

**Skagit County Planning Commission
Deliberations: 2018-2023 CFP and TIP
Presentation: Building Permit Application Packet
October 3, 2017**

Planning

Commissioners: Tim Raschko, Chair
Kathy Mitchell, Vice Chair
Mark Lundsten
Martha Rose
Hollie Del Vecchio
Amy Hughes
Annie Lohman (absent)
Josh Axthelm (absent)
Tammy Candler (absent)

Staff: Dale Pernula, Planning Director
Ryan Walters, Assistant Planning Director
Stacie Pratschner, Senior Planner

Other: Ellen Bynum, Friends of Skagit County

Chair Tim Raschko: (gavel) Good evening. Welcome, everybody, to the October 3rd, 2017, meeting of the Skagit County Planning Commission. We have a quorum. Has everybody had a chance to review the agenda?

(sounds of assent)

Chair Raschko: No changes? All right. The first order of business, we would welcome public remarks if anybody in the audience would like to address the Commission.

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Seeing none, we'll move on. Our first order of business then is deliberations of the 2018-2023 Capital Facilities Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. There was a public hearing on September 19th, 2017, and we'll now consider the public comments and the public hearing testimony and deliberate on that subject.

Stacie Pratschner: Want me to go ahead and open the – yeah, sorry. I apologize. We did hold the public hearing on September 19th. Between that time and the ending of the comment period on September 21st, there were no comments received from our partner SEPA agencies nor from the Department of Commerce concerning those updates. There were written comments that were submitted to the Public Works Department regarding the proposed updates to the Transportation Improvement Plan. Now those were included as Attachment 1 in the Supplemental Staff Report that was issued in advance of the deliberations.

No written comments were submitted to the Planning Department regarding the proposed updates to the Capital Facilities Plan. There was oral testimony submitted during the public hearing for the Capital Facilities Plan and Transportation Improvement Program, and a synopsis of those testimonies is in the Supplemental Staff Report as well.

Given the conclusion of the comment period, staff concludes that this year's updates to the Capital Facilities Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program are both consistent with the Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan because the proposed financing for those needed facilities will be able to support the plan at the adopted levels of service.

Skagit County PDS therefore recommends that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to adopt the proposed updates to the 2018 to 2023 Capital Facilities Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

I apologize for that stumbling start a little bit! I get there eventually.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Pratschner: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: So have any members of the Commission any comments or additions?

Mark Lundsten: I have some questions of Stacie.

Ms. Pratschner: Certainly.

Mr. Lundsten: These are – I think you might qualify some of them as just informational and for my purposes – greenhorn questions. But I'll start with the LOS – level of standards. I've heard "levels of service," "levels of standards." Are these from the Comprehensive Plan? Where are these codified, or are they? Or is it just a descriptive?

Ms. Pratschner: Right. Yeah, excellent question, Commissioner. A level of service is a qualitative measure that typically relates to the quality of traffic service. That's where the –

Mr. Lundsten: Oh, okay.

Ms. Pratschner: Yeah – the LOS acronym comes from. It's used to characterize traffic flow and also to assign quality levels. It's based on performances in traffic, like speed, waiting times, density. Those are rated from A to F in terms of level of service, A being great, F being really bad, and those come out of a document called AASHTO, which is the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials handbook. We also use the term "level of service" when we're talking about schools being able to house the number of students they need or a level of service for, say, like a sewer system. So you can use that –

Mr. Lundsten: Okay.

Ms. Pratschner: You can use that to just define what's –

Mr. Lundsten: I see. So there are various –

Ms. Pratschner: – the standard for it to operate. Right. So in terms of planning or development regulations, if, for example, a new development or something new is going to be built and that changes the level of service, it lowers the level of service standards – say, at an intersection – from a C down to a D, then the developer or whoever is building is going to need to do improvements at that intersection to keep it at that level of service standard.

Mr. Lundsten: So there are various sources of the term, but this one is traffic.

Ms. Pratschner: Various sources. But, yeah, classically level of service – yeah, it's based on the AASHTO.

Ryan Walters: There are other levels of service in the Comp Plan Capital Facilities element.

Mr. Lundsten: Okay.

Mr. Walters: There's a table in that chapter. That's the chapter that doesn't change from year to year. You're looking at the document that changes from year to year.

Mr. Lundsten: So it's a common term and there're varied/various metrics that it refers to.

Mr. Walters: Yes.

Mr. Lundsten: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Pratschner: Yeah, thank you.

Mr. Lundsten: I have a few more, if I may.

Ms. Pratschner: You bet.

Mr. Lundsten: The CFP is said to be consistent with these other public service providers. I'm just curious: Is the CFP *the* coordinating document or is it one of many and they're all just kind of making sure they're speaking the same language? Is the CFP the main one?

Ms. Pratschner: The County Capital Facilities Plan – yes, from the County perspective it *is* the main document and it adopts by reference other capital facilities plans from both – from, say, departments within the County – so our Parks and Recreation Department. Or in the case of Public Works, the Transportation Improvement Plan – Program, excuse me. It also adopts and makes reference to the capital facilities plans for, say, all the school districts, for other departments or districts that aren't within the Skagit County heading.

Mr. Lundsten: Okay. I guess the other question is not really that critical. It's just that it's a matter of terminology. You said you had proposed projects and a financing chart has been replaced by a master planning chart. Is this significant in some way, or is this just really is it something you guys do differently now?

Ms. Pratschner: It doesn't represent a difference in how we're determining whether the Capital Facilities Plan is still matching up with our Comprehensive Plan, but the table should be a little clearer this time.

Mr. Lundsten: I see. Okay.

Ms. Pratschner: And correct me if I'm wrong, Ryan, but it also forecasts also future – some additional future needs.

Mr. Walters: Is that the County facilities table – the office buildings table?

Ms. Pratschner: Mm-hmm, the Master Planning chart.

Mr. Walters: That's the one we're talking about? Yeah, the Facilities Department was providing an inventory of the facilities – I think that's pretty much the same that's in the document – and then proposed projects. The Capital Facilities Plan is supposed to have projects for the next six years. Our Facilities Management division has projects *beyond* six years, too, that they wanted to write down someplace, but they are not pressing needs. They're sort of nice-to-haves. If we didn't get those projects done the County would go on functioning the way it is. It's just for higher efficiency, for better location of functions that are relevant to each other next to each other (that) they have these other projects. You know, one of those projects we did this year and that is to air condition the County Administration Building downtown. As a result, fewer employees passed out this summer. You know, so kind of a nice-to-have, might-have-been-important project, but if we didn't have that project the County would go on functioning.

So, anyway, they needed a place to put projects like that so they rejiggered the table a little bit so that it's not just a table of projects in the next six years, and projects that are in the table are not guaranteed to happen in the next six years. And I think the table explains sort of how that works.

Mr. Lundsten: Okay. That's really all.

Ms. Pratschner: Thank you.

Mr. Lundsten: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: I do have a question about – on the Transportation plan in item, well, 5 under the non-motorizing stuff – Centennial Trail Extension to Clear Lake. Are those funds for construction or for property acquisition or...

Ms. Pratschner: I don't know the answer to that right now. I can certainly find out that answer for you. I would need to talk to the engineers in Public Works.

Chair Raschko: Okay, so nobody knows that then. All right.

Ms. Pratschner: Could Ryan or Dale give some –

Dale Pernula: Maybe in a second.

Chair Raschko: Okay. Have we any other comments or questions? If not, I deem it appropriate for somebody to make a motion to –

Kathy Mitchell: I'd like to make a motion. I move that we adopt – or move forward the Skagit County PDS recommendations for the – to the County Commissioners to adopt the proposed updates for the 2018 to 2023 Capital Facilities Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

Martha Rose: Second.

Chair Raschko: It's been moved and seconded. Do you want me to repeat the motion? Okay. "To recommend that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners to adopt the proposed updates to the 2018 to 2023 Capital Facilities Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program." It's been moved and seconded. Discussion?

Mr. Pernula: Commissioner?

Chair Raschko: Yes?

Mr. Pernula: I think we have an answer to your question. The answer is that at this time it's for preliminary design of the trail.

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you. That's helpful.

Mr. Pernula: Not construction.

Chair Raschko: All in favor, say "aye."

Multiple Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Opposed?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: So that carries. So I guess it's appropriate now to do findings of facts and reasons.

Mr. Walters: So Stacie has that.

