

CLACKAMAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Policy Session Worksheet

Presentation Date: July 19, 2016 **Approx Start Time:** 10:30 am

Approx Length: 1/2 hour

Presentation Title: Septic and Onsite Waste Water Program Update

Department: DTD—Septic and Onsite Waste Water Program

Presenters: Mike McCallister, Planning Director and Septic Program Manager

Other Invitees: Barbara Cartmill, DTD Director; Dan Johnson, DTD Assistant Director

WHAT ACTION ARE YOU REQUESTING FROM THE BOARD? None. This is an informational item only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Septic and On-Site Waste Water Program (SOWP -- formerly known as the Soils Department) was transferred from the Water Environment Services (WES) Department to the Department of Transportation and Development effective January 1, 2016. This study session is intended to update the BCC on the operational changes to the program, current permitting timelines, historical and current permit data, and challenges moving forward.

SOWP generally includes four main permitting functions: site evaluations, authorizations, plan checks and inspections. Other functions include staffing the front counter, responding to phone calls and emails, public records research for existing systems, operations and maintenance reporting, and responding to and resolving violations (public health hazards).

Operation and Staffing Changes: In Spring 2016, it generally required 10-14 weeks to complete site evaluations. Major reasons for this lengthy turnaround time included:

- The Soils Scientists staffed the public service counter, limiting time in the field to conduct site evaluations, inspections and completing authorization notices and plan reviews.
- Site evaluations were completed on a first-come first-serve basis depending on the order in which they were received, resulting in site specific trips resulting in significant driving times and a corresponding increase in permitting timelines.

Since April, the following operational and staffing changes have been implemented to reduce timelines:

1. The Technical Services Assistant now staffs the front public service counter three days a week. This provides additional time for the Soils Scientists to complete

field work and focus on reviewing and issuing of permits.

2. Instead of completing site evaluations on a first-come first-serve basis, staff now completes them based on “clusters” of permits in a specific geographic location. This change in operations has reduced drive time and improved overall efficiency in the field. The result has reduced permitting times for site evaluations from 10-14 weeks to 3-9 weeks.
3. Site evaluations are formally scheduled 4-6 weeks in advance, providing the customer with more certainty in when the permit will be reviewed and completed.
4. The BCC adopted new fees to support the program, which became effective on May 9, 2016.
5. Current staffing includes a senior soil scientist, two soil scientists, one technical services assistant and one temporary / seasonal soils scientist in charge of inspections. Recruitment for an additional permit specialist is underway at this time, with an anticipated job posting in the next few weeks.

Current Permitting Timelines:

1. Site Evaluations: As of this date, there are 42 pending site evaluations. All site evaluations require field work, drawing site plans, report-writing and letter-writing. All pending site evaluations have been scheduled for review and completion between the weeks of July 11 and August 8. The turnaround time for these permits ranges from 3-9 weeks. Twenty-one (50%) of the permits are scheduled to be reviewed and completed in 3-6 weeks; 35, (83%) of the permits are scheduled to be completed within 8 weeks.
2. Authorizations: Authorization notices are those permits that require a review of the record of the existing septic system to determine whether it is adequate to accommodate a proposed development to reconnect to an existing system or where there is an increase in flow (addition to single-family dwelling, etc.). As of this date, there are 11 pending authorization notices. Authorization notices are being completed within 3-4 weeks.
3. Plan Review: Per Oregon DEQ rules, construction plans for septic systems must be completed within 20 days. Plan review timelines are regularly completed within that timeframe plus or minus a few days.
4. Inspections: The aforementioned temporary / seasonal employee is responsible for inspections of septic systems. All inspections are being completed within 1-2

days Monday through Thursday. Inspections are completed by the Senior Soil Scientist on Fridays in emergency circumstances.

Permit Activity: The total number of permits has increased substantially in the last five fiscal years.

Year	Permits	Soil Scientists (F.T.E.)	Technical Services Asst (F.T.E.)	Temp / Seasonal Employee (F.T.E.)	Public Counter Coverage (hours/week)
2011-12	834	3.0	1.0	AN*	28
2012-13	917	4.0	1.0	AN*	28
2013-14	1,069	2.5	1.0	AN - .80	35
2014-15	1,104	3.0	1.0	.80 to 1.3	39
2015-16	1,168	3.0	1.0	.80 to 1.3	39

*AN – As Needed – On call to cover absent staff

Since 2011, there has been a 59% increase in the number of permits during the first six months (January to June) of each calendar year:

- 386 permits in the first six months of 2012
- 615 permits in the first six months of 2016

These are some of the highest volumes of permits in the last decade. Overall there is a 40% increase in permit activity and a 39% increase in counter coverage hours since 2011. Over the same time, staffing has been reduced from four to three permanent soil scientists and has required a higher reliance on the use of temporary seasonal soils scientist. The increased permit activity also results in corresponding increases in other non-permit activities such as phone calls and emails, inquiries at the front counter and public records request.

Looking Ahead: Challenges and Other Thoughts:

1. Clackamas County issues more septic permits than any other county in Oregon. Based on Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) surcharge receipts, Clackamas County issued 940 permits in 2014-15 compared with the next two highest counties which issued 790 permits (Deschutes) and 680 permits (Lane).
2. New fees were adopted and became effective May 9, 2016. The revenue from the first quarter of the new fee structure will be available in August and will provide a gauge toward cost recovery, the ability to hire additional personnel, purchase equipment (new vehicles are needed), etc.

3. Process improvements are being considered that would result in consolidated application submittals and simultaneous review for site evaluations and plan reviews. This concept will be explored this fall, and will require review and approval by DEQ.
4. The current model for this program assumes a continued reliance on temporary workers. While a number of the operational changes may defray the onset of some of the delays realized earlier this year, if these volumes continue there will be a need to secure additional qualified services. Finding qualified personnel (both permanent and temporary / seasonal) continues to be challenging. Staff reached out to WES management to see if any employees with appropriate qualifications might be available to fill this role seasonally or were interested in career changes. Aaron Dennis, Senior Soil Scientist and I, intend to make connections and build support for education programs and / or career pathing for students interested in this type of work at Clackamas Community College this fall.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (current year and ongoing):

Is this item in your current budget? X YES NO

This program is currently funded from revenue by application fees.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

- How does this item align with your Department’s Strategic Business Plan goals?

DTD - Land Use and Permitting Purpose Statement: Provide integrated information, plan review, permitting and inspection services to residents, property owners, businesses and the development community so they can advance their projects in a timely manner consistent with applicable codes, facilitating the pace of economic growth.”

The timely review and issuance of septic permits and other customer service functions are an integral component of the Land Use, Development and Permitting Program. The DTD Strategic Plan includes a performance measure to complete 50% of septic evaluations within 60 days of a complete application submittal. Of the 42 pending site evaluations, 83% are scheduled for review and completion within 60 days, which meets this result measure.

- How does this item align with the County’s Performance Clackamas goals?

The Septic and Onsite Work Program relates to four of the county’s five strategic priorities:

- Build public trust through good government
- Grow a vibrant economy

- Build a strong infrastructure
- Ensure safe, healthy and secure communities

LEGAL/POLICY REQUIREMENTS: None. This is an information item only.

PUBLIC/GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPATION: Not applicable. This is an information item only.

OPTIONS: Not applicable. This is an informational item only.

RECOMMENDATION: None. This is an informational item only.

ATTACHMENTS: None

SUBMITTED BY:

Division Director/Head Approval _____

Department Director/Head Approval _____

County Administrator Approval _____

For information on this issue or copies of attachments, please contact Mike McCallister at 503-742-4522 or mikem@clackamas.us
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