



City of Seattle
Seattle Public Utilities

Seattle Public Utilities Development Services Advisory Panel
Meeting 1 Notes - September 5, 2013

Welcome and Panel Kick-Off (Ray Hoffman, SPU Director)

- Welcome; thanks for participation; really appreciate your time.
- 15 years ago, our lines of business were separate departments with their own way of doing things. When SPU was created under Mayor Rice, development services were not integrated; different practices for different lines of business continued.
- Wake-up call from embezzlement incident; while funds have been recovered, it put a spotlight on need for internal controls.
- Customers run from place to place, and this requires multiple and sometimes redundant interactions with SPU staff in different lines of business.
- We are creating a one-stop shop
 - 30 people in one spot rather than scattered throughout our organization
 - Looking at how other utilities do business with their customers
- Committed to efficiency and productivity – more customer focused, more consolidation, strive for continuous improvement
- Cross-training
- Clear requirements, controlled and predictable costs
- Change won't happen at once, but we will address our challenges and move forward.
- Challenge of meeting our infrastructure needs/deal with aging infrastructure
- It is very important to us to have your perspective, input, feedback as we do this work.

Panel Member Discussion

- Good things with SPU – **side sewer** pretty easy, reviewed w/ building process; verification of side sewer good.
- **Water service applications** still confusing after many years.
 - Get approved SIPs, then have to apply for WAC, then get more and different comments on WAC that affect the project and add scope, schedule and budget.
 - 60-90 days, 50-80% of the time get a second round of different and sometimes inconsistent comments.
 - Every time we try to explain the water process it seems to be different. Every time we try to go to SPU to get information we get “the runaround.”

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- **Side sewer** needs to be built into the permit process – make it part of the building permit process. Side sewer needs to be reviewed as part of building – e.g., actually make it part of the building permit.
- Getting a **storm drainage permit** from SPU doesn't make sense.
 - It doesn't get translated over to DPD – how do we know when we need to go to SPU or to DPD?
 - Where's the documentation of the SPU decisions?
 - Why are three different permits needed? There needs to be better communication between SPU/DPD as well as clarity.
- **Cross training** is great – Kirkland does this. Need subject matter experts (SME).
- Pro/con to **cross training**. Worry is about reducing the response rate and time frame with fewer staff and less direct connection to those with expertise. Don't create a bottleneck.
 - Don't "starve the organization for resources" – but if the skill sets are there, that's great. Bellevue is just checklist people so we often get comments that don't make sense.
 - Having the **one-stop shop** would be great. However, the middleman isn't an expert and can't respond to questions. Don't want issues lost in translation. Knowledgeable staff is essential.
- **GIS** is really helpful. All City staff should have ready access to basic information so they can share it with the customer.
- Surprises on projects about a **mainline extension (sewer)**. Need more pre-application discussion/information.
 - Didn't come up until late in the project. (125K)
 - No **latecomers agreement** available.
 - Worse in some parts of the city.
- **PAR** just hints at things. Doesn't provide requirements. It is not written in the PAR. Needs to be clearer and direct.
 - Recent projects (on GIS) show that design moved far along to permit submittal, and the project actually "died" because there was no storm discharge.
 - Could have been prevented if PAR was more clear and comprehensive.
- **PARs** have gotten clearer but still need to be more directive and less suggestive.
- Early in 2009 when I began to try to **appeal** on financial grounds, I failed on 5 of 5.
- We have been doing more and more **appeals**. We don't have a very good batting average. When we get a PAR back and know we have an issue, we initiate an appeal and even a secondary appeal. Takes a lot of time.
- Filed an expensive **appeal** (lots of analysis) that was ultimately successful. This was a case that put a substantial burden on one property. SPU Director involved in resolution.
- **Latecomers agreement** doesn't guarantee development because we may not be able to wait ten years to recover initial investment.
 - Will be helpful in some instances but not all.
 - Small developers can't bear the financial burden required.
 - Not advocating that Seattle go this route.

- **SDCs** can be viable
 - distributes the cost over a wider base
 - Not a panacea
 - but...SDCs cost more on aggregate than they benefit the system.
- When developers are asked by SPU to do “**opportunity projects**” (e.g., add to their projects in order to provide a broader system benefit), there is no real incentive to do the work when SPU covers only the cost.
- It would be great if we could have **access to maps** that show the water and waste water system.
 - We could do our own research, be able to do due diligence.
 - Understand there may be security concerns. Could we have limited (pass coded) access?
 - There are a couple of people in the water department that give really quick responses – there are some that never respond. We understand they get a lot of requests. It would be more ideal if we could look it up when staff are not available.
 - Even the **sewer cards**—as archaic as they are—are available to us.
- **Technology** - It was a huge advance when SPU went from triplicate paper system to using computers recently, with electronic application. Want more on-line information – sewer cards.
- Why is the **appeals process** a closed process?
 - I don't know who I am appealing to, who is reviewing, the criteria, the issues, and how much weight the various agencies are pulling.
 - Needs to be more transparent. Looking at my past projects I have no idea why I was successful or not.
- Having trouble with **City Light**. If in fact the city is going to grow, line extensions are going to be a constraint. There needs to be a **pool of money beyond the latecomer's tool**. We need more immediate funds for infrastructure. The answer really has to do with having a pool of money now.
- The things that have come to my attention are the screwy operations – Vitamilk at Green Lake, for example - capacity charge that has a five-year “window”; these things don't come up very often, but some industrial uses are moving out of the city and are being redeveloped.
 - On this site is a large amount of groundwater that originally went into the lake.
 - **Revision of Director's Rules** that impacts development so significantly – e.g., limiting Diversion of groundwater – must have longer lead times of notice. This one was “sprung on us.”
- **PARs** initially were very helpful (more project-specific) and have grown to be more boilerplate. Some customers are trying to bold out project specific comments. SPU should do this too; highlight key, project-specific information.
- It is staggering how very different the **Water application processes** can be, depending on who you work with.
 - For every application, there are maybe 5 unique pieces of information – everything else is duplicative and must be entered by hand.
 - This is all information we have given to DPD and SDOT. The low-hanging fruit is in the water application process.
- The **user ID** at SDOT is very helpful.

- On **Water main extensions** -- they are project killers for smaller projects.
 - When there was a crack-down on spaghetti lines, that killed a lot of projects for us. See the justification, but think there has to be another solution for the difficult-to-serve lots.
 - **Impact fees/SDCs** are options but not total solutions. SDC may give us a 25% discount on a project – this won't really solve the problem for the projects of concern in these instances.
- Does need to be a discussion on **GSI** – list of bookmarks for city of Seattle – it is not easy to navigate.
- Also need to talk about taps pavement restoration. Need to improve coordination; saves money, more sustainable.
- We have so little access to **information on water infrastructure**.
 - We get it by calling locates.
 - You can't tell a person who wants to develop whether the project is feasible re: infrastructure, street restoration, etc.
 - Had a project that the main line extension came up after permitting.
 - Some great staff (account execs) in water
- At other cities, the water and sewer people come to **pre-application process** and provide maps. (Bellevue)
 - Water staff there visit the site ahead of time, provide maps up-front
 - Early info/certainty is critical to scope/schedule/budget