CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Joseph Horwedel

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT SERVICES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

DATE: April 6, 2007

Approved Date

The Development Services Partners (Planning, Building, Fire, and Public Works) are working with a research consultant, True North Research, Inc., for the first time, to obtain statistically reliable measures of customer satisfaction among the Development Services customer base. The Partners plan to conduct the survey annually and this year's data provides an important baseline that will be used for performance measures, budgetary decisions, and business process improvements.

After completing 1,000 customer interviews in February 2007, True North consultants analyzed the data and are now preparing a final report. The consultant drew the survey sample from the permit database for customers in 2006. Two versions of the survey questionnaire were used to accommodate the differences between ministerial and discretionary projects. Ministerial projects are administrative in nature and do not require a public hearing (e.g., electrical panel upgrade), while a discretionary project requires a public hearing (e.g., conditional use permit, zoning change). The major findings of the survey are summarized below:

Positive Findings

Overall Customer Satisfaction – Given the regulatory nature of the Partner's work, the overall customer satisfaction numbers are impressive. Among discretionary customers, two-thirds (66%) were somewhat or very satisfied. The Partners performed slightly better with ministerial customers, 75% of whom were satisfied. In addition, 78% of ministerial and 63% of discretionary customers think that service has improved in the past year.

Caliber of Staff – Customers consistently praised development staff for their attitude and competency. 80% of customers give staff high marks for being courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable and agree that they make an effort to understand customer needs.

Information Quality and Availability – 75% of customers are satisfied with the Partner's efforts to make development services information available through the website, brochures, and meetings. At least two-thirds of customers (65% ministerial, 76% discretionary) have accessed the website and, of those who had, 80% were satisfied with its content.

Areas for Improvement
One of the key goals for conducting the survey was to gather the data necessary to show measurable improvement in the development services process. Respondents were asked detailed questions about their experience related to specific steps in the development process, enabling the Partners to pinpoint and target areas needing improvement. The survey results point to four of these areas:

Communication – Perceptions of how staff performed in communicating with customers or other staff members were among the key factors that distinguished customers who were satisfied with the Partner's overall performance from those who were dissatisfied. For both interpersonal and written communications, customers desire clarity, specificity, thoroughness and accuracy. There was also a desire, even among customers for whom communications was not an issue, for additional information, resources and tools to be made available on-line.

Consistency – Customers desire a process that is fair and predictable, which requires consistency in both the structure and application of fees, rules, policies and procedures. While most customers gave the Partners positive reviews related to consistency, some pointed to inconsistent comments and corrections during plan review, and conflicting instructions for a given project between plan review and inspection staff, or between different inspectors. This was especially true for discretionary customers, whose projects by their very nature are often more complex, subject to greater public involvement and have more flexibility in the application of the rules.

Accountability – The survey results show that accountability is a priority area for improvement for a sizable minority of customers. While most customers give the Partner's positive reviews, some felt that Partners need to do a better a job of processing projects according to agreed-upon schedules and taking ownership of mistakes and fixing them in a proactive manner.

Timeliness – While improvements made by the Partners in the three areas above will help address delays caused by miscommunication, inconsistencies, and "late hits," customers also clearly indicated that the Partners should work to clarify and simplify the permitting process to reduce the time it takes to complete their projects.

At the Community & Economic Development Committee's meeting on March 19th, staff presented the survey methodology. On April 23rd, the Development Services Partners and a consultant from True North will present the survey results to the Committee and discuss recent accomplishments that address the four areas for improvement. The final survey report will be distributed to the entire Council via an Information Memo and posted on the Development Services website at www.sanjoseca.gov/development the week of April 9th.

JOSEPH HORWEDEL, DIRECTOR
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

Questions about the survey should be directed to Jennifer Garnett, PBCE Communications Manager at (408) 535-7886.