Ms. Pratschner: I do. Yeah, thank you, Commissioners. What you'll see on the screens this evening is some language you'll be familiar with, for those of you who were here for the updates to the Capital Facilities Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program this year. There is reference to the CFP in the Comprehensive Plan, complementing each other. Also references to the regulating Washington Administrative Code – the WACs. Certainly I can add additional findings of fact.

Mr. Walters: This is all the same language from last year's recorded – yeah. I think we've had maybe three or four years in a row of basically the same recorded motion.

Ms. Pratschner: I made liberal use of copy-and-paste.

Ms. Mitchell: Thank you.

Ms. Pratschner: No problem.

Chair Raschko: It looks very good to me. Have any of the Commissioners any comments or things they would like to add or delete?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay. I presume we need a motion to approve the findings of facts.

Ms. Mitchell: I move that we approve the findings of fact and recommendations.

Hollie Del Vecchio: Second.

Chair Raschko: Second? Thank you. It's been moved and seconded to approve the findings of facts and – is there any more discussion?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Barring none, all those in favor, say “aye.”

All Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Okay, that carries also. Thank you.

Mr. Walters: So I think that was unanimous, but Stacie will record the individual votes because we need a roll call vote on that one. So if there's no opposition then I guess we're done.

Chair Raschko: All right. Would you like a show of hands?

Ms. Pratschner: I'll go ahead and just fill in the – yeah, I'll go ahead and just fill this in. Thank you, though. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you. So that then concludes the deliberations on the Capital Facilities Plan and Transportation Improvement Program, and we will move to a presentation by staff on Building Permit Application changes.

Ms. Pratschner: I'll be back with the recorded motion document for your signature.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Pratschner: Yeah, thank you.

Mr. Walters: All right, so now we trade places. Good evening. Ryan Walters, Assistant Director. We thought it would be a useful exercise to go over some of the changes that the Department is making to our building permit application process, mostly because it's sort of a big deal for us. It doesn't really affect you. You don't see building permits. You don't see those application processes. But we also thought that it would be important for you to understand how those processes work because it may inform what you do in your half of the world going forward. We also thought that it was important to cover some of these application processes because of some of the questions that came up during our Industrial Forest trails discussion earlier this year, where we were talking about what levels of application we have and what types of applications we process and what types of review they undergo.

So I guess we'll jump right in. We are making some significant changes to our building permit application process. If you look at an org chart of the Planning Department, you'll see about 30 people are part of the Planning and Development Services Department. You deal with one: Stacie basically. A little bit with Ryan, a little bit with Dale, a little bit with our on-call transcriptionist who is now going to be performing your transcripts for you. But otherwise you touch one person and then there are 29 or more other people in the Department that process permits, and almost to a person every one of those people is doing permit processing. So there's this whole other part of the Department that is going on all the time. And there are a variety of types of permits, not just building permits. A lot of these people touch building permits but then there are other classes of permits as well.

If you look at this chart – and this chart is in your Short Course Supplement document that's available on the Planning Commission webpage and that you've reviewed before – this chart includes some of those types of permits that are straight out of the code. 14.06 in the Skagit County Code covers the various classes of permits and the review procedures that go along with each. So you've got a Type I permit, and that is a ministerial permit basically. It is a shall-issue permit, a must-issue permit. If the application meets the requirements of the code, there's no discretion involved. We *must* approve it and *must* issue it. We don't get to put on discretionary conditions because we think they're good ideas. And those types of permits are building permits. Building permits are this very special, ministerial type that is different from a lot of others. And they are approved by the Department. There's no Hearing Examiner involved. There's no comment period involved. There's no public hearing or anything like that because they are ministerial. The comments don't matter. What matters is: Do they comply with the requirements of the code?

Now within that Type I there are these other classes as well. And ideally I would break these out into different types but that's not how the code is organized. Because within Type I there's the ministerial building permits and then there's these others – admin special use permits, preliminary subdivisions fewer than nine lots – where we do have comment periods, we do solicit comments. That's because those are not ministerial permits. And the code identifies all of these as Type I because they all are decided by staff, but some of them have comment periods and some of them don't. For instance, admin special use permits are ones that do have comment periods. And I guess we could expand this chart to show which ones have comment periods and which don't.

When I recently wrote the code for Anacortes, I broke this out into two different groups, the ones that do have comment periods and the ones that don't. But the similarity is that they have a single decision-making flow and that is staff review and staff approve, and then there's an appeal process to the Hearing Examiner (and) beyond that to the Board of County Commissioners and beyond that to Superior Court.

The next type is Type II applications. We have a different kind of special use permit that isn't an admin special use permit. It's a Hearing Examiner special use permit, and that means that it gets a recommendation from staff but staff don't make the decision. They only issue a recommendation. There isn't any public hearing because the Hearing Examiner – his function is to hold public hearings and then make decisions based on the results of the recommendation in the public hearing. HE makes the decision. "HE" there stands for Hearing Examiner, not the pronoun. And there's an appeal process beyond the Hearing Examiner to the Board of County Commissioners and then beyond that to Superior Court. So things like special use permits or preliminary subdivision approvals of nine lots or greater follow that process.

And then there's also this Type III application, and there're very few things that fit into this category. But that's an instance where you back up the system a little bit and the *Hearing Examiner* makes a recommendation. He holds a public hearing but then his decision is only a recommendation to the Board. The Board of County Commissioners then makes the decision, and then the only possible appeal is beyond the Board to Superior Court. We don't really do any – I think maybe any of those. I've never been involved in a preliminary subdivision greater than 50 lots. I think there are some that exist in Skagit County but not a lot recently. So that doesn't happen very often. So we're basically talking Type I and Type II applications, and for this presentation we have a laser-like focus on building permits because they are a special class of application.

Now just some numerical background so you have some context. In 2016 the Department issued about 450 residential building permits and then 74 commercial building permits. In 2017 in the first half of the year we issued 256 residential building permits (and) 50 commercial building permits, so we may be on track to exceed last year's numbers. It's kind of hard to tell because sometimes things are frontloaded in part of the year and then sometimes they're not. For instance, last year there was a big rush before adoption of the State building code. The new building code was adopted end of June, I think, so there was a big run-up right before that to make sure you got your plans in and vested under the prior building code. It didn't really change that much but people were concerned about that. So it's difficult to predict the numbers of permits over the years but we expect to process somewhere between 5- and 600 this year.

Now in terms of personnel, we've got those 30 people through the whole Department. We have about 4.4 FTE counter staff. We call those people "permit technicians." They are the people that man the permit counter, you know, just beyond the reception desk over here. Those are the frontline people that will be your first contact if you come in to apply for a building permit. They will explain the process to you. They will send you off with all the forms and all the information that you need. They are also the people that will take in your application at the end of the process, and they're probably the people you will call for help along the way. But then all the other staff that are in the Department that have more specialization in various fields are probably people that you might end up talking to or may have to call for some advice or to get some questions answered. Those are generally the permit planners. We have about 10 of those people. And then Fire Marshal staff may have to answer questions because, as we'll see, the slope of your driveway makes a difference for getting access to your property with a fire truck so they weigh in on the process. And there're a whole bunch of other people in the Department that play some little role or another in the permit process for a building permit.

Now we started – yeah, this next chart is just 2016. If we look at the classes of building permits that we issued in the year 2016, last year, so a complete year's worth of data looks sort of like this. By far – and they're little abbreviations at the bottom here that I'll need to explain – but by far the greatest number of building permits is the New Single-Family Dwelling, the dark gray line there. NFSD is the acronym, is the New Single-Family Dwelling permit application type.

The second one there, Garage, the green line. We do a lot of garages.

And then ASFD is, I believe, Addition to a Single-Family Dwelling, if I recall correctly.

And then we've got ADUs, Accessory Dwelling Units, on the left; Remodels on the right – Alteration, I guess.

When do applications come in? Again, just a little more background here. Basically March through August is the busiest, if we look at the graph over time. This is 2016 through the end of June 2017. You'll see that there are some low spots in the winter, and pretty much the peaks all travel with each other for the various types of applications. You know, just not a whole lot of building occurs in the winter, but that doesn't mean that people aren't applying for permits in the winter because they're getting ready for a drier time of year to do more of the construction. So it's relatively steady throughout the year, although there are some dips and some spikes.

