

**Floodplain**

**Planning &  
Zoning**

**Wastewater**

**Code  
Enforcement**

**Building**



# **Community Development Division**

## **Division Update Report**



**Progress Report**

## Division Organization

The Community Development Division has the primary responsibility for overseeing development and assuring that it occurs in a manner that is compliant with our development regulations and planning documents. Our primary functions include the following:

- A. Ensuring structures are developed with safety to the occupants in mind.
- B. Ensuring that as land develops it is compatible with surrounding development and enhancing our overall economy.
- C. Ensuring that our residents and visitors have been afforded adequate protection from flood damage to structures by assisting Public Works.
- D. Ensuring that individual septic systems and wells are friendly to the environment as well as residents and visitors
- E. Ensuring that our County provides a healthy and visually attractive place for people to live, work and play in.

There is a positive correlation between the strength of our economy and how efficiently and professionally we do our jobs. The responsibility of assuring good quality development is something the division takes very seriously.

Due to a lack of private developable land within Gila County it is crucial that we maximize the development potential of existing private land while at the same time assuring quality. It is of the utmost importance that good community planning be accomplished through a consensus building process. Assuring a good balance between these two objectives can be a daunting task at times.

In the past the department devoted a lot of energy towards understanding and improving our various procedures for providing customer service. A plan of action was developed to facilitate better overall organization and structure to our services.

We wanted both staff and our customers to feel better about the various services we provided.

Part of this report will include some of the discussion from the July 2005 Report from LL Decker and

Associates. This report was an overall assessment of how well the Division was providing services. Some of the issues identified in the Decker report in 2006 include the following:

1. Delays in obtaining permits
2. Confusing Plan Review and permitting process
3. Inspection process can slow down the job
4. Poor communication between county staff and applicants requesting permits
5. Unrealistic customer expectations
6. Lack of staffing
7. Overworked and underpaid staff
8. Staff Training
9. Multiple permits needed and poor coordination between departments
10. Inadequate tools and training for those tools (codes, computer programs, facilities)
11. Inadequate customer complaint process

The Division has identified several goals since the Decker findings were made public.

### A. Permitting and Inspection Process

**Goal:** *The Community Development Department will enhance our permitting services to ensure that quality development projects are quickly reviewed with the needs of our customers as our top priority.*

### B. Marketing/Communication with our Customers

**Goal:** *The Community Development Department will create a highly interactive level of communication with our customers*

### C. Staffing Issues

**Goal:** *The Community Development department will ensure appropriate staffing levels, well trained staff that are up to date on evolving technical and customer service issues and that find the County an excellent place to work.*

### D. Necessary Tools and Facilities to get the job done

**Goal:** *The Community Development Department will ensure that our tools and facilities for providing good customer service are up to date or adequately planned for future expansion.*

**Our number one goal is to create a top of the line service delivery program for our customers.**

First and foremost the Community Development Division made major changes to its service delivery program.

The driving force behind the organizational changes was the LL Decker Study done in collaboration with members from the building community and, the Board of Supervisors who were frustrated by the number of complaints from the building community and general public in 2006.

The Decker Study included 3 major changes that were made for the purpose of centralizing the review and permitting process: **(One Stop Shop Program)**

1. We assumed the responsibilities for plan review and inspections for private septic systems and permitting for new wells in 2006. The Wastewater Department now has two and one-half staff members to do these new tasks.
2. We assumed the responsibilities for initial review for compliance with floodplain regulations in 2006. One staff was added to assist the Public Works Division with review for floodplain safety in 2006.
3. We expanded our Code Enforcement Program with three staff members in 2006. We also added a hearing officer who continues to work today with several different ordinances.

The objective of these changes was to enhance the overall review process by developing a One-Stop-Shop Program for our customers.

I consider the Decker Study flawed in the sense that it did not devote adequate review of the Wastewater and Floodplain review process at that time. Which as of today has been rectified.

