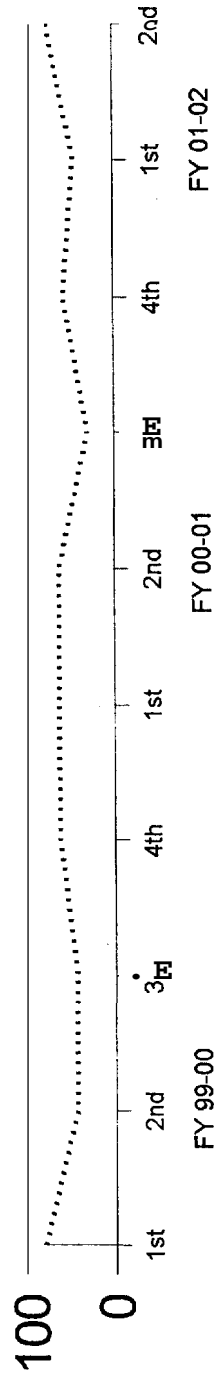
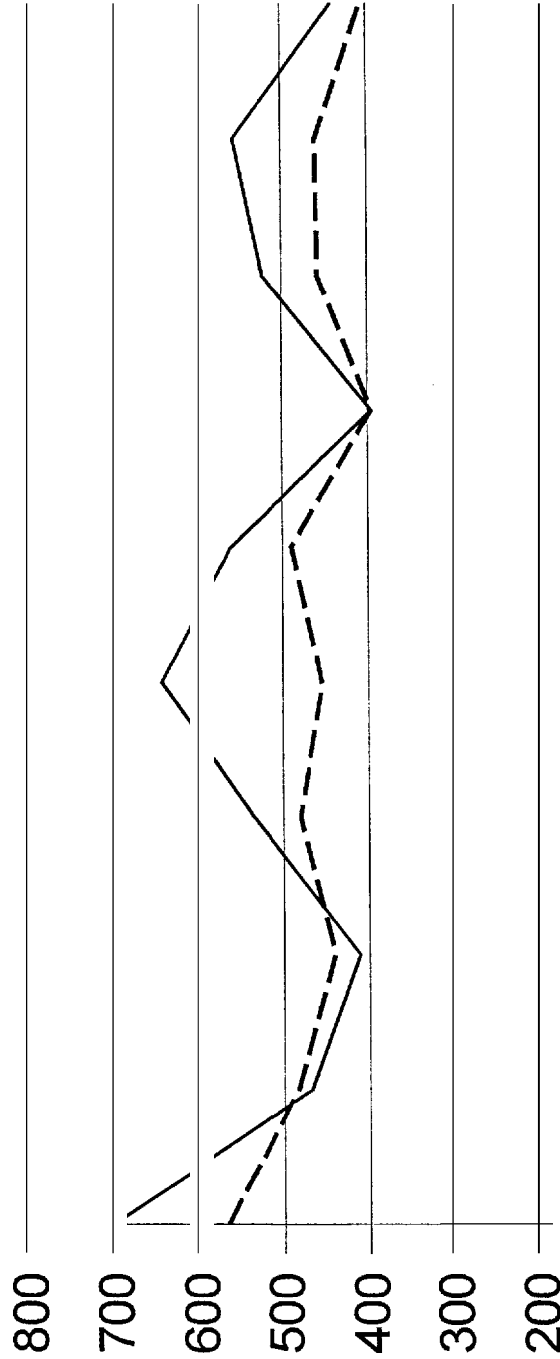
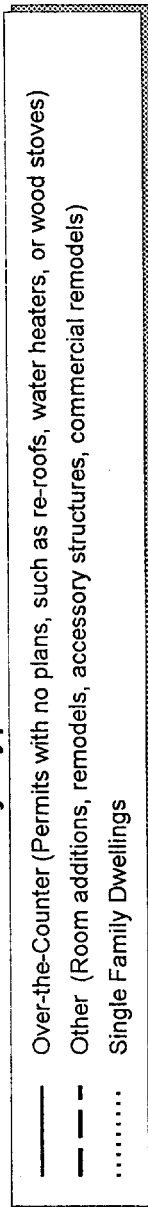


BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATIONS

By Type Last 10 Quarters

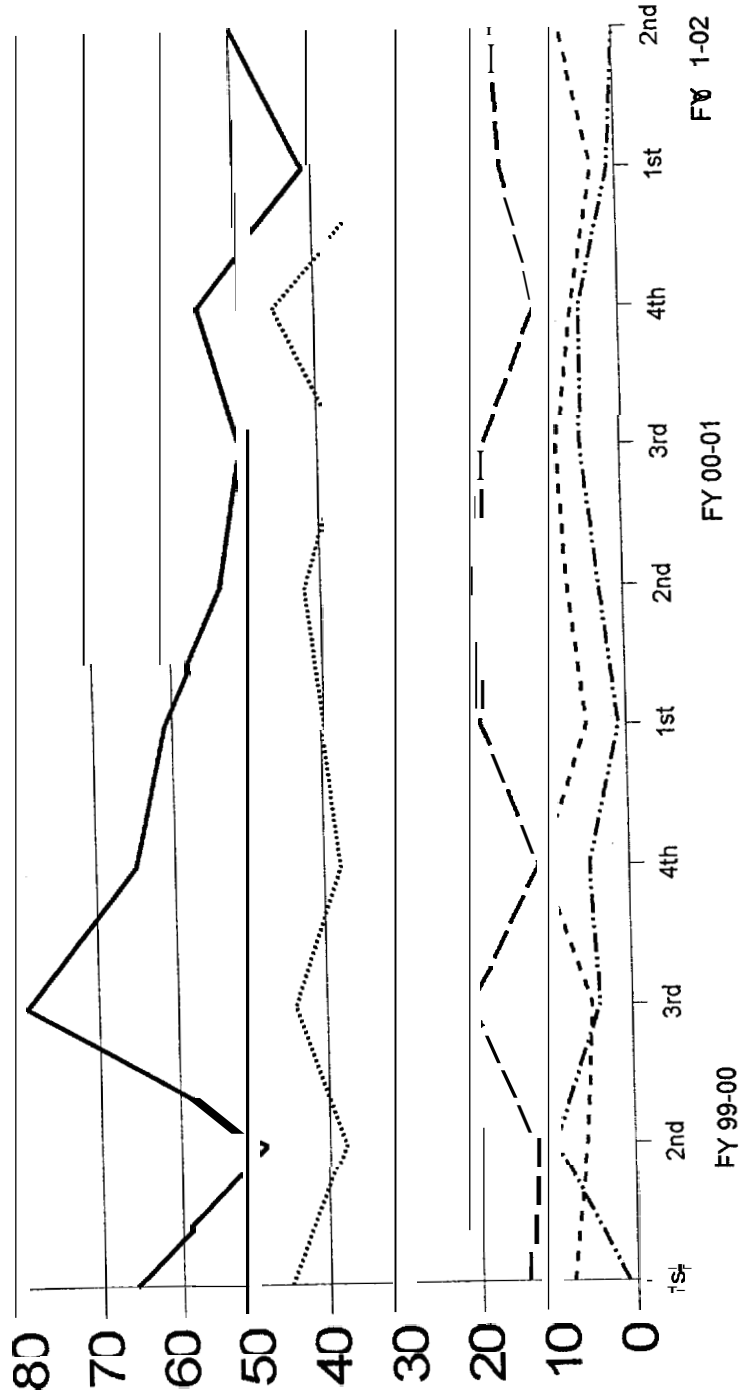
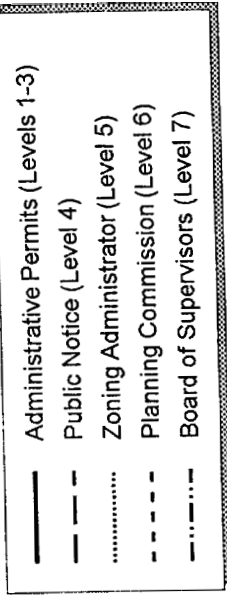


BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED By Type Last 10 Quarters