Now the next chart is going to really show you why we're talking about this at all and why we are engaged in a process to reform how it is we do it. How long does it take to get a building permit? A variety of different types of permits here: A demolition permit is a form of building permit. That's pretty quick. We can issue those over the counter because we don't have to review your plans, we don't have to figure out if you're building it in the right spot. We're just giving you a permit to tear it down. If you're adding a mechanical system – a furnace or something like a plumbing device in your house – we can issue those fairly quickly. There are some other types of permits here that take a variety of amount of time to process. A lot of those are planning permits. If you need a special use permit for a thing, that has a required comment period. There's a required amount of notice. There are multiple notices that have to be mailed to the paper. It's a long process. You've got to do it well before you ever apply for a building permit. And people know that. If people are building something other than a regular single-family residence, then they'll come in and talk to us and we're going to be telling them upfront, Your land use is a thing that requires a special use permit and it's going to take you a matter of months to get that. So people build that into their planning. They know that it takes a certain amount of time to do these land use approval processes. And when they get to the end of that process that is when they are really eager to get their building permit, because they've been through the months of process on the land use approval with the comments and all of that and then they really want their building permit because they have just one more step before they can start going. And most people are not in this to get a special use permit. Nobody wakes up in the morning and thinks they need a special use permit – *I really want to have a special use permit*. They want to have some construction that they're doing, and a special use permit is just the required step to get there.

So when we get to building permit, people are very time-sensitive to the amount of time that it takes. And our review of building permits – a permit type that wasn't on the previous chart – varies a lot by how many building permits are coming in the door, and there's a lot of sensitivity to staff fluctuations. If we lose staff – if staff go on vacation, if staff are busy because of a variety of things, there can be a lot of fluctuation in how much time review takes, and also the number of permits that are coming in the door. So this is a chart that shows over the last, again, about 18 months – January 2016 through June 2017, so one-and-a-half years – how long it has taken in number of days to issue a residential building permit application. And a residential building permit application is a simpler type of application than a commercial one. Residential building permit applications are relatively homogenous. Commercial building permit applications are all over the map. You might have a commercial building application for a really small thing or something like a giant refinery project. So commercial building permit applications are really not what we're talking about. We're talking about residential, by far the largest number of permit applications that we have, and the most homogenous. So for a lot of this year we were up at 60 or 70 days from the time you apply for a building permit till the time it was ready to be issued.

So that is the source of a lot of frustration on the part of applicants for some real, significant, and good reasons that we'll go over in a minute, and it's one of the reasons that the County

Commissioners have really made it a priority to reform our building permit application process, not because our building permit application process is particularly unusual – there are a lot of jurisdictions that will take a lot of time to process a building permit application – but because they have the sense, which is well-informed and correct, that we could do better. So when I took this job the Commissioners individually all said to me, We want improvements in the building permit process. We want that to be your focus going forward – is making those changes. So that's what we've been trying to figure out how to do.

Now we have all these things that have to occur before you can issue a building permit. We need to check to make sure that you're consistent with the building code, which is adopted by the State, written by an international panel of technical experts, and then the land use code, which is written by Stacie and is hundreds of pages long. Actually I guess mostly Kirk and Ryan. Stacie's relatively new. But, you know, the land use code we write here in-house and it's the part of the code that you review, that you offer feedback and recommendations on. And it's very customized to our territory, our geography, the concerns that we have here, the ag preservation principles that we have, the policies in our Comp Plan. And it's fairly lengthy. I would never print the Title 14 development code, but Stacie does. And how many pages do you think it is?

Ms. Pratschner: I'd just like to note for the record that planners like paper copies of things.

Mr. Walters: Yeah. So it's an entire binder worth of code! And we've got to – we don't trust that you submit an application that's consistent with the code because it's not believable that you've really read the whole thing because many of us maybe haven't. We tend to read our slice of the world. We have to check to make sure that your application is consistent with that code and that you've done all the things that we have adopted into law. So we have all these divisions that review.

Water: Make sure that you have water available for the land use that you are pursuing. So a State law requirement.

Stormwater: Make sure that you're managing the stormwater that your building is going to produce.

The construction plans: Those are the plans that – the technical plans that have to be reviewed against the State building code.

Septic: How are you dealing with your waste? If you are producing water, you're producing waste, so where's it going? And we have health codes that deal with that.

Critical areas: You're not allowed to build over a stream or a wetland in a lot of cases. There are a whole bunch of rules about how you can deal with that and how you need to protect those if you can.

Fire Marshal: As I mentioned before, the Fire Marshal has a little slice of this as well because they want to make sure that if you're required to have a sprinkler system that that sprinkler system plan is reviewed. If you exceed the threshold and have to have a special system for accessing your property – like, you have to have a fire access and under certain circumstances it has to be of a certain slope or you have to do a sprinkler system. There're a bunch of fire-related things that have to occur.

Zoning: All of the various zoning requirements; the setback requirements. There are a lot of them. A lot of them are fairly complicated and it's kind of hard to determine sometimes which ones apply to which lots and how they work. That is maybe *most* of Title 14.

So there're all those things that go on and this chart shows the days from when someone submits an application till that division of review picks it up for the first time. So if you submitted a building permit application, which would have taken you a significant amount of time for you to assemble and put all the components together – if you submit that, say, looking at just like July 21st there, development review – the big blue line – would not pick it up for about 55 days. So it would be in here sitting on our shelves with essentially nothing happening to it until Day 55 after you submitted it. So we recognize that as a problem.

Now there're some other lines in there so those other lines are going to hit it a little before. You know, the next one down – that light purple is critical areas. They're going to get to it a little bit before the development review people. And then the green line, shorelines, they may get to it a little bit before the critical areas people, and the purple line – the residential plan review, the people that are reviewing the construction plans – they'll get to it, you know, at around Day 37. But still, those individual reviews don't really take very long and this is the initial review. If there's any error in your application, it may have to go back to you and you may have to resubmit something. So there's a significant period of time where really nothing is happening with your application, or definitely not weeks of review for the weeks that it's sitting in here. So those are the things that we – the weaknesses in our process that we want to try to address and fix.

So it's helpful to lay out what the problems are with our process before we go about trying to fix them. I've started to get into some of that but let's put them in bullet form. There's this lengthy delay before the permit is issued. The delay occurs when the applicant is ready to go. Because the applicant has done all his or her work, and now is just waiting. The delay is dead weight time because basically nothing is happening when that delay is occurring. There's nothing going on. If we get to it on Day 60 and we have to send you a note about it on Day 60, that is really unfortunate for you because then you may have to resubmit something and now you may be back at Day 70 or 80 before you get that resubmitted and get going again. So a surprise requirement that you don't know about at the outset has sort of a cascading effect with your timeline.

If you have to do modifications, it may affect another review. If you have to change your driveway because of the Fire Marshal's review, that may affect your access point on your parcel to the County road system. That may affect Public Works' review of that access point. It may mean that you're coming closer to a critical area. That might affect critical areas review. So we really want to do all of those reviews that have to be consistent with each other only once. We don't want to have to modify it because that review, that review that for consistency with all the other reviews is very time-consuming. And the review sometimes is duplicative because there are all these steps, because we have a pile of permits and we have to go back through them. There are sometimes reviews that occur multiple times. And it's important to keep in mind for all of us that time is a valuable resource. It translates directly into money for a lot of applicants, especially right now when there are very few contractors really available because we have a relatively high number of permits based on – as we come out of the recession, and there aren't that many builders available. A lot of applicants have builders lined up to start on a certain date, and if they don't make that date because their building permit is not issued yet they may lose their reservation for that contractor and they may be delayed months, not just days, because it

took a little while longer than they estimated for the permit to issue. So time gets to be really important really quickly.

So those are sort of the substantive problems. Now the process problems are sort of more difficult to tease out, but we fortunately have some resources. There are all these pieces of literature. Paul Zucker is sort of the planning management guru, and he's written a number of books and white papers. So we've looked at a lot of those and one of the things he identifies is warehousing. The idea that a permit application comes in and then it goes in a pile is a bad thing, because now it's a pile. It's weighing on you – you, the person who has to review these applications. As the pile stacks up, it has a significantly bad psychological effect on you, and as the pile gets taller you kind of lose incentive to work faster because it's just a giant pile anyway and it's not going away. Also, if you warehouse you don't have an incentive or the right prioritization mechanism to review it and get it done, get it out the door right away. So what we want to do and what Zucker recommends is that we just avoid warehousing altogether – that instead of warehousing, instead of creating piles, you schedule review. And so we've taken one step toward that so far, and that is to have application appointments. When you come in to submit your building permit application, you used to queue up in the lobby and you could possibly wait for hours to get in to the permit counter to see a permit tech to submit your application. But now we have appointments like a dentist's office, like every professional office where you call up and you make an appointment. We put you on the schedule and then you don't have to wait in line. Our schedule currently is about a couple days out. So you call up, you make an appointment, you can get an appointment in a couple days. So it's not a long wait, but it does mean that you're not just standing in the lobby. And if you got here late in the day, you might have to go home because eventually we do close the counter and if there was too long of a line you might not make it to the counter before we close. So that was a problem for people, but it also is – this appointment is a step toward eliminating the warehousing, because if we can start scheduling things rather than piling things we can eliminate that warehousing problem.

