



City of Duluth, MN

Economic Development Study Summary & Recommendations

June 2023

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Economic Development Study

The purpose of this study was to:

- 1) Evaluate and provide recommendations on existing economic development policy, programs, partnerships, and staffing.
- 2) Evaluate and provide recommendations on the development process in terms of communications, process, coordination, and customer experience.

Observations and Recommendations Summary

The following summary observations and recommendations are the key findings of the work conducted in the high-level economic development study. The following are proposed as actionable recommendations to strengthen the City's role in economic development prospects and projects moving forward. Timeframes are estimates of the length of time it will take to complete each recommendation.

Observation #1- Economic Development Leadership, Partnership, and Synergy

The City of Duluth has a highly dedicated staff who are committed to their divisions and roles and enjoy collaborating across teams. However, there is inconsistency in who the development community contacts and external misperception in economic development staff roles. The divisions of Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspections were found to operate, make decisions, and interpret codes independently, causing confusion. Developers and citizens noted they would like to have the ability to discuss projects with senior leadership who represent all permitting and inspections staff and can make final decisions across all divisions.

In consideration to partnership and synergy with invested organizations, the economic development process in Duluth is fragmented. Often, the City is not privy to development projects, or potential projects, until late stages of negotiations and decisions to locate in Duluth are made. This can cause significant issues and delays in development if permitting and inspections regulations are overlooked or not considered. Duluth being uninvolved in the process can also stymie the development intentions and future plans of the City of Duluth.

Recommendation 1.A: Realign Duties and Responsibilities

Department staff realignment is recommended to ease bottlenecks in the development process and create clarity among internal staff and external partners. There is a marked need for improving the efficiency of business development and economic development across all facets of the permitting, zoning and economic development process, both within the City and with external partners.

Timeframe: 6 – 9 Months *Priority: High*

Recommendation 1.B: Reorganize Working Group

To promote a centralized, synergistic economic development ecosystem, the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should meet quarterly and on an as needed basis dependent on future or active development projects or initiatives that could impact future development.

Timeframe: 6 – 9 Months *Priority: High*

Recommendation 1.C: Establish Monthly Working Team

To create transparency and working relationships in the development process, a group of designees with subject-matter expertise from each entity in the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should be established, and meet monthly and on an as needed basis dependent on future or active development projects.

Timeframe: 1 – 3 Months *Priority: High*

Recommendation 1.D: Instill a Culture of Open and Prompt Communication Between Partners

To prevent delays or roadblocks in the development process, the Mayor and her selected senior representatives should be apprised of all development projects, including speculative, that are occurring or will occur in Duluth.

*Timeframe: 6 – 9 Months Priority: **High***

Recommendation 1.E: Develop a Regional Economic Development Strategy

To set the stage for meaningful, targeted economic development progress, the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should work together to establish an action plan to guide regional economic development strategy.

*Timeframe: 12 – 18 Months Priority: **Moderate***

Observation #2- Development Process Improvement

The Duluth development approval and permitting process has some areas for improvement. Survey feedback indicated relatively average results; however, the detailed comments show areas for process improvement.

Recommendation 2.A: Expedite and Provide Clarity to the Development Process

Processes and policies of the Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspections divisions were reviewed from an external and anecdotal standpoint of residents and developers. Updates should be made to expedite and provide clarity to the development process.

*Timeframe: 9 – 12 Months Priority: **Moderate***

Recommendation 2.B: Create Internal and External Communications and PR Plan

Internal and external communications and PR plans should be developed to identify the City's "why," establish the importance of the City's work in economic development and communicate the City's responsibilities and work in the economic development ecosystem in Duluth to provide clarity to residents.

*Timeframe: 9 – 12 months Priority: **Moderate***

Recommendation 2.C: Develop Process Improvement Plan

To address the overall development process in Duluth, an improvement plan should be developed based on feedback from City Staff, permitting, and construction professionals.

*Timeframe: 9 – 12 months Priority: **Moderate***

Recommendation 2.D: Institute Quality Assurance Plan

To improve consistency in the development and building plan review processes, a Quality Assurance review procedure should be developed and implemented.

*Timeframe: 9 – 12 months Priority: **Low***

Recommendation 2.E: Conduct Fee Analysis

The City should undertake a comprehensive, independent analysis of development fees to consider and resolve concerns regarding fees.

*Timeframe: 9 – 12 months Priority: **Low***

Introduction

Purpose of the Economic Development Study

The purpose of this study was to:

- 1) Evaluate and provide recommendations on existing economic development policy, programs, partnerships, and staffing.
- 2) Evaluate and provide recommendations on the development process in terms of communications, process, coordination, and customer experience.

Background and Overview

As part of Mayor Emily Larson's goals and objectives to enhance ease-of-use and satisfaction with the development process in Duluth, a study was conducted by Baker Tilly, US LLP (Baker Tilly) to review the policies, procedures, and performance of the City of Duluth's Planning and Economic Development department. This department includes the divisions of Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspection. Goals of the review were to provide recommendations for improvement of economic development processes carried out by the City of Duluth.

Methodology

Baker Tilly began the project by gathering information and data on the City through documents submitted by the City. These documents supplied pertinent information about the City, Planning and Economic Development department, operations, and partner agencies. Planning and strategic documents reviewed include the 2022 Economic Development Goals and Strategic Proposals, Imagine Duluth 2035, 2021-2022 Duluth Workforce Board Regional and Local Strategic Plan, and 2013 Economic Development Strategic Plan. Procedural and systematic documents reviewed include Permit Process Workflow, Construction Services & Inspections Permitting Process Information and website, employee flow chart, job descriptions, onboarding checklists, and others.

After document review, in-person meetings were conducted on 12/6/2022 with City of Duluth staff as well as local and regional partners related to development and economic development. The City of Duluth staff meeting included personnel from divisions including Planning & Development, Construction Services & Inspections, and Workforce Development. The local and regional partner meeting included stakeholders such as APEX, Duluth Seaway and Port Authority, Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, and Entrepreneur Fund. These communications provided a great deal of information, specifically anecdotal and intrinsic, not available in documentation. Conversations with City employees and partners proved to be an important part of the process. A summary of notes from staff and partner meetings can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively. A memo regarding the staff and partner meetings can be found in

To gain public insight, feedback was requested through a public survey which was launched on February 15, 2023, and closed on February 28, 2023, providing for two weeks of public response. The survey was promoted by the City through emails, social media, and press release. City partners also promoted the survey; partners included APEX, Duluth Chamber, and Downtown Duluth. The survey received a total of 164 responses from a variety of end users providing ample feedback to impact the process. In addition to public surveys, developer interviews were conducted to garner longform feedback and gain an understanding of the planning, inspections, and permitting process from a developers point-of-view. Survey and interview responses were utilized to develop recommendations. The summary of survey results can be found in Appendix C.

Organizational Strengths

During this study, Baker Tilly observed intrinsic strengths of the City and its staff as it related to the study being conducted. These strengths included:

- A dedicated staff committed to their divisions and roles and who enjoy collaborating across teams.
- A commitment to the growth and development of the City through assistance to residents and developers.
- An openness to work with external organizations and partners to benefit the growth and development of the City.

Organizational Challenges

During this study, Baker Tilly observed challenges for the city to overcome to enhance its Planning and Economic Development department. The following are themes and challenges that were found.

- There is a need for the City to have increased participation with corporate partners to better understand what's happening in the corporate development sector on the front-end.
- Roles need to be established between the City and partners as to clearly define what Duluth should be doing as related to economic development.
- Duluth needs established best practices for stronger cooperation and collaboration between economic development and workforce development within city departments.
- Duluth doesn't have the staffing to select and prepare sites for shovel readiness.
- The City needs one point of contact for economic development projects and permitting questions/approvals. That point of contact should have the authority to make decisions and provide "yes" or "no" answers in a quick manner.
- Economic Development in Duluth should involve less silos. The City should be included in discussions involving planning, vision, recruitment, business recruitment and retention, etc. if the projects are located within the City.
- If projects are occurring in Duluth, the City should know on the front end, but this doesn't happen currently.

Organizational Opportunities

During this study, Baker Tilly observed opportunities for the City to enhance its Planning and Economic Development Department. The following are themes and opportunities that were found and which guided recommendations.

- Enhanced synergy between the City and its economic development partners.
- Better coordination of Planning and Economic Development department staff throughout project lifecycles.
- Senior staff leader with the authority to make department-wide decisions and a firm knowledge of economic development processes, tools, and procedures.
- Development of a process improvement plan, quality assurance procedure, and communications campaign to enhance customer satisfaction and overall procedures within the department.

Observations and Recommendations

The observations and subsequent recommendations detailed below were determined based on all project inputs including staff and stakeholder meetings, public survey, and developer interviews.

Observation #1- Economic Development Leadership, Partnership, and Synergy

The City of Duluth has a highly dedicated staff who are committed to their divisions and roles and enjoy collaborating across teams. However, there is inconsistency in who the development community contacts and external misperception in economic development staff roles. Divisions within Planning & Development and Construction Services were found to operate, make decisions, and interpret codes independently, causing confusion within the process. Developers and citizens alike noted they would like to have the ability to discuss projects with senior leadership who represent all permitting and inspections staff and can make final decisions across all divisions.

In consideration to partnership and synergy with invested organizations, the economic development process in Duluth is fragmented. Often, the City is not privy to development projects, or potential projects, until late stages of negotiations and decisions to locate in Duluth are made. This can cause significant issues and delays in development if permitting and inspections regulations are overlooked or not considered. Duluth being uninvolved in the process can also stymie the development intentions and future plans of the City of Duluth.

Recommendation 1.A

Realign Duties and Responsibilities

Department staff realignment is recommended to ease bottlenecks in the development process and create clarity among internal staff and external partners. There is a marked need for improving the efficiency of business development and economic development across all facets of the permitting, zoning and economic development process, both within the City and with external partners.

- A senior staff position should be determined to lead and have decision-making authority over the Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspections divisions. This position should take input and direction from department staff but have the authority to make a final decision on all development projects.
- This senior staff position should have an active role in the Mayor's Economic Development Workgroup and have well rounded knowledge of economic development processes beyond city duties including business recruitment, retention, and expansion.

Recommendation 1.B

Reorganize Working Group

To promote a centralized, synergistic economic development ecosystem, the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should meet quarterly and on an as needed basis dependent on future or active development projects or initiatives that could impact future development.