Wastewater authority is currently delegated to Gila County by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. We are delegated for alternative systems, standard systems and code violations.

These changes created a real demand for existing staff to expand their knowledge into the septic systems, code

enforcement and floodplain areas. While tremendous progress has been made in these areas a lot of learning still needs to occur in order to absorb these functions fully within the department. This learning process can be very frustrating at times.

There has been a significant amount of time and effort put into the development of a strong professional work environment that could function as a team. The morale of the department was also an issue that needed to be addressed and we have now done that.

We have seen significant improvements in the timing of our plan review and permitting process. Much of the decrease in time to obtain permits for new development is due to the work of the Wastewater and Floodplain staff.

We also have a new Chief Building Official who has been a tremendous help with staff morale and creating a sense of discipline and professionalism.

Wastewater has managed to decrease a three month plus time delay in obtaining soils inspections down to one to two weeks and continues to do so today. Administrative Policies that facilitated this improvement included a change in final inspections for septic systems, in 2006 and have recently reestablished that inspection. We also had a change in what our customers can do prior to an inspector being on site, and then finally the addition of more staff.

Our Wastewater Manager was the major staff transferred from the Health Department with a tremendous amount of knowledge on wastewater systems. We also received a sanitarian who has kept this program running.

Transfer of some floodplain authority to this division has also significantly decreased the waiting time and also benefited the Floodplain Administrator by allowing him to focus more efforts on countywide projects. In this case the transfer of floodplain review benefited both the Public Works and Community Development Divisions thus giving our residents a double benefit, because now projects that weren't getting done now are getting done. Staff has made many changes that enhance customer service.

Our Code Enforcement Program is also continuing to grow. We have made adjustments to the Hearing Officer Guidelines and the process we follow in our

efforts to create a more attractive environment. We are also receiving financial benefits from this program in fines and having those who built without permits obtain those permits sometimes at twice the cost of the original permits.

### Creation of a Positive Growth Program

Probably one of the most difficult areas of adjustment was and continues today to be the philosophical attitude towards our Positive Overall Growth Program.

During a Planning & Zoning Commission Work-study several years ago a significant amount of time was devoted towards discussing the four elements that create a positive growth program. These elements included:

1. A good planning program with significant citizen involvement
2. Development Guides that actually work to achieve the vision created during the planning phase. (Zoning & Subdivision Regulations)
3. Adequate resources to implement programs and enforce development guides
4. A maintenance program to ensure continuation once development is established (plan review & code enforcement)

If any one of the above four elements that make up a positive growth program is not adequately addressed important issues such as quality of life and the economy are seriously compromised.

I believe we have made some progress in the development of the above defined approach to affect a positive growth program. We still have a long way to go, progress thus far has been slow.

Our weakest area is still in the planning arena. We need to devote more resources towards implementation of our past planning projects and this includes developing additional small area plans. Plans are currently being formulated by staff for the Planning and Zoning Commission to hold public hearings all around the County for the purpose of soliciting input on how our residents perceive the future vision for Gila County. This would involve holding meetings in Pine/Strawberry area, Payson area, Kohls Ranch/Christopher Creek area,

Young Area, Tonto Basin area, Roosevelt area, Globe/Miami area, and the Hayden/Winkelman area.

We have made significant modifications to our development guides, but much more is still needed. We have revised our Zoning Ordinance this past year, and are currently considering more changes. Modifications to our subdivision regulations and minor land division regulations have also been completed.