DISCRETIONARY PERMIT APPLICATIONS

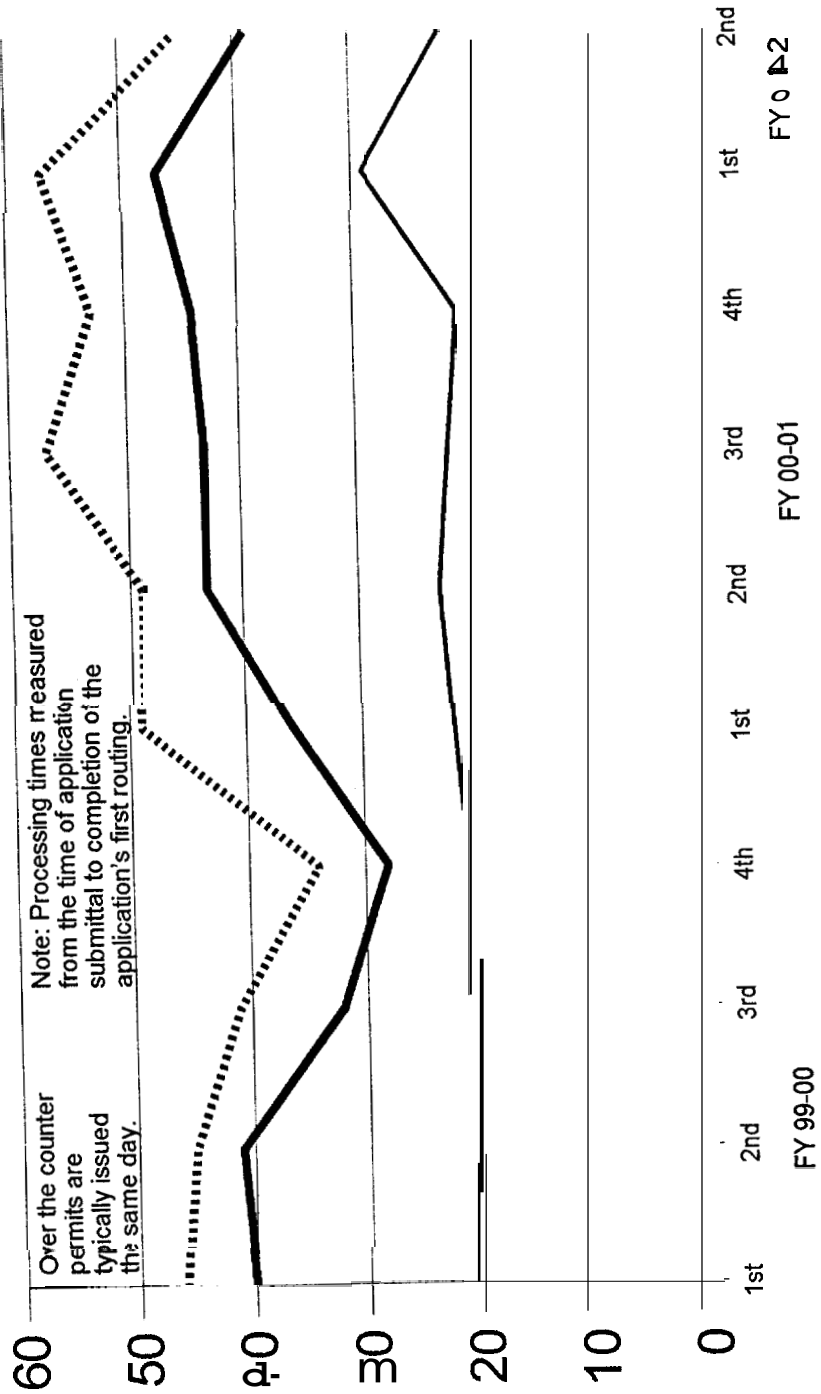
By Type Last 10 Quarters



0191

AVERAGE BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES By Type, Last 10 Quarters in Calendar Days

- Minor (Room additions < 500 sq. ft, remodels, etc.)
- Major (Room additions > 500 sq. ft., accessory structures, commercial remodels)
- Single Family Dwelling



0193

AVERAGE DISCRETIONARY PERMIT PROCESSING TIMES IN WEEKS

By Type, Last 6 Quarters