- Objectives of these meetings should include discussion of general updates regarding economic development in Duluth and how partners can leverage and support one another in the process.
- This group is informational and not technical in nature and should include, but is not limited to, senior leaders at APEX, Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, and Duluth Seaway Port Authority, Northland Connection, and Downtown Duluth.
- Partnerships should be formed with workforce and childcare development providers to bring them together in lockstep with economic development initiatives. These partners should be involved in development discussions and include K-12 and career and technical education (CTE), training partners, technical schools,

community colleges, and four-year institutions.

- To create clarity regarding group function, a name change to this high-level group should be considered (ex., Duluth Economic Development Council).

Recommendation 1.C

Establish Monthly Working Team

To create transparency and working relationships in the development process, a group of designees with subject-matter expertise from each entity in the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should be established, and meet monthly and on an as needed basis dependent on future or active development projects.

- Objectives of these meetings should include discussion of development project details, requirements including permitting and inspections, decision making needs, project timelines, workforce needs, and other information required to move development forward.
- This group should be made up of decision-making, subject-matter-experts in the economic development process and tasked with more technical work related to development and potential development projects.
- This group will openly share information and actively break down silos in the development process in Duluth.

Recommendation 1.D

Instill a Culture of Open and Prompt Communication Between Partners

To prevent delays or roadblocks in the development process, the Mayor and her selected senior representatives should be apprised of all development projects, including speculative, that are occurring or will occur in Duluth. (See Appendix A, SWOT Analysis, page 14)

- Notification of new or speculative projects should occur as soon as feasibly possible through appropriate communication channels. With this model, senior staff can understand project complexities, be actively involved in the planning and permitting process during project inception and create and carryout a streamlined development process for the client.
- This process should be addressed with all partners but may first require a relationship building process between designated senior leaders with the City and external partners. The City and external partners should meet as a team and consider holding a half-day or full-day planning session moderated by a trusted local leader or consultant to determine best practices for communication and collaboration.

Recommendation 1.E

Develop a Regional Economic Development Strategy

To set the stage for meaningful, targeted economic development progress, the Mayor's Economic Development Working Group, as it currently stands, should work together to establish an action plan to guide regional economic development strategy.

- Strategy should build off each participating entity's organizational strategic plans but define a combined effort and action plan.
- The action plan should provide direction and measurable actions over a defined period up to ten years with opportunity for annual updates.

- Strategy to advance affordable housing efforts and growth within the community should be defined in the action plan. Housing is a major component in economic development and should be central when planning for future economic growth.

Observation #2- Development Process Improvement

The Duluth development approval and permitting process has some areas for improvement. Survey feedback indicated relatively average results; however, the detailed comments show areas for process improvement and community satisfaction.

Recommendation 2.A

Expedite and Provide Clarity to the Development Process

Processes and policies of the Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspections divisions were reviewed from an external and anecdotal standpoint of residents and developers. Updates should be made to expedite and provide clarity to the development process.

- To develop a transparent and streamlined process, policy should state that any debate regarding the interpretation of the development code should be taken to the senior staff member for mediation and determination. This should be completed in the quickest manner possible. (See Appendix D beginning on page 21: Summary of Developer Interviews, 1.b, 1.d; Survey comments, Appendix D)
- City and staff guidelines should be put in place establishing that initial decisions made by department staff are final and cannot be reversed, so long as nothing in the developer's plan is altered. (See Appendix D: Summary of Developer Interviews beginning on page 21, 1.g; Survey comments, Appendix D)
- Policies should be put in place to improve the timeline of projects already in the approval process pipeline but require changes to meet permitting standards. Submitted projects that are denied and require changes should have an expedited review process once changes are made so that development is not delayed due to a waiting period between approval meetings. (See Appendix D beginning on page 21, Summary of Developer Interviews, 2.a; Appendix D, survey comments)

Recommendation 2.B

Create Internal and External Communications and Public Relations Plan

Internal and external communications and public relations plans should be developed to identify the City's "why," establish the importance of the City's work in economic development and communicate the City's responsibilities and work in the economic development ecosystem in Duluth to provide clarity to residents. (See Appendix A, SWOT Analysis, page 13)

- An internal campaign should be developed to instill individual ownership over the importance of roles and responsibilities and how City employees and departments impact the growth of the Duluth and its tax base. An internal process map of the economic development process should be defined and distributed to staff but could also be used externally.
- An external campaign related to economic development and the development process should be created to provide ongoing information to the community and potential investors to establish what City departments are doing to catalyze growth and present the case for how the City is involved in economic development and expanding the tax base.

Recommendation 2.C

Develop Process Improvement Plan

To address the overall development process in Duluth, an improvement plan should be developed based on feedback from City Staff, permitting, and construction professionals.

- The improvement plan should be designed to decrease development timelines, provide clarity to code in addition to a “Yes-No Flowchart” making interdepartmental code interpretation and decision-making consistent, and address the structure and function of departmental roles and modify decision-making authority and interdepartmental conflict-resolution guidelines. (See Appendix D, Summary of Developer Interviews; Appendix D, Survey comments, beginning on page 21)

Recommendation 2.D

Institute Quality Assurance Plan

To improve consistency in the development and building plan review processes, a Quality Assurance review procedure should be developed and implemented.

- The Quality Assurance review procedure should take place before conclusion of all medium to large size development projects to ensure that all projects are treated equally and consistently.

Recommendation 2.E

Conduct Fee Analysis

The City should undertake a comprehensive, independent analysis of development fees to combat concerns regarding fees. (See Appendix D beginning on page 21, Survey Number 4)

- Analysis should ensure fee rates are competitive, efficient, and sufficient to cover the total costs of regulation, including both direct and indirect costs.
- Communications and public relations should also be improved through an awareness and communications improvement campaign including website and checklist materials to advance understanding and ease of process

Prioritization of Recommendations

The recommendations detailed in this report are prioritized as high, moderate, and low. High priority recommendations are topics the city should consider implementing first, approximately within the next six months. Medium and low priority items are recommendations that provide positive impact to the Planning & Development and Construction Services & Inspections divisions but do not have as high urgency as other identified recommendations.

Each recommendation has a listed anticipated level of investment and timeframe. The timeframe is an estimate of the length of time each recommendation will take to complete. These estimates are for planning purposes only and are relative to this project.

Recommendation	Priority	Timeframe	Anticipated Level of Investment
Observation #1- Economic Development Leadership, Partnership, and Synergy			
1.A: Realign Duties and Responsibilities	High	6 - 9 Months	\$\$
1.B: Reorganize Working Group	High	6 - 9 Months	\$
1.C: Establish Monthly Working Team	High	1 - 3 Months	\$
1.D: Instill a Culture of Open and Prompt Communication Between Partners	High	6 - 9 Months	\$
1.E: Develop a Regional Economic Development Strategy	Moderate	12 - 18 Months	\$\$\$
Observation #2- Development Process improvement			
2.A: Expedite and Provide Clarity to the Development Process	Moderate	9 - 12 Months	\$
2.B: Create Internal and External Communications and Public Relations Plan	Moderate	9 - 12 Months	\$
2.C: Develop Process improvement Plan	Moderate	9 - 12 Months	\$\$
2.D: Institute Quality Assurance Plan	Low	9 - 12 Months	\$\$
2.E: Conduct Fee Analysis	Low	9 - 12 Months	\$\$

Appendices

Appendix A- Staff Meeting Notes

Duluth Staff Meeting Notes

Meeting held on 12/6/2022.

Primary Themes

- Assistance for small businesses is available through multiple resources in Duluth. The SBDC is available to future and current business owners for the purposes of planning, starting, managing, and growing a business. The SBDC was once operated under University of MN at Duluth but is now housed under the Northland Foundation. SBDC services have decreased to Duluth businesses because services are overextended, and regional outreach has grown. The 1200 Fund is available to help small businesses financially but is only available to businesses with 2+ years of financials. There is opportunity to better integrate workforce development with small businesses and provide a centralized website for small business assistance programs and resources.
- There is a need for the City to have increased participation with corporate partners to better understand what's happening in the corporate development sector on the front-end. *[the city needs a representative that attends APEX, Chamber, and Northland events, programs, and meetings as appropriate. It would be highly beneficial for the City to have the city on boards, even if ex-officio]*
- A new customer-facing permitting process system is being developed, with a primary function of digitally tracking the permitting process.
- The City should be involved in economic development projects on the front-end to mitigate permitting issues during the project, especially close to the end.
- May need to investigate a communication strategy for permitting, both for commercial and residential.
- Roles need to be established between the City and partners as to clearly define what Duluth should be doing as related to economic development. As it stands, it seems that Duluth's role should be focused on permitting, zoning, and city tools such as a TIF. The City should have a role in the economic development process toward the beginning of projects, when appropriate.
- An economic development consortium should be established between the City, APEX, Port, and Chamber for open communication, established roles, and transparency.
- Partnerships should be formed to bring workforce partners together in lockstep including the City, training partners, community colleges, technical schools, four-year institutions, and K-12 (specifically CTE courses).
- Need best practices for stronger cooperation and collaboration between economic development and workforce development within city departments.
- Focus on economic gardening and help promote, expand, and retain the City's current businesses; potentially bring back the "Locally Rooted" initiative which was started from Imagine Duluth (Policy 5, Strategy 1)
- Focus Tax Abatements on local small businesses.

SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">S</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional, dedicated, and trustworthy staff that are experts and sincere in their work. Value based group that knows everything they do matters for the community. • Ambitious team with big goals that takes a multipronged approach. • Team members know the city tools they can bring to the table. • Team that is open to change, even if its incremental • Innovative partnership between workforce, planning, and economic development • Equity is a core value for the city. • Focuses on tourism and sustainability. • Everyone realizes that silos are dangerous, but also very easy to fall into • Innovative and creative pilot programs • Engaged business community and workforce 	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When failures happen, everyone knows about them; when wins happen, not enough people know “because that’s their (the city’s) job.” • Sometimes projects feel a little scattered because they can “chase a squirrel” • Scope and scale of issues trying to be tackled are too big for the city, staff, and budget • Staff is overextended.
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">O</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of programs, specifically for qualitative data and outcomes • Build stronger partnerships with others involved in EcD, like community college, to facilitate use of their programs/incentives. • Strategy as to how to share the “wins” with partners and the region. • Leveraging tourism for talent attraction • Development focused on sustainability. • City should lay out vision so other organizations can support based off one vision. • Need a strategic economic development plan, implementation plan, etc., to do more focused work. 	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing shortages within the city • Shrinking workforce • Overextending the same resources- ex. Is TIF • A large portion of the population doesn’t work- retired. • Some of the population can’t work- transportation issues, childcare, etc.