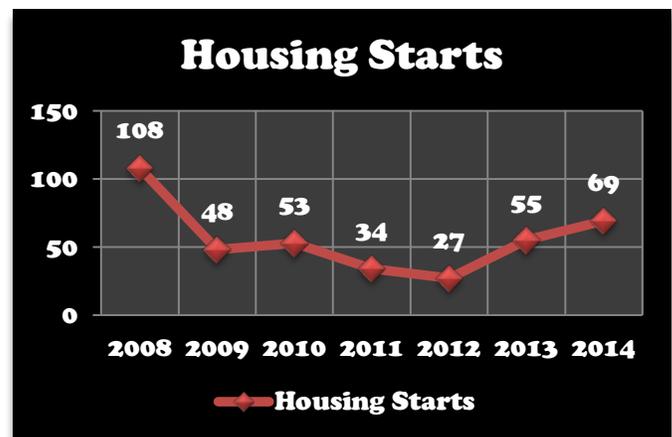
We have made a significant effort to ensure adequate resources are available for staff to get the job done. We have replaced most of our vehicles over the past three year. This included vehicles that should have been put to rest a long time ago. We have expanded training opportunities for all staff to improve their skills and knowledge, and most important we really try to listen to what staff has to say about what they need in the way of tools and equipment to do a better job.

I am optimistic that things will come together better due to our struggle with the growing pains from past the several years.

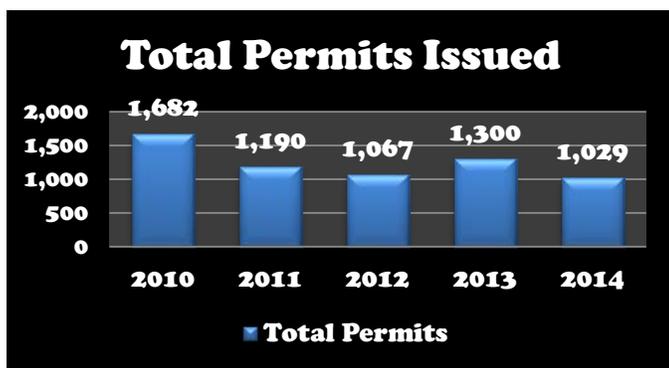
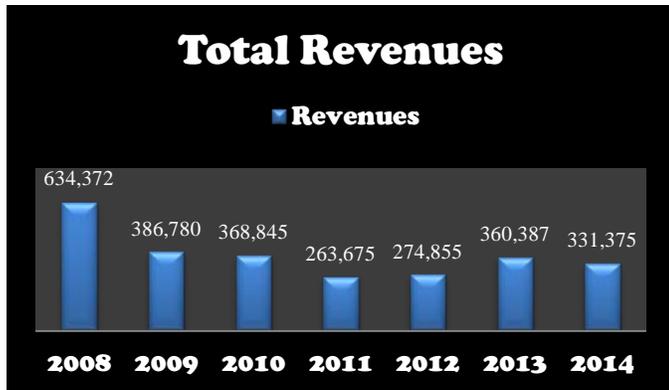
### **Building Division**

The number of housing starts reached its all-time low in 2012 and has very gradually increased since then. This past calendar year has increased by over 150% since 2012. This only meant an additional 42 housing starts. Housing starts include both site built and mobile homes. It does not include RVs, park models and other temporary dwellings.

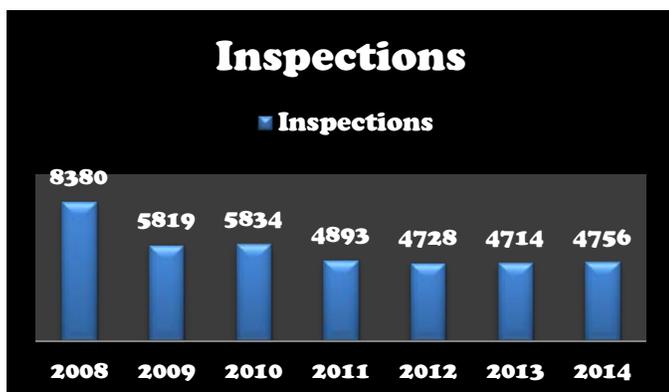
**"If any one of the four elements that make up a positive growth program is not adequately addressed important issues such as quality of life and the economy are seriously compromised."**



While our housing starts are still down from our pre-economic collapse period the departmental revenues also remain low. The Division updated the Building Codes from 2003 to the 2012 International Codes which included no fee increases



Total inspections have steadily declined since 2008. Even with the drop off this past fiscal year we remain on a slightly upward trend in regards to development.