Now we also have some prioritization problems because we've got all these people – you know, 30 people in the Department; 29, less Stacie – and those people, as you saw, we have 4.4 of them, I think, that are dedicated to the building permit process – the permit technicians – and then we've got permit planners, planners that touch permits, but they also have other responsibilities – those five-month processes – the special use permits; the variances; the shoreline approvals, all those kinds of things. And building permits aren't necessarily their priority, but they *are* the applicant's priority because the applicant wants the building permit right now. So we have to address that issue. We have to prioritize building permits over other things and that probably means reorganizing staff so that you've got certain staff working on building permits and certain staff working on other things.

And then batching. Batching is a similar problem to warehousing. Because if you are not scheduling the review and you are piling them up, what can happen is: You're the person doing this review. You have a lot of things that you need to do. Some of those things are building permits. And if you touched every building permit as soon as it hit your desk you would be very frenetic, you know? Okay, well, let me stop the complicated land use problem I'm working on and pick up a building permit, review it, and then move it on. So people don't do that; they batch. But when they batch it has a significant negative effect on the process for that individual permit application. It's more efficient for the person doing the review because now they're not doing so much frenetic multitasking, but for the building permit that is trying to move through the process it has just hit, you know, a week delay until Friday when it's the day that that planner picks up permits and looks at them. So that's a problem. Batching is a problem.

And then handoffs. A lot of these books talk about the fact that the more people you involve in a process, the more handoffs you have between people, the less efficient the process is overall because anytime you have a handoff you have communication problems. You've got to write down – you can't just keep it all in your head – you've got to write it all down so that the next person in line understands what it is that you did as part of your review process. And it creates some CYA problems sometimes because you're not sure what the next person in line is going to do with it. So all of those things are things we need to avoid and fix in the review process. It's helpful to write these things down in bullet points so that we keep them in mind as we invent the new process.

Similarly with goals – bullet points here. We want to minimize the surprises applicants face. We don't want them finding out on Day 60 after they submitted their application that they've got some new requirement that they were not previously aware of. We want to minimize the time that our Department spends on review because time is money. Time is money for us. Time is money for applicants. Time is money for the Commissioners. We want to minimize the time that an application spends in the Department, out of the customer's hands. If it's in the customer's hands and the customer's going along at whatever pace they want, fine. But when they're depending on us, we want to minimize the time we have it in our hands. Now it's a little different metric than the time we're spending on review because the time we're spending on review – I mean active review, and then there's the time it's just in the pile. That's this third bullet.

And then we also want to minimize the total time to issuance of a permit from the time that an applicant gets the idea of doing a new building permit to the time that they actually get the building permit. So there's a lot of time that they spend before they apply where they're figuring out their site plan and all that. We do also want to reduce that time, but that is the fourth bullet point down. That's less important than the others. We don't want to just push all this time onto the applicant, but if it's out of our hands and it's at their pace then that's a better deal than for them to be waiting directly on us.

So what are the fixes? Well, we have a few ideas. One is we need to reduce our procedures to writing. We have a great oral tradition in the Department of how-do-we-do-this, how-do-we-do-that, well-let-me-tell-you. I don't know if some of you know Grace, but she will tell you all of the ways that we do things. She has it all memorized because she's been here for 40 years. But that is not good enough because we need to add people when more permits come in. You can't add a person if you have to orally train them for everything. So the first thing that we identified is what we need to do is reduce all our procedures to writing, keep them in one place, make sure the procedures are reviewed, that management knows what the procedures are and agrees that that should be the procedure, that we evaluate the procedure so that it's the most efficient procedure we can follow. But you can't do that unless the procedure is in writing.

We also, as part of that, have gotten a software program so we have a single source of the procedures. At some point people started taking notes on what they were supposed to do and then everybody had a different set of notes and they were not always the same, so people were doing things a little differently. Now we have a software program where all the procedures are just stored in one place.

We need to improve the application forms because what we have had are application forms that are sort of checklist-style and then behind the counter we have our own checklists and they're not the same. So you might submit the things that you need to submit but you might not, and

we'll check it against our checklist. But why can't the customer just have the same checklist that we're using so that we're all singing off the same sheet of music?

And then, finally, our idea is to approve at least residential building permit applications over the counter. And that's something that Whatcom County has been able to achieve. Once you do the other steps like eliminating warehousing, reprioritizing, improving the application forms, documenting the procedures, eventually you can get to a place where you do issue a lot of the application – receive the applications and issue a lot of the permits over the counter. They set up an application appointment like we do. It's 90 minutes long. The review that needs to occur occurs during that 90-minute appointment. It's scheduled instead of warehoused. And then they issue the permit. They don't do that – they don't achieve that for 100% of applications. You know, there're some that have errors that you don't catch until the end but they do it for, like, 80 to 90% so it's a *huge* achievement. I mean, 60 to 70 days to 90 minutes is a big deal if we can make that happen.

So in this process – the way we may end up doing this, is the applicant would come in for an initial consult. You know you want to build a certain building, or your house – you've just bought property so you're in here at the Department early on, hopefully before you have purchased construction plans, and you're in talking to us and we can walk you through some of the initial requirements. There are some prerequisites. You can't build on every piece of property in Skagit County. Property that was illegally subdivided may not have lot certification and you may not be able to build on it. Almost every other piece of property you probably will be able to build something on, but maybe not quite in the same spot that you idealized. There may be a wetland or something like that. So there are a lot of prerequisites that we need to think about. You've got to have land use approval. Single-family residences are allowed in almost every zone – not every zone, but almost every zone – so that's usually not a problem. But if you want to build something else that may require a special use permit, it may not be an allowed use in the zone. We need to check for that before we start issuing you a building permit.

So the permit tech at that initial consult will research those prerequisites, give you a pre-app tracking number, walk you through and make sure that, you know, you're aware of those initial requirements and whether you can actually pursue the use that you want on your piece of property. And then the applicant will go off and do the other required reviews. You know, there's water. You're going to have to demonstrate a source of water. There're a whole bunch of things that we'll go over in just a second. And a lot of those reviews interact, as we discussed, so they've got to do that part. And then once those pieces are done they call us up, schedule their 90-minute application appointment, bring all their materials in, and the permit tech and the plans examiner meet them at the counter, take their materials, review the application, and issue the permit within the 90-minute window. The 90-minute window is what Whatcom County does. That's where this idea comes from. We're not trying to emulate all the stuff Whatcom County does – basically just the 90-minute part. But the 90-minute part by itself is not even that important because we've talked to applicants. We've talked to the Skagit/Island County Building Association. They don't really care about 90 minutes. What they care about is avoiding 60 days. So if we could issue building permits in five days, in three days, in two weeks, it would be a huge improvement over 60 days. The important thing is is to not warehouse because warehousing applications is a slippery slope toward all the other problems that we've talked about.

So, as I mentioned, what we did so far is implement the application appointments. We also have an automated e-mail system that sends a notice about the appointments. During the 2017

Comp Plan Amendment process, we updated some of the title notices. Title notices are a real thorn in our side because they take a lot of time and they always occur at the end. We've got to have the property owner notarize them, and that's not always the applicant and you have to hunt down the property owner, bring a notary with you, get them to come into the County. It's a real – it seems simple, but it's a real pain. But Airport Environs Overlay ones are particularly bad. And then we've also released some secondary application forms. We haven't updated the building permit application yet but the other little forms that you've got to submit we've updated a lot of those. The application appointments is working really well, especially once it was communicated out to, like, people from Seattle who were coming up. You know, for a while we allowed them to apply even without an appointment because they drove two hours to get here. But otherwise that piece of this is really working out well and it's been well-received.