General Notes

- **Can you talk about the types of assistance available to current businesses from the City? SBDC? Gaps?**
 - Considering a storefront development program which would partner with entrepreneur fund.
 - Program to deploy construction financing.
 - 1200 fund for small businesses, but some small businesses don't have two years of financials to qualify.
 - SBDC, but now taken over by Northland Foundation; not as focused on small businesses in Duluth (was located within the University of MN at Duluth)
 - Dislocated worked funds that can pay for training, some costs; incumbent worker training to help small businesses work with consultants and small businesses.
 - Opportunity to better integrate workforce development with small businesses.
 - No current corporate partner board, but corporate partners are all members of the chamber; corporate partners are aligning with APEX, but the city isn't always in conversation- APEX is completely private with no public funding- APEX wants to move more into the convening space.
- **Permitting Process**
 - New permitting process system that is being put in place- primary function to digitally track permitting process and it is customer-facing.
 - Much of the process breakdown in relation to permitting comes when the city is brought into the project late.
 - Citizens don't know they need to come to the city for permitting approval.
 - Architects/contractor will use the city as the scapegoat and say they're waiting on the project to be city approved.
 - there is a myth that the City of Duluth is hard to deal with when it comes to permitting.
- **Recruitment/Retention/Expansion**
 - Duluth doesn't have the staffing to select and prepare site for shovel readiness.
 - Potential sites have been chosen and brownfield funds have been used in the past but not to the extent that it should.
 - Could do a better job articulating roles with key stakeholders.
 - Need to create a clarity of roles for the city to let the recruitment partners know and let them know that the city is available on the front end, rather than the back.
 - Port and Airport Authority should have more synergy when it comes to economic development initiatives; should be better alignment and sharing of plans.
 - Not sure that stepping into the recruitment space is the right move, but to have availability to interact with APEX, Port, etc. would be beneficial on the front-end of projects.
- **Workforce**
 - Aging workforce that is rapidly retiring.
 - There is a large chunk of potential workforce that has really struggled with things that come down to poverty (unstable housing, addiction, mental health, etc.) childcare shortages, lots of college students graduating, but are leaving for larger cities.

Appendix B- Partner Meeting Notes

Duluth Partner Meeting Notes

Meeting held on 12/6/2022.

Primary Themes

- The City of Duluth's role should be focused on permitting and zoning, not business recruitment, retention, and expansion.
- It would be helpful for the city to be involved in economic development projects on the front end to head off potential issues with permitting.
- The City needs one POC for economic development projects and permitting questions/approvals. That POC should have the authority to make decisions and provide "yes" or "no" answers in a quick manner.
- Economic Development in Duluth should involve less silos. The City should be included in discussions involving planning, vision, recruitment, BRE, etc. if the projects are located within the City.

General Notes

- **How would you define or explain partnerships between the City, Chamber, APEX, and the Port? Is there room for partnership improvement?**
 - Chamber has regularly scheduled meetings with Mayor, CAO, and Economic Development & Planning speak regularly on specific projects. The Chamber also has a high level of communication with the City Council President, is represented on Mayoral councils, has a standing membership on the Workforce Committee, Planning Committee, and others. The Chamber is working with City Hall on policy changes that could benefit Economic Development- specifically on construction permitting and focused on how to implement those changes.
 - Entrepreneur Fund has overall good relationship and tandem partnerships especially after Covid with business loan forgiveness. Entrepreneur Fund has a general partnership with 1200 Fund, works with the city CDBG office, has worked with the Chamber to promote political advocacy side, and would love to find someone who could be an educational partner.
 - APEX wants to focus on working together, understanding the skills of others/other organizations, determine what each organization is good at and complement each other. Believes that partnership is transparency, true collaboration.
- **What do you see as the City's current role in economic development? Would you anticipate the current role being any different in the future?**
 - The City needs differentiation between planning and economic development; it seems that their focus needs to be on the permitting and planning side of economic development.
 - Plans are approved by one hand and the project plans are approved by someone else- something the city has worked hard to correct.
 - The Chamber is doing economic development out of necessity because the city is doing more planning and permitting than economic development. Ideally there would be a clear, proactive City liaison; city needs a quicker response time, even if it's a just check-in to say this is where we are on this project/approval/permit.
 - The City needs a more proactive Economic Development and Housing leader with a strong economic development background.
- **Is there a need for the City to have a more active role in recruitment/expansion/retention with APEX or the Port?**
 - If the project is occurring in Duluth, the City should be brought in on the front end of the project.
 - The Chamber conducts business recruitment and retention on its own for members, but City staff comes along and can help get meetings with new businesses. The Chamber thinks the city should be upfront and vocal about the direction in which it wants to go in the economic development sphere; after establishing a vision, the Chamber can work to assist in working toward that vision.
 - The City's focus should be on speed to market and permit pre-design approval.

- The City needs one point of contact for economic development and permitting, but that point of contact needs to have the authority to make yes or no decisions instead of having to go to someone else with higher authority.
- **General Comments**
 - Chamber has just put together a "partner matrix" and its focus has transitioned to advocacy; also focusing on placemaking and benchmarking against other cities (Fargo and Asheville); doesn't think the region thinks big enough for talent attraction and retention for purposes of regional growth.
 - The job of the Entrepreneur Fund is to make local business investible, help them grow beyond the million-dollar mark and watch them continue to grow; over 70 business counselors; covers a large area of northern MN.
 - Duluth Seaway Port Authority is the largest maritime port on the Great Lakes by tonnage; intermodal hub; first strategic plan has been completed (2021).
 - APEX visualizes a better economic development synergy in Duluth. This would be defined by established roles for each organization, "pre-meetings" and coordination before site visits, and open/transparent communication between partners.
 - Focus on inclusivity and bringing groups not traditionally involved in economic development into the process (indigenous peoples/tribes, BIPOC, etc.)

Appendix C- Project Update Memo



Memo

To: Mayor Emily Larson

From: Jolena Presti
Daniel Jayroe

Date: January 6, 2023

Subject: Economic Development Audit Update

On behalf of the Baker Tilly team, thank you for your trust in our team and process. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you, with the City of Duluth ("City"), and City partners as we conduct this economic development audit, review and consider existing conditions, and seek to identify opportunities for advancement of economic development in Duluth. It has been a pleasure working with you, your community, and local partners over the past few months. The following is a general update and summary of current findings and an overview of planned and potential next steps.

In summary, virtual and in-person discussions with City of Duluth staff and external economic development partners, follow-up communications, and City and partner documents, have provided abundant information related to the current state of economic development both within city hall and with economic development partners. This status update is meant to provide you with a high-level summary of materials reviewed, key takeaways from discussions and interviews, themes of recommendations for next steps based on information gathered, and a snapshot of what we will work on next.

Due Diligence

To initiate the economic development audit and review process, our team began by reviewing documents provided by the City. These documents supplied pertinent information about the City, Planning and Development Department, operations, and partner agencies. Planning and strategic documents reviewed include the 2022 Economic Development Goals and Strategic Proposals, Imagine Duluth 2035, 2021-2022 Duluth Workforce Board Regional and Local Strategic Plan, and 2013 Economic Development Strategic Plan. Procedural and systematic documents reviewed include Permit Process Workflow, Construction Services & Inspections Permitting Process Information and website, employee flow chart, job descriptions, onboarding checklists, and others.

A day of in-person and virtual interviews were conducted the first week of December, with some follow up after the in-person meetings. These communications provided a great deal of information, specifically anecdotal and intrinsic, not available in documentation. Conversations with City employees and partners proved to be an incredibly important part of the process. Key takeaways from these conversations are listed below.

Brief summary of meeting takeaways (more detailed notes are available if desired):

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- The City has a highly dedicated staff committed to their departments and roles and who enjoy collaborating across teams.
- There is need to further establish staff economic development roles—define where the city wants to be most involved in economic development—with purpose of increasing the tax base.
- The City should have a role in the economic development process toward the beginning of projects, when appropriate. Currently, perception is that the City is focused on permitting, zoning, and City tools such as TIF.
- There is a need for the City to have increased participation with corporate partners to better understand what's happening in the corporate development sector on the front-end. *[the city needs a representative that attends APEX, Chamber, and Northland events, programs, and meetings as appropriate. It would be highly beneficial for the city to have a place on boards, even if ex-officio]*
- An active economic development consortium should continuously function between the City, APEX, Port, and Chamber for open communication, established roles, and transparency.
- Partnerships should be formed to bring workforce partners together in lockstep including the City, training partners, community colleges, technical schools, four year institutions, and K-12 (specifically CTE courses).
- Economic development in Duluth should involve less silos. The City should be included in discussions involving planning, vision, recruitment, business recruitment, retention and expansion, etc. if the projects are located within in Duluth.

Recommendations and Next Steps

From the information gathering stages, we have established recommendation themes for the next steps of the process. Those themes are listed below.