In March of 2007 building activity started to increase to the levels we had been performing during calendar year 2008 and continues to remain at a higher level until 2009. Since 2009 there has been a gradual decline.

A major accomplishment for the Building Division has been the adoption of the new Building Codes this past fiscal year. Staff put a lot of time and effort into reviewing the new codes and making appropriate amendments through the public participation process.

Staff has also worked with the local contractors to identify concerns with the code.

Several other amendments are also underway. The most important amendment was the creation of a Building Safety Advisory and Appeals Board. This Board has enhanced public participation in how we structure our building codes program. This Board will facilitate review and adoption of new codes, revisions to existing codes, and provide an appeals process for those affected by the decisions of the building staff.

### Wastewater

Wastewater services were transferred into the division at the start of fiscal year 2007. At the time of the transfer an inadequate number of staff positions were provided to complete all the assigned duties and responsibilities. Three staff positions were transferred into the department from the Department of Health Services and it didn't take long to create a significant back log in soils evaluations. One staff person left and went back to Health Services.

When Soil Evaluations were with the Health Division, staff estimated that there was the equivalent of three full time staff doing Soils evaluations. We had one staff person devoted to soils evaluations. The three staff transfers included the department manager, one sanitarian and a technical person who did not go into the field but handled clerical and administrative duties for the most part.

The backlog of service demand reached the point where it took three to four months to schedule a soil evaluations. This was totally unacceptable as a service level for our customers. We hired a temporary sanitarian that lasted for approximately three to four months. When this person left a Building Safety Assistant was transferred into the division. In addition final inspections on conventional septic systems were suspended for contractors listed on the Gila County Wastewater Contractors List. With this change and the additional staff assistance scheduling a soil evaluations was reduced to two to three weeks. Today virtually all

soil evaluations are conducted on the day requested by the customer.

We have continued with this extra person part time in the division and have resumed conducting final inspections of all conventional septic systems.

Arrangements have also been made with Public Works Division for the assistance of a part time soils inspector to work one day a week conducting soils inspections. Roland has been gone many years.