Our expected benefits of this process are 100% effectiveness at preloading the reviews that need to occur before you ever apply; making sure that application dead time is on the applicant's kitchen table, not on our shelves; final review without warehousing or piling; and making it easy to determine if more staff is needed. Right now you know how many building permits are coming in but it's kind of hard to make the translation into, Does that mean we need more staff? But with a new system, we'll be able to tell you whether you need more staff because we'll have a set amount of staff for a set amount of appointments, and if the appointment wait time gets too long we can report that to the Board of County Commissioners and if they think that that wait time is too long then really the only solution is to add staff. Otherwise, they can just decide, you know, we're just going to deal with that for now. And that's – so that's always a concern and this helps figure that out for us.

In terms of the application forms, these are all in our kiosk out here in the lobby. You can peruse that at your leisure. But they're also all on our website. We've cleaned up the website and tried to harmonize all these things because there were kind of forms everywhere. We consolidated forms when possible. We're working on a new water review form that I think takes, like, six or seven forms and breaks it down into one form. We have tried to consolidate several of the others. Tried to consolidate several of the handouts, as well, because they're just informational handouts – how you attach a deck to a house, that kind of thing. They have to get updated with the new building code. That is one of the things that changed in the new building code. So we've done a lot of work with that. There's still more work to go, especially on the land use side, but that's been really important.

We've reorganized the forms with standardized components because we anticipate getting new permit application software soon, and when we do that we're going to have online applications. We want to make that transition easy. And a lot of jurisdictions, they buy new software and then they spend up to a year doing what we're doing right now, which is kind of unfortunate because everybody really wants to see it going on the new software but – and you already paid for it – but you kind of have to do the homework before you can implement the new software. We have been waiting on Whatcom County to do an RFP for new software, which they are almost – allegedly almost done with. And once they do, we'll probably purchase off of their RFP rather than us doing all the paperwork for a request for proposals for new software products. So we've saved a bunch of time on developing that RFP. They bought a consultant – or paid for a consultant a whole bunch of money to develop the specs and all that. We have bypassed that by relying on them. But we might be over the next year going to new software, so our reorganization of the permit application forms will help facilitate that. And then we've integrated some of the checklists, the procedures, the policies into the forms themselves, and you'll see that in a minute. And that is a real improvement too. It's taking that checklist that we keep

behind the counter, throwing it away, integrating it into the application form that the applicant sees so that we are all talking from – singing from the same sheet of music. There're many more forms still to go, but we've made a lot of progress.

Now the new building permit application form we are almost done with, so we are hoping that we can get that out, well, for certain – nothing's for certain, but this month, maybe in the next couple of weeks. We've shown it to – a prior version – to the Skagit/Island County Builders Association and they – I don't think it's too much to say – they loved it. Tears of joy, I think is only a little exaggeration. Yeah. Yeah, that doesn't happen a lot. But what we've done is taken the application form that was two pages and made it, like, 50 pages and it's fantastic. It's only a little bit of an exaggeration but it's also a lot of the truth, because what we're doing is showing you the requirements up front so that you know what's happening, you know what your application is being reviewed against, and it's very conversational. It's a question-and-answer-style form. You answer "yes," you do this; you answer "no," you do that.

We've broken it into three sections. One, the prerequisites, the deal-breakers. If you don't have a certified lot you can't do your residence. So that is a precondition to proceeding with the rest of the form and the rest of the application process, and there are other things kind of like that. If you can't get water, for a residence you could do rainwater catchment. For something other than a residence you may be stuck. If you can't get a well – and as we know, there are places in Skagit County where you can't put in a new well – that may effectively be a precondition, a deal-breaker to you proceeding with your development. So there are a number of things like that and we put all those together in one section, and that's the part that the permit tech at the counter will go over before they leave the first consultation appointment at the beginning.

Then there are those interactive site planning reviews – where you're putting stuff on your site to make sure that the driveway isn't too steep, and that you're not in the wetland, and that your stormwater is able to be managed, and all of those things. Those are all very – they interact with each other so they all kind of have to be done simultaneously and they all basically have to do with site planning.

And then there's the final plans. A lot of people still draw up their construction plans first, and we really discourage that because your construction plans may change based on where you put your house on your site, or they may not change but you may prefer that they change. If you have to move your site over here, you turn your house, you get your better view going this direction, you know. You need your downspouts to come this way and your stormwater to go that way. It affects your construction plans, so we really discourage people from getting construction plans first. We try to push that off to the end after you've done your site planning. Also once people have their construction plans they are really ready to go, because they've spent possibly a significant amount of money on the construction plans. So we don't want you to spend that money until the end of the process. You may have to take out a loan. That may be the point at which you've gotten your loan. We don't want you to get your loan and then spend months doing site planning. We want that to happen at the end.

So here is some little bit more detail on the Part 1 Prerequisites. There's the lot certification. There's zoning. Do you have land use approval? Are you in the floodplain? Are you in the Airport Environs Overlay? Are you doing residential development in a natural resource land? Because that has other things that come along with it. There're some weird special jurisdiction requirements. We *happen* to process building permits for the Town of La Conner just because they're small and they pay us to do it, not because we have any authority over them. But we

need a letter from them saying that, yeah, you can submit a building permit here. If you're in the Anacortes UGA that's the one UGA where we apply *their* zoning so we need a letter from them saying, yeah, you're good to go, because we're not evaluating Anacortes's zoning for it. So they're a couple special jurisdiction requirements like that. Things that right now what we have been doing is we look at them after you apply, and that's a bad time to find out you can't do that at all. And then there's the water, as I mentioned, and then there's SEPA. We have to do State Environmental Policy Act review on everything, basically, other than a single-family residence and some other smaller construction permits. So we want that to get done and out of the way at the beginning of the process, because if it isn't done upfront it's a thing that's going to happen later. It has a required comment period, it's going to be a delay later, and it may affect whether you're able to do the thing at your site or in the way you want it. So we want that to be done upfront.

So pretty much all of that – like, SEPA can't be done at the counter, but almost all the rest of that *can* be. Water: If you connect to a PUD water line we can probably tell you that upfront and then you're done. If you have to go get some well information then that's going to take a little longer, but we send you off with a worksheet so that you can work through that. You may have to have your water tested – you know, some things like that. So there are some things that are going to take a little longer, but otherwise we're going to evaluate all that at the counter. We're going to tell you if you qualify for zoning, whether you're in the floodway – that kind of thing.

And on some of these things there's no way to tell, like we have the maps for the floodway here. We don't make them available on the iMap tool on our website because they're not quite good enough. We have scanned them in and then tried to put them onto the electronic map. That hasn't worked out perfectly yet, so until we get that worked out we don't make it available to the public. So there're some things you just can't find out except by visiting the counter.

Then site planning: We're talking about things like setbacks; flood review – so not necessarily just floodway, but if you're in the floodplain; pipelines; critical areas; stormwater; septic – if you're connecting to sewer, great, but if not you've got other things that you have to plan for on your site; access to public roads; and then fire apparatus access – the Fire Marshal review that I mentioned before. So there're all those things that have to interact with each other. And if you're on a rectangular lot that's flat and wonderful, then this may be easy, but otherwise it really isn't. And there are a lot of challenging lots to develop in Skagit County, so this can become sort of difficult to work through.

Then Part 3 is your final plans: your final site plan that shows the results of all those site planning exercises; your construction stormwater pollution prevention plan; your erosion and sediment control plan – basically, that you can submit at the end; your construction plans for your house; and then construction details data sheet, which is what are your square footages of various things because we base a lot of fees on square footage so you have to tell us those things so that we can figure those out.

So this is what it looks like – the building permit application, the new building permit application. It's got these three parts and Part 1, Precondition, sends you off to complete and attach the preconditions worksheet, and I'll show you that. The preconditions worksheet walks you through all those precondition reviews.

Part 2, Site Planning, asks you the question: Is your project internal remodeling only? If so, then you don't have to do the dimensional standards worksheet, but otherwise we have this

dimensional standards worksheet you need to work through to make sure that your setbacks are right and that kind of thing – that you're doing your natural resource land waiver and that kind of thing if you're in natural resource lands. In any case, you have to do a site planning worksheet because you could be in floodplain, you could be near a pipeline, you could be in these other things we mention in site planning. You have to do that even if you're only internal remodeling, but we're able to ask the question at least if you're just internal remodeling and dismiss the dimensional standards worksheet if you're not. Or if you are you don't have to do the dimensional standards worksheet, so we're able to save you a step.

And then Part 3, Construction Plans and Specs, and then we ask you some similar questions and "if not" or "if so" there are different requirements based on your answers to the questions. And these are some simple questions. They get a little bit more complicated as we go on.