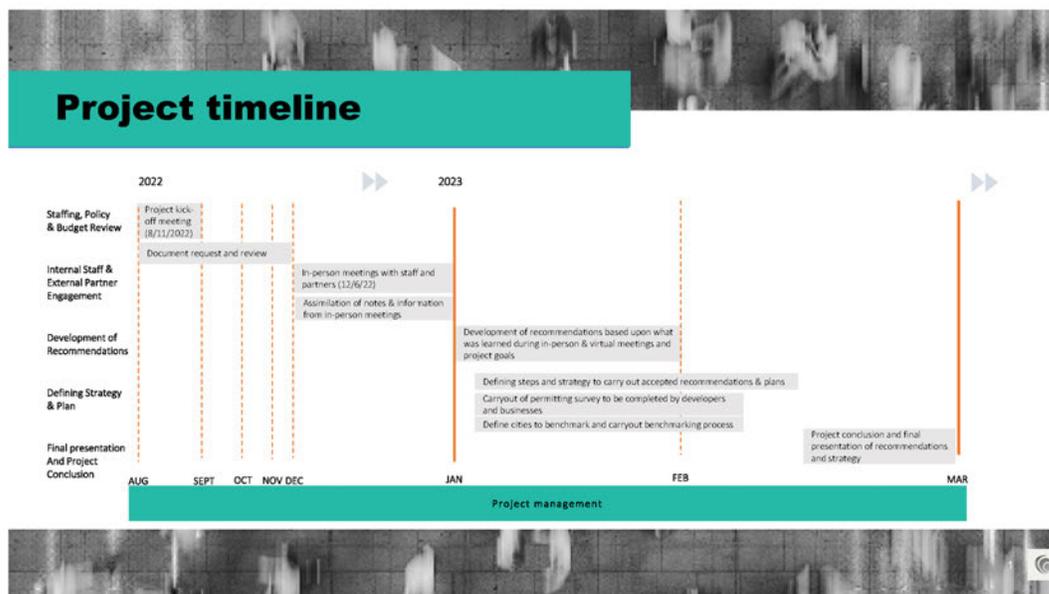
1. Establish and define the City's desired or ideal role in economic development. Identify a strong internal economic development leader to be the main voice, contact, leader in terms of City economic development participation (to work alongside external partners). Consider potential near-future staffing changes (e.g., retirement).
2. The Mayor's Economic Development working group convenes monthly to discuss topics in economic development and serves as a communication and collaboration opportunity. Given this group is already established and includes the many partners desired at the table for expanded activity in economic development coming out of city hall, there is an opportunity to activate this group.
 - An engaged, guided, and activated economic development working group could increase in function including the City, APEX, Port, Chamber, Housing, Workforce Development, Higher Education leadership for open communication, established roles, and transparency.
 - To set the stage for meaningful, targeted progress, this group could work together to establish a workplan/action plan, and targeted economic development strategy. This strategy would build off each entity's organizational strategic plans but define a combined effort and action plan "workbook focused on this effort entirely. The workbook would provide direction and measurable actions over a defined period (typically 5-10 years) with opportunity for annual updates.
3. Affordable housing. Communities nationwide are experiencing a housing crisis. Housing *is* economic development and therefore a strategy should be developed within city hall as well

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as with community housing and economic development partners to advance affordable housing growth in the community.

4. Workforce and childcare development. Partnerships should be formed to bring workforce partners together in lockstep including the city, training partners, community colleges, technical schools, higher education/four-year institutions, and K-12 (specifically CTE courses). This will elevate potential for success in economic development growth in Duluth.
5. Create in internal communications and public relations campaign related to establishing the City's "why." The campaign could instil individual ownership over the importance of roles and responsibilities and how City employees and departments impact the growth of Duluth and the tax base. An internal process map of the economic development process in Duluth should be defined and distributed internally but could also be used externally.
6. Create an external communications and public relations campaign related to economic development, development process (flow diagram) and provide ongoing information to the community and potential investors to establish what City departments are doing to catalyze growth and present the case for how the City is involved in economic development and expanding the tax base.

With the City's direction and approval, next steps in the project will include developing recommendations on task force activation, building a framework around the City's role in economic development, designing an internal and external PR campaign, and beginning to identify roles and responsibilities for an expanded or new economic development leadership position. Below, you can find an updated project timeline based on project history and the recommendations herein. We are excited about moving forward in the economic development audit process and the positive outcomes it will provide for Duluth. Please feel free to contact us with any comments, questions, or concerns.



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Appendix D- Summary of Survey Results



Memo

To: Mayor Emily Larson

From: Jolena Presti, Daniel Jayroe

Date: March 8, 2023

Subject: Economic Development Audit- Survey and Developer Interviews

Overview

The City of Duluth (“the City”) is conducting a review of internal operations to update policies and procedures that will ensure ease-of-use and swift delivery of planning, inspection, and permitting services. To gain insights into the current process, the City requested public feedback through a public survey which was launched on February 15, 2023, and closed on February 28th, 2023, providing for two weeks of public response. The survey was promoted by the City through emails, social media, and press release. City partners also promoted the survey; partners including APEX, Duluth Chamber, and Downtown Duluth. The survey received a total of 164 responses from a variety of end users providing ample feedback to impact the process. In addition to public surveys, developer interviews were also conducted to garner longform feedback and gain an understanding of the planning, inspections, and permitting process from a developers point-of-view.

The feedback and comments herein were gathered from the public survey as well as interviews with developers who have led or considered projects in Duluth. To provide clear and meaningful findings, feedback from the public survey is presented in this memo in full without edits. Information gathered from developers has been summarized and compiled categorically and developers have been left anonymous.

The survey respondents included a wide variety of citizens and professionals who utilize the planning, inspection, and permitting process. This methodology allows for a broad perspective on project sizes from small to large.

Meaningful feedback was garnered from the open-ended answers and comment portions of the surveys, as well as through developer interviews. Themes in responses:

- Overall, the respondents were neutral on a scale of 1 to 10, when rating overall experience (average rating of 5.68), request response time (average rating of 5.42), and preliminary review (average rating of 5.3).
- Feedback indicates an impression that teams within the city departments tend to be isolated or “siloeed” and that attention is needed to break down barriers within the teams.
- When asked if the inspection and/or permitting process was consistent and straightforward 90 respondents, or 58%, noted that the process is consistent and straightforward.

- When asked if city staff were helpful and knowledgeable when answering questions, 105 respondents, or 64%, said “yes” and 39 respondents, or 24%, said “no.”
- Survey and interview responses indicate a need for clarity at the onset of a project and the ability for city representatives to decipher whether all elements of a project are approved from the beginning without fear of subsequently being told that previously approved project elements must be changed, or final plans must be altered at a later date.
- Developers noted that the City should focus on providing “project champions” that can assist with walking through a project from start to finish, providing clarity, understanding, and champion for the process.
- City staff were regarded by developers as committed and hardworking individuals who show compassion and care for their roles and duties.
- Also mentioned by developers was that senior staff and decision-makers should be involved on the front-end and throughout the entire process to ensure transparency and confirm decisions regarding approval or denials.

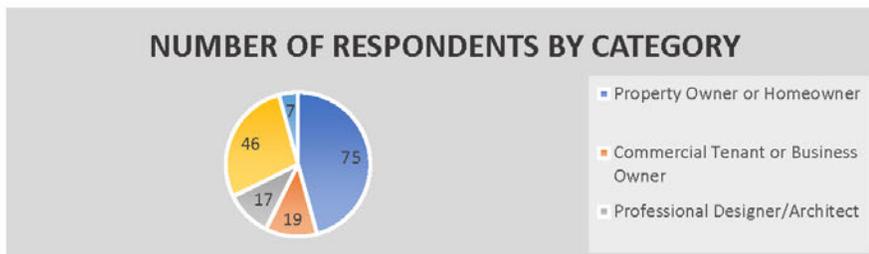
In next steps, it is recommended that City leadership consider a development review process update. One in which internal functions are more closely analyzed, protocols and processes are developed, and the updated effort is tested and then finalized through a public facing campaign which launches the new development process to the public, including developers, and development/economic development partners. A refresh of the City’s process will allow the City team to respond to existing challenges and allow for a more fluid approach to policies and procedures and ensure ease-of-use and swift delivery of planning, inspection, and permitting services moving forward.

The following is a detailed overview of the survey results by question as well as notes from developer phone interviews.

Summary of Online Survey Feedback

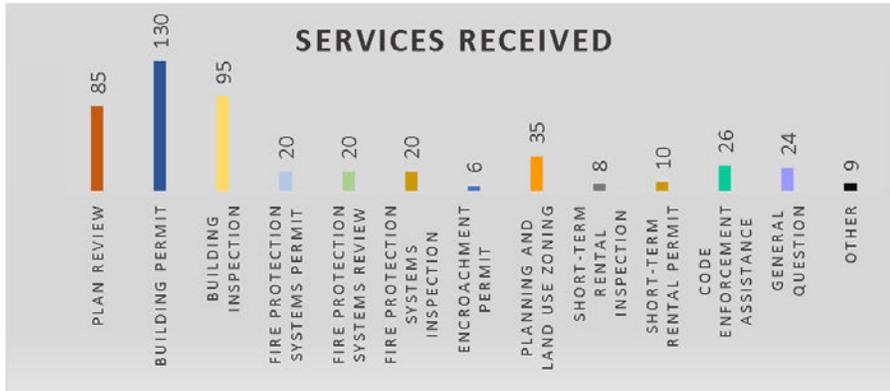
The survey process was conducted online in a digital format through Microsoft Forms. The survey included 20 questions, some of which allowed for comment and one of which that was open-ended answer only. These comments and open-ended answers can be found in the Appendix of this document. The survey was launched on February 15th, 2023, and concluded on February 28th, 2023. A total of 164 responses were recorded and answers to those responses are shown below.

- **Survey Number 1- Number of Respondents by Category:** Out of the 164 respondents, the majority (75) identified themselves as “property owners or homeowners” followed by “contractors” (46). “Commercial tenants or business owners” (19) and “professional designer/architect” (17) were also represented. Respondents that identified as “other” included “renter”, “homeowner and business owner,” “property and business owner,” “commercial property owner,” and “developer.”

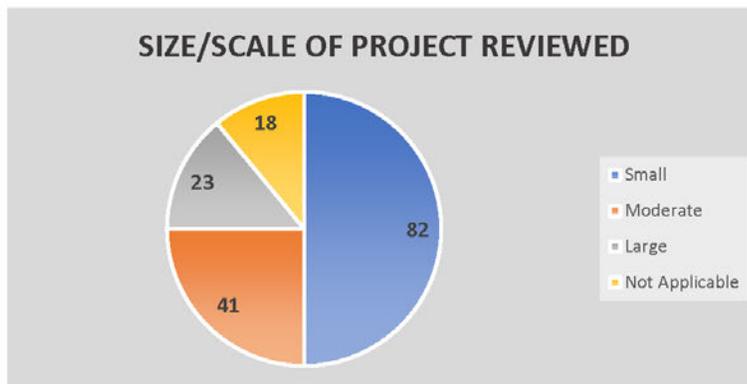


Grammatical edit made on 5/10/2023

- Survey Number 2- Services Received:** For the question “What services did you receive?” respondents were able to choose multiple answers. “Building permits” was identified as the most frequent service utilized followed by “building inspection” and “plan review.” Respondents that chose “other” cited “transportation permit,” “obstruction permit,” “oversize/overweight permit,” “wetland delineation,” and “right of way clearing.”