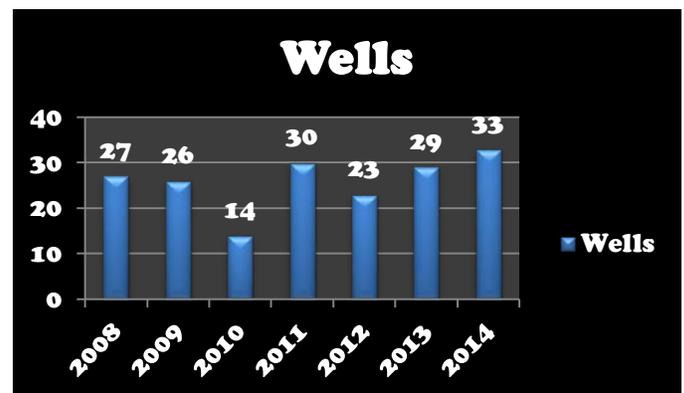
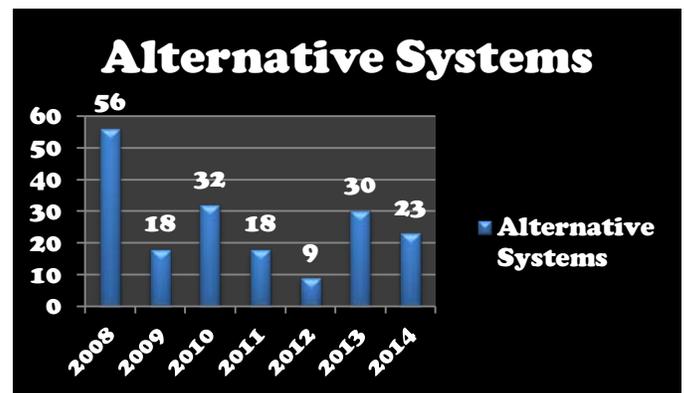
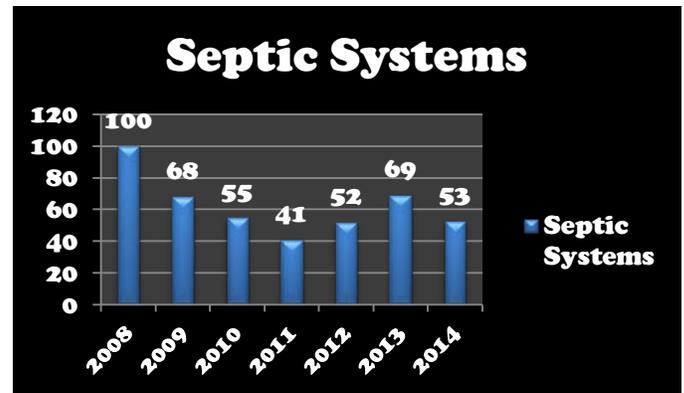
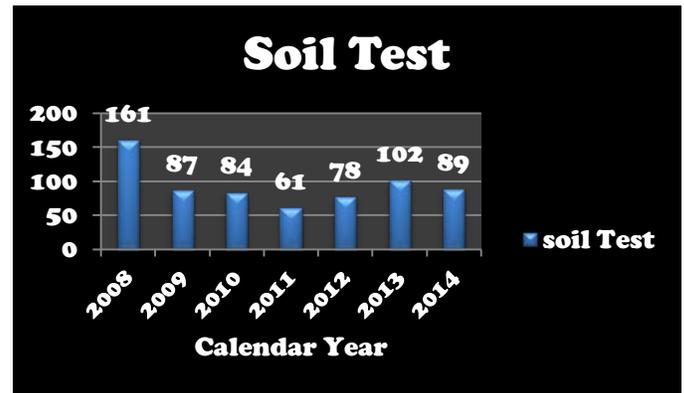
The Wastewater Department processes applications for standard and alternative septic systems, provides clearance letters, processes well applications, conducts observes soils investigations and reviews perk tests. and conducts sewage and gray water related complaint investigations and haring officer cases. A significant amount of time is spent in finding and explaining options available for citizens seeking to upgrade the capacity of their existing homes.

Standard septic system permit applications went from a high of 100 in 2008 to 41 in 2011 and have now rebounded into the range of 55 to 70 per year.

Due to the notice of Transfer Inspection Program there has been a significant upswing in septic tank replacement permits requested. In 2009 there were no tank replacement applications. That number grew to 40 in 2014.

Applications for well site inspections went from 27 per year in 2008 to 14 in 2010 and have since stabilized around 30 per year.

Through 2008 The department is was seeing an increase in the number of Alternative Systems needing to be utilized. This increase can be attributed to advances in soil testing knowledge related to clay soils and the presence of a high percentage of rock as well as the build out of flat lots with deep soils leaving the steep, shallow soils and more difficult and expensive to develop lots. Beginning in 2009 the rate of alternative system applications has dropped from 56 systems per year to the range of 20-30 systems per year. All Alternative Systems are processed by the Wastewater Engineer who also manages this part of the division. He has been training other staff to assist with alternative systems.



The department is seeing an increase in the number of Alternative Systems needing to be utilized. This is due to changes in State regulations and a limited number of quality lots being available. All Alternative Systems are

processed by the Wastewater Engineer who also manages this part of the division. He has been training other staff to assist with alternative systems.

## Code Enforcement

While Code Enforcement has historically been a function of the division, it wasn't until fiscal year 2007 that a serious effort was made to identify code violations and pursue compliance through the complaint process.