This is your list of construction plans. We used to have just a list – you know, you have to attach these six things. But actually we don't need all of those plans if you're doing a manufactured home, so we'll ask you: Are you doing a manufactured home? Great, then we don't need a foundation plan. We don't need the cross-section. We don't need the elevations. Just give us one copy of the floor plan and two copies of the installation manual and we're done. So we're able to ask you some questions, get your responses, and then tell you what we need interactively based on those responses. This was a mystery to our permit techs, too. Do we need a copy of this for a manufactured home? I don't know. Somebody would tell them yes, somebody would tell them no. They would jot it down in their notebook and then maybe that might get communicated to the next permit tech. But we're trying to solve all these problems at once.

And then there's a contact information form. That's a separate page because you can photocopy it and attach it to all the applications you might need to use, and when we do online applications you'll have an online account and you'll never have to fill that in. There's the agent authorization form if you want to have someone other than the property owner apply for the permit.

And then there's just some heads-up. These bulleted items at the bottom about fees – you have to pay your plan review fee at time of application; you pay your permit fee at the time you pick it up; if you make a revision to your application, we're going to bill you by the hour to review that revision so try to get it all right the first time; and if it's code enforcement, we double your application fees.

Now this is a draft of what the preconditions worksheet looks like. And we ask you the questions, like lot certification. If you have it done, you tell us the Auditor's file number, we record that with the application, and we're done. If not, then you need to apply for lot certification. There's a lot certification application and that can take a little while sometimes. You may have to submit a title report and it goes to Grace and she shoves it through a black box and out the other side comes lot certification. It's a very complicated process and that section of the form sends you off to go do that, if you need to. But most lots, especially in recent subdivisions, are certified. It's just a matter of figuring this out and our permit techs will help get you there.

Under Zoning: Is your project an allowed use? What is it? Because some people assert that, you know, it's a barn. Well, what are you doing inside the barn? You know, if you are running a factory inside the barn then a *barn* is not the land use. A barn is just what the structure looks like. And sometimes we have been asking just about the structure, not about the land use. So

the land use is important and now we're catching it here. If you have a special use permit, you tell us that, but otherwise you're identifying the use as it is allowed in the code.

Floodway: Are you in the floodway? Now we're going to tell you if you're in the floodway or not. And if you're not then there's nothing more to do here, but if you *are* you cannot build a new residence in the floodway. So this form tells you upfront you can't do that. Now you can do some other things but you've got to indicate that to us: The project is *not* a new residence. Or the project is an existing residence, then the rule kicks in that you can't do more than a 50% improvement on the residence. So you have to say that here – that your project will not improve it more than 50%. You have to answer – you have to assert that you're in compliance with the code here.

Then there're a number of other things. We don't necessarily have to go through every one of these but I do sort of want you to have a flavor of the things that applicants are hitting as they go through the application process. The Airport Environs Overlay: I think a lot of you were on the Planning Commission when we updated that a couple years ago. We did the Bayview Ridge Plan. You've got to say whether you're in or out, and those maps are available on the web. And if you're in you have to tell us what Airport Compatibility Zone you're in, and then you can't be one of the prohibited land uses in that Airport Compatibility Zone and you've got to tell us – you've got to tell us that. As we take this form in or as we fill it out for you we're double-checking that your answers are correct.

For a residential development in natural resource land we have some requirements. If you are in Ag-NRL, you've to demonstrate that you are generating from your own commercial agricultural production at least \$100 per acre per year for the last three years before you can build a new house. So we ask you those questions and tell you the things that you're going to have to attach to prove that, and then you're in compliance with that requirement. And you weren't surprised at the end when you came in with a building permit for a house and we tell you, Well, have you been farming it? Because under our code residences are accessory to agriculture on parcels greater than one acre, and you've got to show us that. And you won't be surprised because it's right here on the worksheet.

And then there's another question about Industrial Forestlands. The requirement here is fairly complicated so we don't give you a whole bunch of questions. And there aren't a lot of people that are applying for residences in Industrial Forest, but we do give you the heads-up. Here's the code citation. The permit tech is going to show it to you – going to show you all the things you have to do in order to build a residence in Industrial Forest.

There's these Special Jurisdiction Requirements, where you've got to attach the letter from Anacortes or Town of La Conner or Swinomish, if you're in the Swinomish Indian Reservation.

Health Department has some interaction with us. This isn't really a requirement because you have your own requirement to go get the permit from the Health Department and it's not contingent in one direction or the other on your building permit. But we do give you the heads-up. If you're doing a food service anything you're going to want to get Health Department approval because they're controlling the – I don't know what they're controlling. They do something with your food. They approve your menu or something that I don't need to know, don't know. But we connect you to that. We ask you the question and then send you to the Health Department so that you can be fully informed and aren't surprised.

And then for Water Review: Our water code is showing its age and it probably needs to be updated sooner rather than later, but it is what it is for the moment and so we have this complicated set of questions that you have to answer as to whether you have to do water review. If you're adding a living room, the living room to an existing house, that doesn't really require water except if it's more than 500 square feet of living room then you do have to do water review. I can't explain why but it's in the code. So we ask you these questions to lead you to the right code-based answer. And if you answer "yes" to any of them, then you have to do water review. If you're able to answer "no" to all of them, then you can skip that step. So there are some people that can answer "no," like you're building a shop without water – great. You're not using water, no connection there, then you don't have to do water review.

And then SEPA. There's sort of a complicated set of questions because there are a number of SEPA exemptions, but sometimes you might exceed the exemption and we don't want you to find out at the end. A single-family residence that doesn't involve grading greater than 500 cubic yards is basically always exempt. It's the commercial uses that hit these thresholds. But we want to be able to articulate these things so the people at the counter – the permit techs – can help you work through it and you're not surprised at the end.

Now Part 2 is the Site Planning Worksheet, and it's similarly constructed. It will take longer to fill out but it's shorter. Flood Review – a couple of questions. If the project is in the floodplain, then you're going to have to go through this section. And then if it's new construction, it gives you just some heads-up. You're going to have to use low impact development techniques because we're required to require you to do that because of the FEMA Bi-Op. There's nothing to do here right now but it gives you a bulleted identification that that's a thing you're going to have to do. And then we also tell you that when you do critical areas review it's going to have to have this habitat assessment because that's another part of the National Flood Insurance Program and its interaction with the FEMA Bi-Op we make you do, so just a heads-up that that's going to happen. And then if your project is a substantial improvement, then you may have to do certain things in the floodplain. So we ask you the question, explain what a substantial improvement is, and then tell you that you have one or more of these options that you need to do when you do your project. We want you to know that upfront, because if you have the option of locating your building on the parcel out of the floodplain that's probably better for you. It's probably going to be cheaper. But it's an option. You can probably still locate in the floodplain and that might be for your site where you want to be. It might have the view of the river or something. So we identify the requirement, give you some insight into what the costs are and when it's permissible for which types of structures.

For a pipeline there's not really much to be done here except that you have to do a pipeline title notice. But we don't want to miss it, so we have this question: Is your project area within 100 feet of a hazardous liquid or natural gas pipeline? You can find that on iMap where you look it up and then if you are within that 100 feet then you fill out this title notice or, if you've already done the title notice, you give us the Auditor's file number of the one that's been recorded. If you haven't done it, you fill it out. We'll record it when you turn in your application but then that's done and we'll not have missed this part of the review.

Our staff really likes to get things right so they really freak out if they have missed one of these requirements. And some of them are big deals; some of them aren't. But we're trying to fully comply with the code, fully implement all the required code provisions all the time, so we spend – you know, like on pipeline. It's just a title notice, just a sheet of paper you record against your property. How big of a deal is it? I don't know, but it's a requirement of the code. So we spend

quite a bit of time doing, you know, just things like that. Obviously it's a bigger deal if you dig into a pipeline.

Critical Areas and Shorelines Review: We have some questions that trigger whether you have to do that review, so it's a "yes" or "no."

Repair, remodel, remodel ____ improvement.

Stormwater Review: There are some thresholds in our stormwater code. If you're adding 2000 square feet or more or if you're disturbing 7000 square feet or greater of land, then you're going to answer "yes" to one or more of those questions and if you answer "yes" to either of them then you have to do stormwater review. If you answer "no" to both, then you get to skip that step. And these yes/no things are important because right now all projects are going – are all lining up in those queues, those approval queues, so they're all getting some level of effort from the reviewers, even when it's not required.