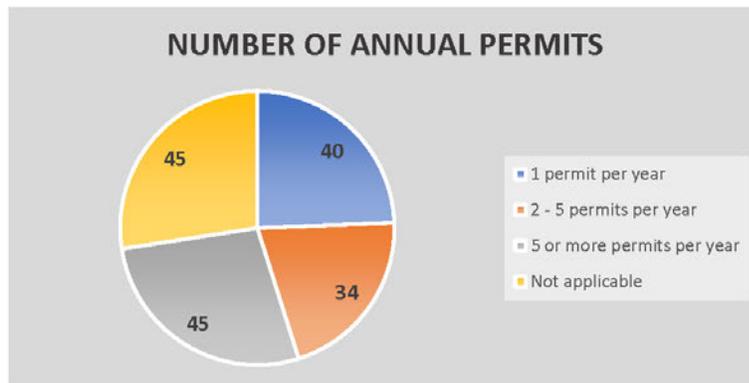
- Survey Number 3- Project Size/Scale:** Respondents were able to choose their project size and scale that was reviewed for survey purposes. Small projects that consist of expansions, additions, or repairs to residential or commercial buildings less than 2,500 square feet were the highest reported at 82. Next, moderate projects which include multifamily residential complexes less than 20 units or commercial buildings between 2,500 and 15,000 square feet, were reported at 41. Large projects that consist of projects for multifamily residential complexes with 20 or more units and commercial projects greater than 15,000 square feet were reported at 21.



- Survey Number 4- Permit Fees:** Respondents were made aware that the State of Minnesota requires municipalities to establish permit fees to cover actual costs for services and were asked about their thoughts about fees. Sixty-two (62) respondents noted that fees are “about right”, 79 noted that fees are “too high”, 23 noted that they were “not sure”, and 0 said permit fees are “too low”.



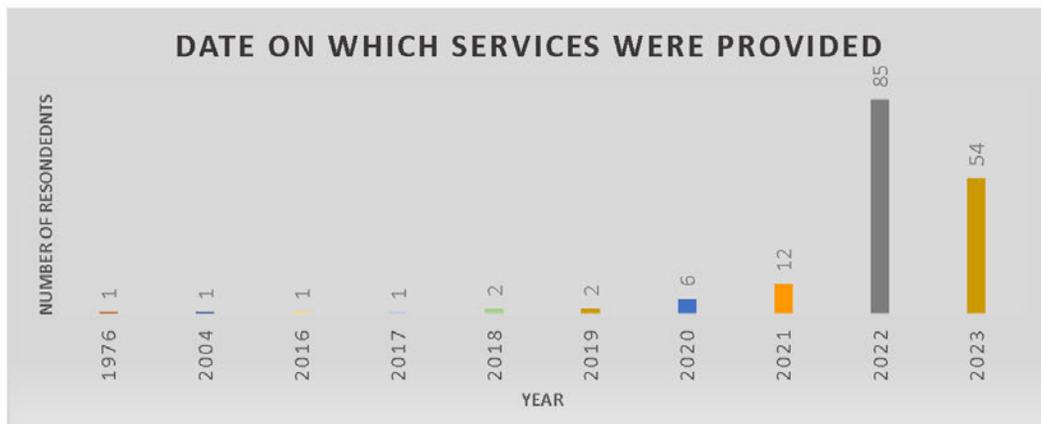
- Survey Number 5- Permit Requests:** There was a large distribution of how many permits were pulled annually by respondents. Forty (40) stated “1 permit per year,” 34 stated “2 – 5 permits per year,” 45 stated “5 or more permits per year,” and 45 stated “not applicable.”



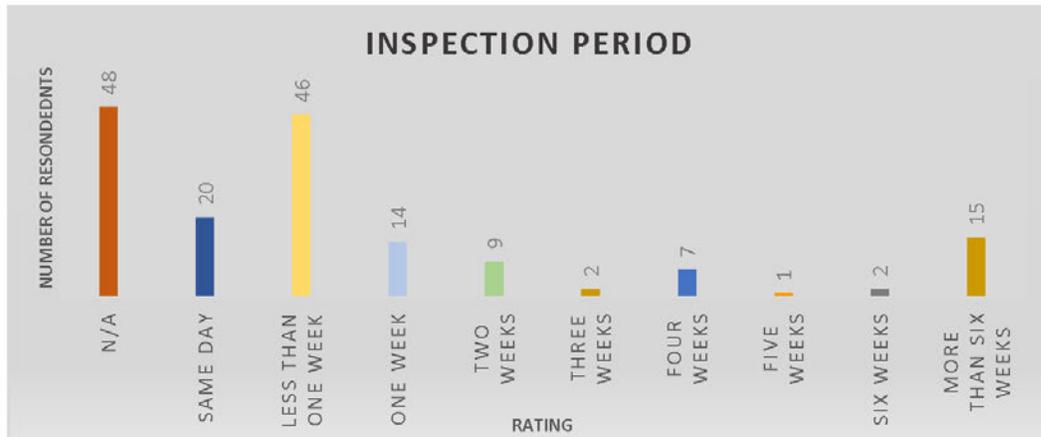
- Survey Number 6- Overall Experience:** Respondents were asked to rate their overall experience with the departments on a scale of 0 – 10, with ten being great. The average rating was 5.68. The average rating for respondent groups are as follows: Commercial Tenant or Business Owner - 3.7; Contractor – 6.5; Professional Designer/Architect – 6; Property Owner/Homeowner – 5.8.



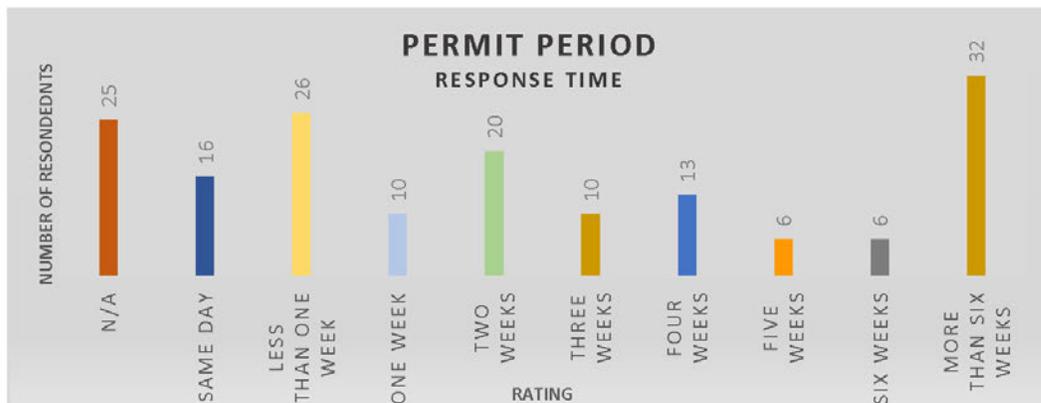
- Survey Number 7- Date on which services were provided:** Respondents were asked to “Choose the date on which services were provided. If your experience took place over a period of time, please choose the date on which your project/inquiry was completed/resolved.” 139 respondents (85%) noted dates in 2022 and 2023.



- Survey Number 8- Inspection Period:** When asked “how long did it take to have an inspection completed?” the most common period chosen was “less than one week.”



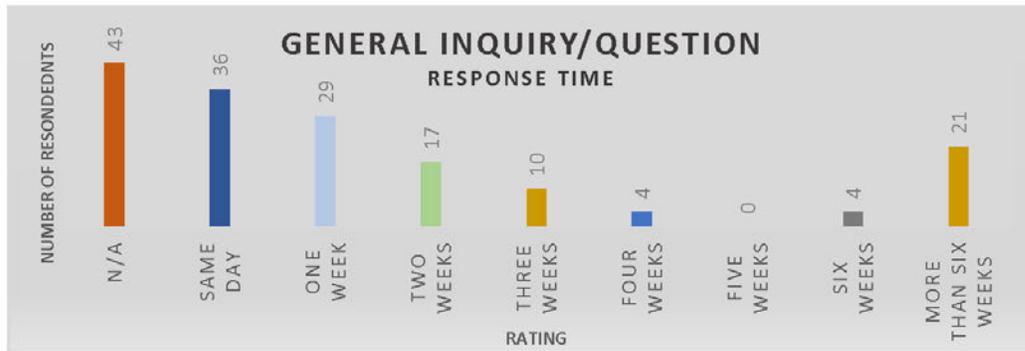
- Survey Number 9- Permit Period:** When asked “how long did it take to receive your permit after initially submitting documentation for approval?” the most common time periods chosen was “more than six weeks” and “less than one week.”



Note: Most of the respondents who chose “more than six weeks” noted that the “inspection or permitting process was not consistent or straightforward.” Most of the respondents who chose “same day” or “less than one week”

noted that their inspection was consistent and straightforward. There were no major differences in project size between the two response categories.

- Survey Number 10- General Inquiry/Question:** When asked how long it took to resolve an inquiry/general question, most respondents either chose “one day” or “one week.”

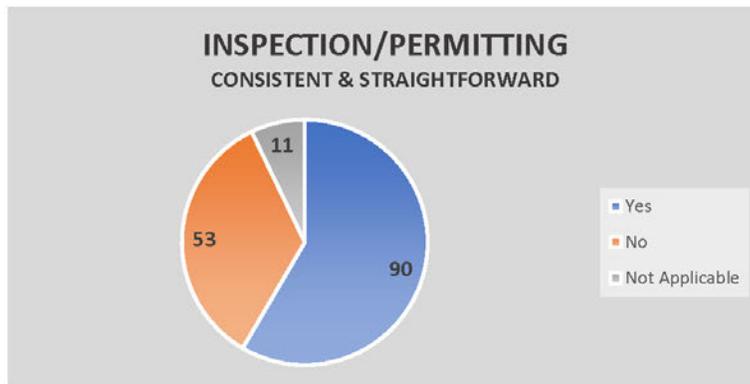


Note: Most of the respondents who chose “more than six weeks” noted that the “inspection or permitting process was not consistent or straightforward.” Most of the respondents who chose “same day” or “one week” noted that their inspection was consistent and straightforward. There were no major differences in project size between the two response categories.

- Survey Number 11- Request Response:** Respondents were asked to rate if their request was handled in a reasonable amount of time on a scale of 0 – 10, with 10 being “most reasonable.” The average rating was 5.42.