Our program has been a reactive program, not a proactive program. We have discussed the possibility of becoming proactive during fire season to eliminate high weeds that provide fuel for fires.

Four staff has been assigned this function. Staff includes a supervisor, two code enforcement officers and a hearing officer. The Hearing Officer works part time to hearing cases. He is available for standby if we have last minute hearings.

Much time has been devoted to setting up this program. Various programs were studied, hearings with other counties were attended by the staff and guidelines were prepared and adopted by the Board of Supervisors to direct the overall program. While the program is fairly well situated at this time we are continuing to make changes to improve the function of the hearing process.

Code enforcement staff has spoken in front of various groups to get the word out that the County is making an effort to improve the overall appearance of Gila County.

The following is a before and after picture of a recent code enforcement violation. It is important to note that cleaning up the County can have not only visual appeal but have a positive impact on our economy and environment as well. This violation provided breeding areas for insects and rodents.

## Code Violation – Before Picture



## Code Violation – After Picture



The goal of Code Enforcement is to help in making Gila County a clean and attractive place to live and visit. This is a very important undertaking and it is appropriate for the County to lead the way.

We held our first hearing in January 2007. Ten cases were scheduled for that particular hearing date. Seven of the ten code violators initiated compliance or came into compliance prior to having a hearing. All ten cases were resolved within three months of the hearing date. The vast majority of cases never need to go before the Hearing Officer because the property owner cleans them up.

Code Compliance allows for a 30 day period to clean up the violation. If it is not cleaned up then they are scheduled to go in front of the Hearing Officer. If they

have cleaned up their property (after the 30 days but before the hearing) they may be dismissed with no fine or punishment. In cases such as these the County assumes the full cost put into the case.

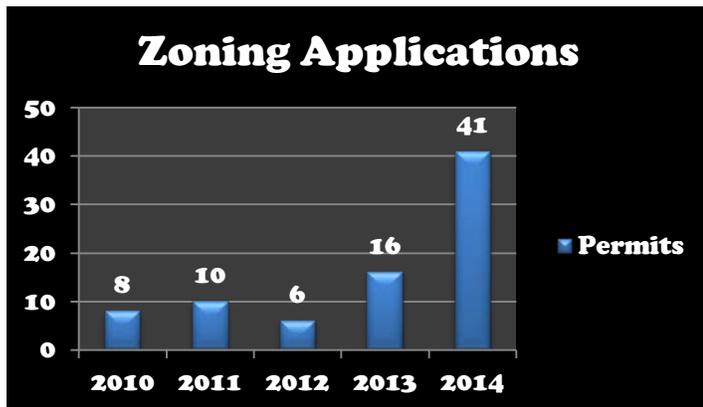
While Code Enforcement is not a major revenue producer it does have a positive impact to the county. Our approach to code enforcement has been to simply gain compliance. If we can get compliance without having people fined that has been the preference.

We do take in some revenues through building without permits through the double permit cost and the hearing officer will levy fines that are usually around \$100.

The Guidelines for the Hearing Officer was adopted in 2005 and then we adopted a Clean and Lien Ordinance in 2008. We lost all funding for cleaning up code violations shortly after we obtained it. When we did the cleanup for violators who would not do it themselves we would lien the property for the full cost plus and administrative fee. We have been able to get some of our investment back that way.

### Planning & Zoning

The Director provides staff time for this part of the division. A part time staff person works out of the Payson office.



The total revenues for this department were \$30,577. Revenues from Minor Land Divisions accounted for \$22,750 or 74.4% of the total revenues. Part of this is due an increase in fees that became effective March 15, 2007. After the adjustment in fees we averaged \$542 per Minor Land Division, prior to the increase our average was \$186.

Processing a minor land division includes significant staff time doing research to ensure compliance with

subdivision regulations and engineering time to consider compliance with Registrar of Contractors rules for surveys and to ensure the correct math. We also have to do mail outs to obtain input from various fire departments. Prior to the fee increase the collected fees were inadequate to support staff activities in review of these applications.