Septic/Sewer: Similar concept. If you already have a septic system and you're remodeling, you don't need to do septic again, except if you're going to exceed the capacity of your septic then you do, so we ask some questions to try to figure out – if you are adding bedrooms that are beyond the capacity of your septic then, yeah, you're going to have to get a septic permit or do some changes.

Access to Public Road System: We regulate that as well. You can't just put a driveway into a County road. We limit the number of accesses onto a County road. We limit the type of access onto a County road. We may say you can't put it on this blind corner but we're going to require a certain site distance. And if you're going to do work in the right-of-way, you're going to have to have insurance. So there's this permit requirement that Public Works handles for accesses onto (a) private road. And you've got to be able to demonstrate some access onto a private road, or how are you getting there? You may have access onto a highway and if it's a state highway then you need to get permission from the State DOT. So we'll ask for that. We'll ask you to demonstrate that as well. Sometimes if you're increasing the number of accesses onto a private road that leads to a County road that may trigger it, so we're – we're trying to ask the questions and put them on the form because there is – I kid you not – a lot of confusion in the Department on when you need an access permit. It's hard to articulate the standards sometimes and so the best thing we can do is write it down and write it down not on a secret piece of paper that we keep behind the counter but on the application form so we're all on the same page.

And then Fire: If you're a certain distance from a public road then you have to have a certain driveway design. We have a handout about that that explains all the requirements. Don't try to fit them all here.

And then we have this exclamation point, or information circle there that says if you go through one of these reviews, figure out that you're going to be positioning your house here and that it's sufficiently far from a wetland and that's great, but then you change your driveway and then you end up moving your house, if you change one of those reviews you may want to have your other reviews redone to make sure that you're doing that correctly.

For critical areas, we're changing the critical areas review a little bit so that you tell us all the possible places you might want to put your house and we'll look at all of them. And if they're all good then we'll circle all those places and give you a letter saying all of those places are good.

We don't need to look at any of those places again. If you want to do something else, then we'll have to look at that. But otherwise the areas that we reviewed that don't have any critical areas within 200 feet we don't need to worry about. And so that will be a significant improvement because that letter can be looked at by the applicant, the applicant can have certainty about where they can put their house, and the permit tech who's reviewing this at the end can have certainty about where they put their house.

Then this is the Project Details datasheet that I mentioned before. It's very simple to fill out once you've got your construction plans. You're just writing down a bunch of square footages and number of bedrooms and that kind of thing so that we know how much to charge you in terms of fees, how much to report to the Assessor, all of those types of things – just a lot of little details that we need to figure out various other things.

So our next steps as we go forward here are our final form updates, as I mentioned. Hopefully building permit very soon. We need to implement this tracking number system for the pre-application applications. We need to generate some template text for our approval letters that we'll send out, because right now we're not really doing that so much as we're just marking it in our software. But we want to write letters that we actually send out to people.

We really, really would like to improve our website, but that requires staff time from the IS and GIS Departments. We really would like to be able to send you to a property search page where you type in your address and it tells you in a narrative form everything we know about your property. Like it would just tell you, You are in floodway and, P.S., this is what that means. Right now a lot of that information's available – not all of it, but a lot of it is – but it's hard to explain to a person how to find it all. Like we have to *teach* you to use iMap instead of you just looking it up. And then people have other trouble. Like they'll use the property search page on the web, which probably a lot of you have used. It's a very popular page. And it will tell you the zone but it won't really tell you that's the zone, so if you're not looking for the zone you might look down below where it says "Land Use." That's an Assessor term. It means nothing for us. So there're some of these confusing things about the webpage that we have encountered very quickly in our testing of this. We need to get those things fixed but we're going to work around them until they happen. We will propose and do code amendments as necessary. Stacie is keeping an ever-burgeoning list of little weird code amendments that get in the way of doing simple things.

Mr. Lundsten: LWAs?

Mr. Walters: What's that?

Mr. Lundsten: LWAs?

Mr. Walters: Yes, little weird amendments.

Ms. Pratschner: Is that the new official term?

Mr. Walters: I think so. The Planning Commission loves acronyms – I forgot to tell you that. Always use acronyms. Never explain what they mean. And then we have already been doing some outreach to contractors through the Skagit/Island County Builders Association, and then we've approached the Western Washington Ag Association about getting at ag operators and doing outreach directly to them. They're not the same groups, obviously. We'll do some public outreach. We'll probably do some video, web, social media outreach to tell people about the

new permit process and to tell people, as we always try to do: You should plan ahead. You know, don't come in for a building permit application because you want to build next week. It's not like building in the city where all the lots are laid out, there're streets already there, and you just need to get in an application with your construction plans. It is a lot harder where there is no infrastructure built out, you've got wetland you've got to deal with – those kinds of things. Building in the county is different for real reasons than it is in the city. You've got to plan further ahead.

And new permit software. We're really pegging a lot of our hopes and dreams on that, and hopefully we will get that going this coming year if Whatcom County pulls through and finalizes their RFP.

So I hope that that was somewhat useful just to give you a flavor of what the other 95% of the Department does every day, and what the results are of the work you do. You know, you're not just writing code in a vacuum. It has actual results on applicants. We are trying all the time when we write code to think, How's this going to be implemented? You know, like on stormwater I think we admittedly did not do a very good job of that, but nobody really had a good sense. We would talk to a lot of people in the Department about how we would apply this and in Public Works, and nobody really had a good sense about how that would work, and we found some problems with it. That's why we are now doing a stormwater update this year. But ever-improving, trying to do better. And as you move forward with your processes, I hope that you will ask, you know, How will this get implemented on the ground? What would the application form look like? We're probably not necessarily going to have an answer to that question, but if we're all thinking in those terms we can, I think, develop better policies, procedures, and code as we move forward. I know this is a high priority for the County Commissioners, a high priority for us as staff, and I assume that it makes sense to you that we want regulation to serve a purpose. We don't want it to be overly burdensome, any more burdensome than it has to be, and we want it to not lead to incoherent results. So this is just part of the process and working through all that. And do you have any questions?

Chair Raschko: Are there questions? I thought that was a great presentation myself, and I think it's a very noble effort. That was eye-opening to me. Anything else?

Ms. Rose: No. I think that your putting it on the applicant to round up all that preliminary information is good. The water availability, the – you know – fire, all those steps. I think, if I understood you right, they have to bring that with them to the appointment?

Mr. Walters: Yes. We tell you upfront sort of what it is you're going to need and then they're going to need to assemble it. But hopefully there won't be any guessing as to the requirements. You know, you're going to need this document and that document. Here's how to go get that document. When we met with SICBA, the Skagit/Island County Builders Association, they said one of the best things about developing in Skagit County – and they compared it favorably to Snohomish County and Whatcom County and Island County – is that we explain things to them. We don't say, Here's the requirement; figure it out. You know, we say, Here's the requirement and here's how to achieve the requirement. So that's good, and we don't want to lose that. But we also want it to be in writing and consistent across the various people that offer that, and we want to be able to build capacity. Because if you have more applications coming in, your wait times get longer unless you are able to build capacity. And we can't build it quickly without some changes to our process.

Mr. Pernula: I would add one other thing and that's that who has to know all this total gamut of all these regulations are our permit techs who work up at the front counter. It's an extremely difficult position with a lot of things to learn, and in the past a lot of the stuff wasn't written down. Everybody had their own little cheat sheets on what had to be done. And it was passed down by word of mouth. We're trying to get everything in writing so that everybody has a consistent idea of exactly what's necessary to be submitted with an application. And it really helps in training new people who are coming along, and as you may know, we had a turnover of about a third of our staff in the last year.

Mr. Walters: And those permit techs are some of our newest employees. And all the planning management literature says you want to put your best employees, your most experienced employees at the counter, but that hasn't been our tradition. We've got all those experienced employees trained in these specialties, so they don't even know the process. They don't know the whole building permit process. So, yeah, fresh, new employees – those are the ones that have to know everything – more than everybody else.

Ms. Del Vecchio: Is there staff time set aside to be putting all of these – I just know how hard it is to get all of your operating procedures written down and consistent, and it's so easy to say that we're going to do that.

Mr. Pernula: This has been a huge effort over – what? – in a year or so.

Mr. Walters: Eighteen months.

Mr. Pernula: Eighteen months?

Mr. Walters: Yeah.