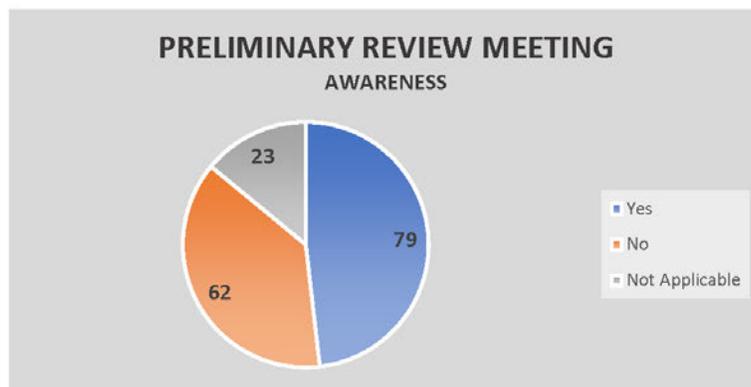


- **Survey Number 12- Inspection/Permitting:** When asked if the inspection and/or permitting process was consistent and straightforward 90 respondents, or 58%, noted that the process is consistent and straightforward.

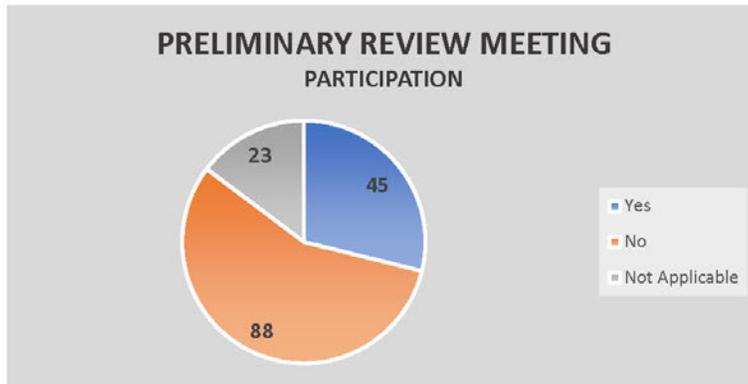


Note: A variety of comments were made regarding this question and are available in Appendix A.

- **Survey Number 13- Preliminary meeting awareness:** When asked if the respondent was aware that there is an option for a preliminary meeting, 79 said "yes" and 62 said "no."

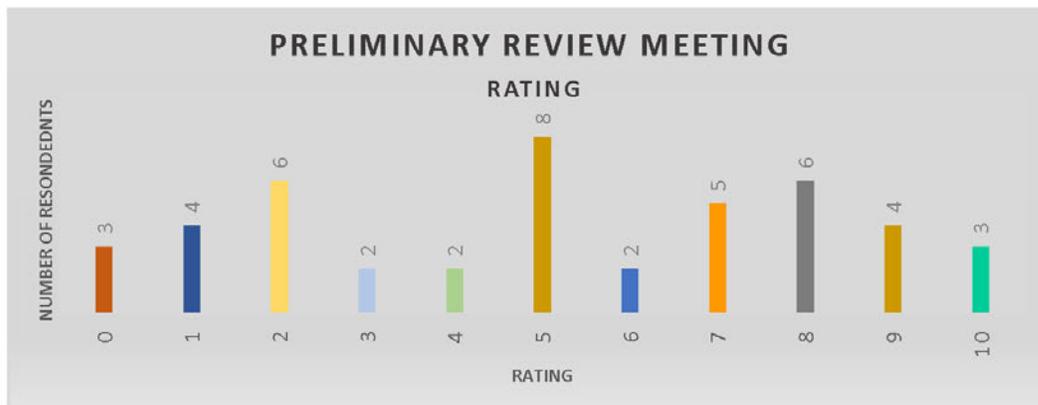


- Survey Number 14- Preliminary review meeting:** When asked if the respondent participated in a preliminary review meeting, 45 said “yes” and 88 said “no.”



Note: Overall, preliminary review did not create a positive or negative impact on the overall experience with the departments. For those that participated in preliminary review, the average rating on the overall process was 5.3.

- Survey Number 15- Preliminary review rating:** For those that participated in preliminary review, the average rating was 5.1.



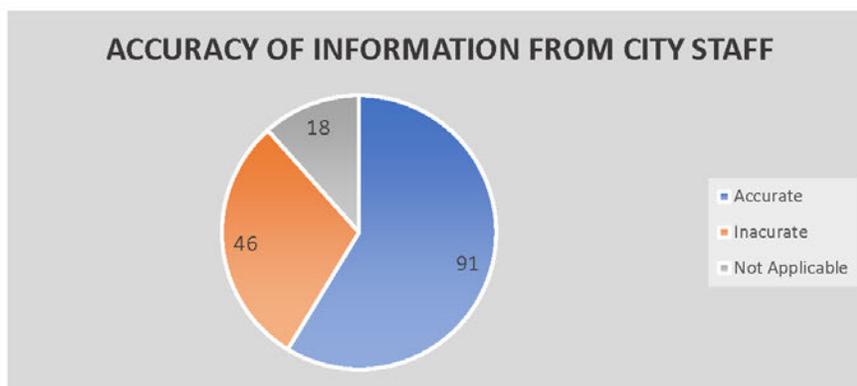
- **Survey Number 16- Open-ended-** “If you participated in preliminary review, do you have any comments about the process.”

Note: Comments were received regarding the preliminary review process and can be found in Appendix B.

- **Survey Number 17- City Staff Courteousness-** When asked about the courteousness of city staff, the average rating was 7.

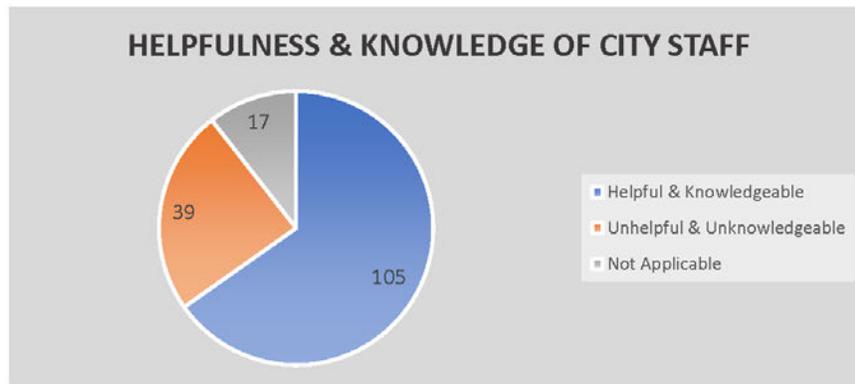


- **Survey Number 18- Accuracy of Information-** When respondents were asked if they received clear and accurate information from city staff, 91 respondents said “yes” and 46 said no.



Note: Comments were received regarding the preliminary review process and can be found in Appendix

- Survey Number 19- Helpfulness and Knowledge-** When asked if city staff were helpful and knowledgeable when answering questions, 105 respondents, or 64%, said “yes” and 39 respondents, or 24%, said “no.”



Note: Comments were received regarding staff helpfulness and knowledge and be found in Appendix D.

- Survey Number 20- Open-ended:** “What can we do to improve our inspection process, plan review process, and/or permitting process? Please explain.”

Note: Comments were received regarding the inspection, plan review, and or permitting process and can be found in Appendix E.

Summary of Developer Interviews

Developer interviews were conducted via phone call on February 2nd and February 6th, 2023. Out of five developers contacted regarding interviews for the economic development audit, three responded. Conversation revolved around first-hand experiences of the development process in Duluth. Questions asked are listed below, along with responses. The following is a summary of input and opinions gathered during the interview process. Information gathered from developers has been summarized and compiled categorically and developers have been left anonymous.

- Can you start off by discussing your general thoughts about the permitting and inspections process in Duluth and your experience with development in the City?**
 - The team at City Hall is committed and hardworking and works through processes as best as they can.*
 - When processes, including decision making on project aspects, are carried out with individual departments/decision makers, different answers will come from different people, and it seems the departments are siloed instead of working together.*

- c. *The planning commission can be more focused on approving projects that impact socio-economic factors, but they don't put as much focus on projects that impact overall economic development and outside investment.*
- d. *The form-based zoning code was modeled after a larger city and doesn't fit Duluth very well and creates cumbersome requirements. There is inconsistency in interpreting the zoning code between City departments.*
- e. *Those completing final inspections should be involved in the pre-planning meetings so there are no surprises upon project completion.*
- f. *When you talk to individuals working for the city, they show compassion and care. However, their guidelines don't allow them to expedite the process or work around required changes.*
- g. *The building services department can be very rigid and difficult to work with. For example, on a certain project, a bike path needed to be moved for ingress and egress. It took a Senator making a phone call to the city to get approval. Code changes are also an issue- Developer had six buildings completed and on the 7th building, the city made them rip out a bathroom because the city changed the code. If a building plan is approved by city code, an update/change to the code should not have an impact on already approved buildings.*
- h. *People complain about how arduous the entitlement process is in Duluth, but that's not uncommon. It is difficult with red tape, multiple departments, etc. Interviewee uses key people in the process, knows how to get through.*
- i. *One senior staff person is needed to help walk developers through the entire process from beginning to end. Decision makers should be involved on the front end of the development process and all needed information should be laid out so that last minute decisions can't be made to alter plans.*

2. What the general timeframe it takes to get inspections and permitting complete and what kind of timeline do you think is appropriate?

- a. *The inspections and permitting process can be cumbersome if a portion of the project is denied. There should be an expedited route to approval if a project is already in the approval process but needs to replan for any reason.*
- b. *The timeline wasn't too bad, but the inspections and permitting departments do not want to be at all amenable to developers and they have little empathy to a developer's issues, timeline, or budget.*

3. What do you think the city is doing well and what can they improve upon?

- a. *The "champions" that developers are assigned to are imperative to the process. If you are assigned a bad champion, it can kill a project. Good champions and bad champions have been assigned.*
- b. *The City engineering staff have been reluctant to give clear and open decisions, how to go through the process, and timelines. Sometimes engineering just doesn't know the answer and they have trouble finding it. Wants to know if a project is going work on the front end; whether good or bad, don't drag the answer out.*

c. *Theresa and her predecessor (city planners) did things very well. They always answered calls and were always there to work with them. The city planners clearly understand the process and the hurdles, but they have no power over the permitting process once it gets to that stage, which is where the difficulties lie.*

4. Have you worked with other cities that carried out the inspections and permitting process more effectively? If so, what worked well and made the process easier?

a. *People ask time after time to find them projects outside of Duluth in Hermantown or Superior.*

APPENDIX A

Appendix A includes comments from survey question number 12, "Was your inspection and/or permitting process consistent and straightforward? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option." The information below appears unedited and exactly as written and submitted by survey respondents to preserve the input as received.