Adjustments need to be made to the overall fee structure for Planning & Zoning similar to what was done for the Minor Land Divisions. The total amount of time currently allocated to this function would equal well over \$100,000 per year when wages and benefits are factored in. This assumes that the director puts 50% of his time into planning and zoning and that the planning tech position put 80% of her time. The part time planner was factored in at 100% of his time. We are capturing 30% of the cost to provide service.



Services that require public hearings, public notices, mail outs, and significant staff review need immediate attention. These services include:

- Rezoning Applications
- Conditional Use Permits
- Plan Amendments
- Variances

The processing of subdivision applications while not requiring public notices is very staff time intensive. The fees that we collect for all of the services listed above do not come close to paying for the cost to provide those services. Fees have not been reviewed for quite some time.

Services that are primarily for the benefit of an individual or company, and this individual or company reaps financial benefits from this service should be required to pay for the full cost of that service, not all the tax payers for Gila County.

Changes made to the Planning & Zoning Department during this past year include addressing the enforcement and fee schedule for Minor Land Divisions, and working to achieve a more cooperative customer service philosophy.

The role of leadership for this department has been to constantly remind everyone that we want to all be going in the same direction with a the needs of our customer and the quality of life for all county residents to be number one on our list of importance.

There have also been more mistakes or errors made during the review process this year than I am comfortable with. This includes public noticing requirements on more than one occasion, staff review for Rezoning or Comprehensive Plan amendments not being thorough enough and several others. Part of this is due to not having adequate staffing, and needing to slow down to ensure thoroughness. We have instituted changes to provide greater assurance that mistakes will decrease in the future.

## Floodplain



Limiting the threats to homes and people from flooding is a very important function.

One floodplain staff was added to the division this past fiscal year, and another one has just recently been added. We also just recently signed a delegation agreement with the Floodplain Administrator to take over more responsibilities for review of permit applications for floodplain clearance.

The Floodplain Department does not produce any revenue at this time. It would be appropriate to charge for Use Permits at the very least. It varies between counties in charging for use permits. Some counties

charge nothing and some charge \$150 to \$300 for their use permits.

If we charge the \$150 fee during the last fiscal year we would have generated approximately \$10,000 in revenues. The cost to provide this service is in excess of \$100,000.

The Delegation agreement we have with Public Works allows this division to be in control of about 90% of all floodplain reviews. This provides better assurances that review requests are processed with the concept of one stop shop as a high priority.

## Summary

First I cannot stress how important it is to focus a significant amount of energy and thought towards refining the One-Stop-Shop concept. I believe we've made significant progress but we must understand more exactly what our goal is and then pursue it vigorously.

It will be through collaboration with other departments as well as within the division that we will be able to refine the One-Stop-Shop concept. One-Stop-Shop is a process and does not necessarily need to be a department. Once we clearly define what it is we want to accomplish it will be up to the leadership to be constantly pushing us in the same direction. Leadership within the division rests with the director and department managers.

Second, we need to continue to build our communication structures with the public. We need to expand our websites, not only for information but to make it more convenient to our customers to pay for services and to submit applications. We need to devise other communication structures such as radio and new letters so that we maximize the input potential.

It is of the utmost importance that we build trust with our constituents, and in order to do that we must communicate at a higher level than we currently are. The more input we are able to get the better off we and the public are.

Third, we need to focus more time and energy into the planning process. It is through the planning process that we will have the opportunity to develop a vision of where we really want to go and at the

same time facilitate the building of trust between the County and our constituents.

Fourth, we need to continue to pursue additional staffing to keep up with service demand and to put more time and effort into the Planning and Zoning function.

The fifth, and final objective for the department is to develop a fee for service structure that allows the Community Development Division to have our customers pay 75% to 80% of the cost to provide services.