Mr. Pernula: By a lot of people.

Ms. Del Vecchio: Okay.

Mr. Pernula: The people in the specialty areas like water have been working back and forth many, many times on trying to get those forms that are very, very – deal with a very complicated issue to make sense so that people can actually use them.

Ms. Del Vecchio: Good. No, it's a great effort.

Mr. Walters: But we are rebuilding the plane while it's in the air. Still trying to issue permits while we're trying to re-engineer the process.

Ms. Del Vecchio: No, exactly. I mean, the challenge is you still have these stacks of things that have not yet gone away, and in the meantime we're trying to write everything down. And I say that just not to challenge your ability to do it but just to acknowledge that, you know, getting that all in writing takes a concerted effort, and if staff time hasn't been devoted specifically to that – it seems a worthwhile use of time.

Mr. Walters: Yeah. The permit techs, they're learning it as they are – some of them are new employees – they're learning, and they previously would, like, print out a screenshot from the software and then you fill in this box and they'd circle it. But now what they do is they

screenshot it and paste it and past it into the software program and they write on the software program "Fill in this box." And then once it's there instead of in their secret notebook it's in the software that everybody can see so there's a lot of time-saving as a result. Because they were doing that anyway, but it wasn't shareable and it wasn't searchable, so there's a lot of efficiencies that come along with it.

Ms. Del Vecchio: Nice, though. Good work. Thank you.

Ellen Bynum: _____ question? How do you know if you are successful and how will you correct your mistakes?

Mr. Walters: So the question is, How will we know if we are successful and how will we know if we've made a mistake and how will we correct it? First of all, I think we will be successful if we achieve the goals that we identified off of one of the slides – both goals. That's why it's important to write down the goals so that we can measure success. So one of the important metrics is the reduction of time where the application isn't doing anything where it's just sitting at the department. Another important metric is the total time to issue an application. We don't really have that metric now – you know, from the moment a project is conceived of in the applicant's head till the first time they come in here till the time they actually get their permit. That total time, we don't know what it is now. But we will be able to get some sense of it. Like we'll get complaints if people say we just shifted the time around. So that'll be a little bit more qualitative than quantitative, but what won't be qualitative is that time spent in the Department – that 60 days or 70 days it's just sitting there. That is maybe the thing that we have a laser-like focus on trying to fix. So we'll know that.

I think we'll know if we've made mistakes – if we've made some actual substantive mistakes in processing applications – like, if we find out oh, you're skipping or missing some requirement of the code. Then we'll know that that's a problem. But otherwise it's not, you know, a mistake to just reduce time so there will be – I guess we'll rely a lot on customer feedback, as well. And we don't have very many people filling out customer feedback surveys. We've had a variety of ways of doing the surveys and we've – over *years* we've gotten, like, eight cards returned. So we started doing an e-mail thing. We've been doing that for months and we've gotten two responses. So we don't have a high rate of return on customer surveys, but we hear complaints separate from surveys as well, so some of this is fairly qualitative.

Chair Raschko: Kathy?

Ms. Mitchell: A quick question for you. So what happens if there is a mistake somewhere down the road in some of these forms? Are you guys going to have a fast-track way to fix those things when they're realized?

Mr. Walters: Yes. We're planning on, you know, releasing this building permit application – the new one – fairly soon. But we know that we will need to make changes to it and so that's why for the past 10 months or so we've been training people. We have a whole system set up for when we release a new form, we search and destroy all previous versions of the form. We move to the next one. Every form has a footer at the bottom that says, This is the date it was updated that's always up to date. When we go to online applications that'll be even easier because a problem that you identify that you fix on a form will immediately replicate to any application that's in progress. So we have some of those mechanisms figured out to deal with that. But what we intend to do is increment the forms. As we learn something, we'll release a new form to

fix it. And we've got a lot of these forms modular. You know, we've got this worksheet and that worksheet so we don't have to replace the whole thing. We just fix the individual components.

Ms. Mitchell: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. We'll turn now to the Department Update, please.

Mr. Pernula: Usually I just go over where we're going – the direction for the next few meetings. It really hasn't changed from the last meeting.

We're probably going to be scheduling a public hearing on those changes to the stormwater code in November. It might get in December, but hopefully in November. Rural Forestry Initiative, we haven't scheduled a date yet but we're continuing to work on it and make sure that it's ready to come back in its final form to the Planning Commission. And we're putting together very soon the information to take to the Board of County Commissioners concerning the 2018 Comprehensive Plan Amendment docket so that we'll have whatever those Comprehensive Plan applications that we're taking forward next year. So we'll have those sometime this fall before the end of the year. That's what we're working on.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Mitchell: One more question. When is the next literal meeting? I mean, what's scheduled? What is the date for the next meeting?

Mr. Pernula: The first – excuse me. The regular meeting would be two weeks from tonight – isn't it?

Mr. Walters: Yes, but I don't think we have anything.

Ms. Mitchell: That's what I was wondering – if it's going to be solid or fluid.

Mr. Pernula: We may not have anything.

Ms. Mitchell: Thank you.

Mr. Pernula: We'll let you know.

Ms. Mitchell: Okay.

Mr. Pernula: Probably in a week.

Mr. Raschko: I will not be here in any event.

Mr. Pernula: Okay.

Chair Raschko: Anything else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay, Planning Commissioner Comments and Announcements. Anything, Hollie?

Ms. Del Vecchio: No, I do not.

Ms. Mitchell: I've got one quick comment. You guys are rocking! This is getting good!

Ms. Pratschner: We make it look easy.

Ms. Mitchell: Yeah!

Ms. Pratschner: Thank you.

Ms. Rose: I have a question, Dale. You had mentioned six months or a year ago – I don't remember – not to put any pressure on, but you said that the Department was going to start working on a standardized engineering plan for rainwater harvesting, and I just wanted to follow up on that.

Mr. Pernula: Yes. Okay, we've been working with Western Washington University on a project to do a number of different things. That's one of the projects that we want them to work on with us. Stacie and Ryan met with people from Western Washington University yesterday and I think they can give you an update on that project.

Ms. Pratschner: Yeah, certainly. Yeah, yesterday we were able to go to the Western campus and meet with our sustainable community folks – the coordinator there. We were able to sit in on a couple classes. We have a number of projects that some Western professors and students are going to be assisting the County with. The students are excited. Staff are excited. This is a great opportunity for them to do a capstone project for a senior year project, for example, to earn credits within their degree.

As far as the rainwater catchment project, we are working with Dr. Bob Mitchell. He's a hydrogeologist from the Geology Department at Western and then one of his students/interns – his name is Joe. Both fantastic people to work with. Joe's a very hard-working young man and is busy working on what we hope will become a prescriptive design for a rainwater catchment system that will be use-friendly for folks. We're excited about the partnership.

Ms. Rose: Thank you. I have a follow-up question –

Ms. Pratschner: Sure.

Ms. Rose: – which is – so I sit on this committee at National – with NHB, National Association of Home Builders, and I'm on the Environmental Issues and they're talking about the same – the conversation's happening everywhere. And they're actually – there's a group and I don't know exactly who this group is but they came to talk to us, and they're putting together this metric of – a revised water consumption chart, is what it is. Because most of the water consumption charts assume everybody's using 120 gallons a day.

Ms. Pratschner: Yes.

Ms. Rose: And so I just want you to be aware of that so that as this thing progresses that that can be used as part of this design for this standard plan.

Ms. Pratschner: Great.

Ms. Rose: Because the industry is evolving to the point where instead of running two-and-a-half gallons for your lab faucet you can now be half-a-gallon. And the .8-gallon flush toilets work really good, way better than the 1.6-gallon flush. So at any rate, it's – to me that is an important piece of this puzzle to keep in mind these advances. And I don't know, like I said, how quickly this chart will be completed on this research they're doing but they are working on it.

Ms. Pratschner: Great. I will track that.

Mr. Pernula: If you have a contact, could you send it to me?

Ms. Rose: I will try to round that up. I believe it's on my desk. Yep.

Ms. Pratschner: Thank you so much.

Ms. Rose: Yep.

Chair Raschko: Okay, Mark, anything?

Mr. Lundsten: What?

Chair Raschko: No? Okay. Then I'd entertain a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Mitchell: I move to adjourn.

Ms. Del Vecchio: Second.

Chair Raschko: All in favor, say "aye."

Multiple Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Great, we're adjourned.

Ms. Mitchell: Good.

Chair Raschko: Thank you (gavel).