Was your inspection and/or permitting process consistent and straightforward? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option.
Everything was good except the online permitting portion, tried that unsuccessfully.;
Inspection was great, permitting was not always clear in the process and then caused a delay getting it.;
items required didn't make sense and seemed out of order;No;
Needing to call to get info & fill out a physical form is not ideal in this day & age. I also paid for a permit but never received an inspection so what is the point of pulling a permit?;
No;All of my projects are small and simple, yet time to process and issue permits has increased from 2-3 weeks to over 8 weeks;
No;Confusing and complicated;
No;I got permits but nobody would come and inspect so I had to finish my home so I could have a place to live. I still have not finished my electrical completely. And every time I called an inspector, they were rude and dismissive, so I quit. I even got permits for work that OTHER people were doing and were supposed to pull themselves. I followed the rules and the city didn't care. Now that I'm a commissioner, I realize the city never cared.;
No;Inconsistent information;
No;Inspection was done after construction was complete and cleaned up so inspector wasn't able to view any work accomplished ;
No;It felt as though the plan reveiwer understood what the code said however did not understand best building practices to achieve said code. Which is frustrating for the folks who actually have to accomplish the task. Also, the interpretation of an exterior wall on a town house seems to be unclear.;
No;It was straightforward, but inconsistent with turnaround time;
No;List of requirements are not clearly made available.;
No;no guidance, constant deflection, inconsistent between land lord and inspectors. Each blamed the other. archetect proved city was wrong, which we paid for.;
No;prefer not to say;

No;Reasons for rejection were unclear and appear to be a very arbitrary interpretation of what is in city code.;
No;The threshold of \$2,500 requiring permit is ridiculous. That is far too low. For our industry, \$7,500 should be the minimum threshold for permitting and plan review. If I have (2) techs replacing a few bad sections of pipe and it's a one for one replacement with a lift, I need a permit and plan review to do that? Seems like it's set that low to pay for a position within the city that isn't fully necessary or not being performed well.;
No;Too many permits had to approve by multiple people ;
No;Took 9 months for parking lot approval ;
No;Took a long time and city would not return my calls. I would have to catch them when they were in the office in order to actually speak to anyone.;
No;Your people are not knowledgeable and pass it on to another person who isn't available ;
Not Applicable;
Not Applicable;
Ringsred lawsuit created bumps and challenges ;
Was explained initially, but needed to modify the process.;
No;Check for inspection was cashed, but never received the inspection appointment nor the corresponding license received. During prior inspections, it was very apparent their is a different set of inspection standards for different types of owners. ;
No;CITY CAN SEE THE PERMIT ON LINE BUT DOES NOT LOOK;
No;Duluth is the hardest city to work with ever. They're more concerned with what they themselves like, than what everybody else prefers. They are a detriment to moving business forward on a timely basis. ;
Disagreement between DFD egress requirements and Planning Dept. Had to debate who was correct prior to receiving permit. ;No;
Never made it to this point. Couldn't get past street work - extending main, complete streets etc. ;
New concrete slab/retaining wall for my garage was fine but wanted to add on to my garage and was denied.;
No clear leader from within the City that handled my permit. It was confusing to me who did what and what information we were waiting on to get the permit completed.;
No, inexperience in the department has led to a lot of confusion;No;
No;conflict between DNR, Parks and Building permits;
No;Delays in communication no results ;
No;Design professionals and contractors need to include a "City of Duluth" factor in all fee proposals to account for the laborious, outdated, and unending process.;
No;I was working with three departments for my vacation rental. Each department would refer me to another on occasions along with using different nomenclature for the needed permits or forms. Life Services was the most informative and easiest to work with. Planning and Safety department didn't seem to be on the same page with much at all. The fee of \$1600 is way above of what the actual cost must have been. Also I have learned that my particle fee was being used for rtes housing trust fund is I think that's not exactly legal use of the fee and maybe why it went from about \$400 to \$1600 in one year.;

No;Long after other review were finished, here comes the fire review requesting changes when we needed a permit;
No;Process of plan review and addressing code review questions at "Pre-Review" meetings occurred over a couple different meetings, and those went okay. But then there was a third meeting to address a specific permit application process (or so I thought), but then that meeting ended up including discussion of stormwater specific items that had not occurred previously, and for which the engineer/storm water management individuals were not present at the two previous meetings. There seems to be inefficiency in this process.;
No;Typically changing directions and lack of consistency. Example: plan review and permit review and signed off and Fire inspector changed requirements post construction because they really didn't look at plan. Costly change order and Fire Marshall didn't care. Frustrating to say the least. Fire Marshall likely most unorganized part of permit process along with public works stormwater team;
No;With Public Works (Utilities and Stormwater), Fire Department (Fire, Rentals), Construction Services, Planning Department all being part of the process, its clunky and clumsy. City staff blame others for slow response or NO response. Need to Improve speed by improving communication between departments. However, City has been trying to do this for years. We would just rather invest in other areas due to the hard to work with Duluth. Everyone is crabby at Duluth. Gives your barriers rather than helping solve problems. ;
Not helpful;
Too many cooks in the kitchen. It varies and can go back and forth depending upon who you are working with ;

APPENDIX B

Appendix B includes comments from survey question number 16, "If you participated in preliminary review, do you have any comments about the process?" The information below appears unedited and exactly as written and submitted by survey respondents to preserve the input as received.

If you participated in preliminary review, do you have any comments about the process?
I suggested a preliminary review. Overall I feel that construction services needs to take a look at how they conduct business. Anyone going through construction services is looking for communication, facilitation, and solutions to make their investments in their projects a reality. Construction services should focus on the facilitation and solution aspect rather than the roadblocks and code enforcement aspects.
Yes it's horrible
If we are going to pay such high fees and have such a long review process I would hope things would not get missed that we need to go back at our expense and repair because the field inspector says to.
I've asked questions to the Fire Systems Plans Examiner and Inspector several times without receiving a timely response, or any response at all. I'm not confident a preliminary review would be ideal.
Previous head of planning [redacted] was an [redacted]
I did not meet but was able to receive answers via email prior to submittal and while fixing issues with my permit application.
N/A
nope

No
NA
N/A
For vacation rental properties the preliminary review for existing properties is a waste of time. I had to take time out of my day to log into a meeting I had already sat through a few months prior. It was necessary to rearrange my day to be at this meeting. The meeting itself was only 15 min and gave me no new information.
Yes I was told that I have a 2 1/2 stall garage and no need for adding addition on to my garage. Was going to be within 6' of property line and my neighbor already said he was ok with me adding on to my garage to illuminate our storage shed in the yard.
The City missed some key items that they made us change later, which cost a lot of money.
The city department is viewed as blockers of investments versus enablers of investments
Quite often, the proper departments are not in attendance resulting in multiple meetings or disconnected follow-ups – not enough direction from leadership on which departments are mandatory and very rare case that anyone reviews the drawings prior to the meeting so time is not used efficiently and effectively Preliminary reviews are meant to catch big picture issues or concerns so they can be addressed early in design before pricing has been completed or documents are too far along requiring major plan changes which costs owners and design firms additional time/money. Quite often documents are not reviewed well enough by city staff and then when you get to a permit review major items that should have been addressed during the preliminary review are brought up too late causing major issues and delays to the owner and project team. We have inquired about the process for determining who attends these meetings from the City and have been told that all departments get 'invited' to the meeting and it is up to each individual then to determine if they need to be present. This is not an appropriate system. When we fill out the forms required of us, we state who we feel should be there and the construction services department needs to do the same if they feel there should be additional from what we included and may have not thought about.
12 people on it, zoom call, 3 people actually talk, but inefficient because of zoom bandwidth. Disorganized, admitted to not even knowing anything about the project before the call. Follow-ups with engineering were rude, ardent, unwavering on unreasonable positions,.
It started off positive, then they completely did a 180 on the help and promises...to the point of misquoting my initial request into something COMPLETELY different!
Made us hopeful about our project that it would go smoothly and in a timely manner, but it didn't
City staff related to zoning issues regarding parks encroachment are very un professional and lazy
Sometimes it helps. Other times, what is discussed at these meetings doesn't help at all as City staff forget what was discussed, ignore directions/decisions made at the preliminary meetings, or simply get overruled by field inspectors after the fact.
The preliminary review was nice but way too much information on the general side so it lacked what turned out to be more detailed information needed. Also it was with one of the three departments I needed to work with. I found out later that I could have had a prelim with Life Services. If I would have known the I feel I could have saved me and the City lots of time and me about \$2000 in items installed that wasn't needed.
Seemed more like a formality and not very constructive

<p>Process of plan review and addressing code review questions at "Pre-Review" meetings occurred over a couple different meetings, and those went okay. But then there was a third meeting to address a specific permit application process (or so I thought), but then that meeting ended up including discussion of stormwater specific items that had not occurred previously, and for which the engineer/storm water management individuals were not present at the two previous meetings. There seems to be inefficiency in this process.</p>
<p>Yes- only allows certain times. Even when it does happen, most city staff unprepared and have to get back to you. Seems like a waste of time to be honest. People gone, sick, not prepared, unavailable, etc makes these on paper sound great but doesn't work in reality. Need better way of doing this.</p>
<p>Useless Meetings! Half the time staff from other departments never show up and if they do they mentioned that they will have to go back to their desk and review and get back you a person. Why do this then! Staff unprepared usually, unorganized meetings. I can do the same thing calling them all separately after waiting 3 weeks for each call back..</p>
<p>Process for prior review is good and helpful to find the problem areas before completing plans.</p>
<p>There is a lot of interpretation depending on the person. Lacks consistency and takes the enthusiasm down to a torturous experience</p>
<p>It was over Zoom which added to the poor experience but it was a waste of too many peoples time and it can be done much simpler with no meetings at all.</p>
<p>The City often does not thoroughly review the pre-application meeting to be prepared for a specific conversation. City does not offer alternates, they send you back to the drawing board without much help. The City tends to get stuck on an aspect of the building or design that seems unreasonable.</p>
<p>Document all discussions.</p>
<p>no</p>
<p>Chris Lee was super helpful</p>
<p>Over the phone.</p>

APPENDIX C

Appendix C includes comments from survey question number 18, "Did you receive clear and accurate information from City staff? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option." The information below appears unedited and exactly as written and submitted by survey respondents to preserve the input as received.

<p>Did you receive clear and accurate information from City staff? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option.</p>
<p>the process was not clearly explained from the start;</p>
<p>I worked through construction services for a smaller project and it was surprisingly difficult, stressful, and overall just an unpleasant experience. I have another project I was working with construction services on which was another unpleasant experience so I scrapped it for now. Would love to start working on it again. But same thing, ran into a feeling of a roadblock without facilitation and solutions so I scrapped the project for now. ;</p>
<p>No;Their responses were more conjecture than fact or code. Very much felt like they just didn't want to be bothered with my questions.;</p>
<p>No;Seemed to make up the rules as they went. ;</p>

No;at times city staff uses "opinion" in place of regulation;
No;Seems like different departments don't communicate;
No;I was given numbers to call for inspections and in return, I got abused over the phone by inspectors and they never showed up.;
No;Inconsistent information and confusion;
No;Late and not able to perform inspection;
No;The main issue I remember was a shared fire wall we did an a town home was really not clear on how the city wanted it done. Also, paying such high fees and having the review process the city has just to tell me I need an engineer seems redundant if I need an engineer fees and review should be greatly reduced.;
No;While courteous, the feedback was often not very "solution oriented";
No;Staff gave wrong information about water lines and gas line location ;
No;9 mo drawn out approval ;
Mostly;
Construction is still in process;
No;We pull between 20-30 permits per year, and so I am speaking more generally and so some of the questions aren't 100% applicable, but my comments and ratings are an aggregate of my/our experiences with the City. This question in particular, is one of the areas I feel they could use the most improvement. If something is deemed unacceptable due to code, there is no path or communication on how to move forward, it just goes into a black hole and we spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to correct the issue. The inspectors are great, and they know we are doing everything we can to meet the requirements, but we also operate in the real world and they need to work collaboratively with us. ;
No;The answers I received about the requirements for a complete demolition permit were vague and confusing.;
Did not give alternatives to problems or possible solutions. ;
Yes;The information was accurate and clear - I just wish I would have had the information before doing the project. I did call the inspector to ask questions before hand to make sure it was done the correct way the first time however, I was not given all information. Therefore, when he came to inspect, I had to change many things and scramble/run to the store so he could come back the next day. I would have been prepared originally if he would have given me more info when I first called.;
No;Staff unaware of current codes;
The permit process was handled by our architect.;
No;Accuracy questionable. I am genuinely disappointed in the interactions I've had with the Life Safety division department and the Auditors office. Over the past 19 years I've been surprised by the unprofessionalism experienced from both offices. ;
INSPECTOR SHOULD SEE IF PERMITS APPLIED ANYWAY;
No;It varied depending who we spoke to. ;
No;Again disagreement in requirements between different city departments;
No it was during Covid shut down and all they did was look on the computer and never even stopped to look at my project ;
No;Too many handoffs. The city expects contractors and home owners to navigate their complexity. Want an easy button.;

No;They completely changed their initial point of view and turned my request into something it was not...this allowed them to justify their answer...but it caused great mistrust in this government agency. I constantly corrected them when they would misstate my position...but they were still lying about my position in the final steps.;
No;Said process would take a few months took over a year to get going;
No;too many departments have to review the same plan;
No;city tree staff fail to listen to concerns;
No;The process is so long and disjointed that decisions that are made one day are contradicted by a different department, staff member, or field inspector later in the process.;
No;Received conflicting information from various departments;
No;Many times they answer your questions but really help you on next steps and ways to get project done. They are the barrier to getting things done.;
Mostly the opinions of our contractors and architects it is frustrating for them. Delays happen after they have done due diligence in getting work submitted ;
No;If the City does not agree, it's the responsibility of the designer to find solution without input from the City. This can be really costly for the Client;
No;Answers to questions received in the pre-planning meeting later became problematic in plan review.;
No;regulations are complicated - info received was as clear as possible;

APPENDIX D

Appendix D includes comments from survey question number 19, "Were staff helpful and knowledgeable when answering your questions? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option. The information below appears unedited and exactly as written and submitted by survey respondents to preserve the input as received.

Were staff helpful and knowledgeable when answering your questions? If no, please explain in the "Other" line option.
Yes;
No;
No;
No;
No;
Yes;
No;
No;Would not listen to reason on opposing viewpoint;
Not applicable;
No;answers can be "NO" and told to wait for an email;
Yes, for there portion;

No;My questions were not answered and I was made to feel like an idiot for asking them at all.;
No;Different staff gave different information;
No;Unqualified ;
No;This is a yes and no there seems to be hit or miss. Always helpful!;
Yes;
Not applicable;
Yes;
Yes;
No;While we eventually got to workable solutions, it took far longer than it felt it should have. If staff would have taken time to understand the end goal and used their knowledge of city code, solutions would have been arrived at far faster ;
No;
No;Some staff were very knowledgeable others were not ;
Yes;
Yes;
No;
Yes;
Not applicable;
No;They are knowledgeable, but don't spend any time trying to help the project team find resolution if there is a deficiency. ;
Not applicable;
Yes;
Yes;
Not applicable;
Yes;
Yes;
Yes;
No;
Yes;
No;
Yes;
Yes;
Not applicable;

Not applicable;
Not applicable;
No;
Yes;
Not applicable;
Yes;
Not applicable;
Yes;
No;
No;
Yes;
No;Lack of common sense in the department. Department of "no";
Not applicable;
No;
No;
Not helpful. Completely inflexible, cost us thousands on engineering consulting because they didn't "Understand" our system.;
No;Most of the answers were vague and I was referred to call other Duluth staff...everyone was trying to push it off on another department.;
No;Up until the building process, there wasn't much help, Adam was probably the only one that was any help. This has nothing to do with the building construction staff.;
No;
No;
Yes;
Yes;
No;city park staff related to tree issues are disresectful;
No;
No;Sometimes. Other times, decisions are deferred to other departments and the whole things becomes an exercise in chasing your tail.;

APPENDIX E

Appendix E includes comments from survey question number 20, "What can we do to improve our inspection process, plan review process, and/or permitting process? Please explain." The information below appears unedited and exactly as written and submitted by survey respondents to preserve the input as received.

What can we do to improve our inspection process, plan review process, and/or permitting process? Please explain.
Making sure everything in the process is explained and understood from the start, especially for those of us who rarely have to have permits pulled...
Create a timeline for when things should/will be done with consistent updates. Without this, scheduling a project becomes a lot harder.
I would suggest looking at construction services from a standpoint of helping the community invest and improve. I came from the construction industry and have dealt with a lot of different municipal permitting departments. Although I am wearing a different shirt being on the homeowner side vs. contractor side, I was shocked that it wasn't easier to accomplish a project working through construction services. I would assume this is why a lot of landlords do the cheap and easy "landlord fix" rather than doing it the correct way through construction services with a permit. I'd suggest that when the homeowner reaches out with a project idea, the mentality from construction services should be, "What are we trying to accomplish?" & "What do we have to do to make this happen?".
This appears to be more for a home owner who is building a home or business not current home owner that wants to add on or expand. Property taxes being so exorbitant and cost for inspections and ridiculous codes.
Duluth needs serious change on all levels. Build the community not just tourism.
Faster turnaround times for sidewalk/street use requests. Information needs to be updated online.
do the work
It seems the city is too big with too many people sending contractors different directions. Employees are afraid to make decisions and not much gets accomplished
CSI: I have never had any issues w/ site inspectors. My main concern is new staff (front desk) she appears to feel empowered w/ authority and really is not concerned w/ resolving issues but displaying authority. Planning: Some planning department staff lack knowledge, experience and worse yet seem to have no interest in gaining knowledge or understanding regulation or construction means and methods. How can you review a process w/o ever seeing or understanding what is required to perform the process.
Literally ANYTHING would be an improvement. I replaced doors, roof, windows, plumbing, electrical, changed the oil boiler and gas water heater to a gas combi unit (with PROPER ventilation, instead of venting the old gas water heater through an unlined chimney), and rebuilt some walls PLUS added a dishwasher and got permits for absolutely everything AND installed a pressure regulator on the water as well as grounded the electrical outdoors, which was never done in 95 years. And upon calling for inspections, was treated like [redacted] on the phone and nobody ever came to look at anything. After talking to other people, I find this is considered "normal procedure" in Duluth. This would never fly in San Diego. I had inspectors out all the time at every step and they were prompt, helpful, and knowledgeable. If I didn't know what I was doing, I'd be scared to death to live in this house.
Knowledgeable staff that can guide and provide consistent information with requirements. Completing the required inspections timely during constructions so that projects are not held up. Make clients aware of the option to have preliminary review process.

<p>Inspector was informed of work going on and the inspector requested to be notified when work was complete. Once work was complete inspector showed up but was unable to see anything other than quality of trim work/finished product. When I asked why the inspector didn't show up during work the response was, "I've worked with this contractor before and they do good work so I trust they did a good job". Defeats the purpose of a permit and inspection if you can't view the work in progress. Have the inspectors do their job instead of just checking a box. I've pulled permits 3 times and always the same response from the inspectors.</p>
<p>The main frustration I have and I hear from my clients is simple. Either make it clear up front we will need an engineer and do away with the long review and high fees or reduce the need for an engineer. Finding an engineer is difficult and typically I do most of the leg work and they review it just to tell me I can do it the way I had thought. Also, permitting should be easily submitted online and kept track of. The online system is not good at all.</p>
<p>being consistent with the turnaround time on processing permits.</p>
<p>Make clear, detailed reequipments available to us.</p>
<p>A more categorically more informative guideline. Too many types of business lumped together with generic guidelines. More congruency with county and state. Everyone had different guidelines we funded to accomadate. Our inspector was excellent, we felt he took out his frustration with our land lord on us. The land lords should be involved more in tenant expectations. Tough task, best wishes:)</p>
<p>Duluth seems to be attempting to thwart REASONABLE growth at the expense to it's residents and in favor of big business and BIG and BIGGER fees. I am a lifelong Democrat....but out you go City Council and Larson. Small Businesses provide jobs and bring affluence to a greater number of people. You have lost site of that.</p>
<p>Would encourage staff to presume positive intent rather than going on the defensive and that clients are trying to dodge building codes or city ordinances. Also embracing technology to have meetings, rather than depending on phone calls or in-person meetings. A Teams/Zoom meeting with all parties could often resolve things much quicker than traded phone calls or emails. I understand staff have a difficult task in applying codes to builders/owners that are not well informed on requirements but acting as a partner rather than an adversary would go a long ways.</p>
<p>Hire a competent person to perform the job.</p>
<p>I know my experience of building in the city of Duluth was a few years ago but the process was very hard, and time consuming. almost everyone in city hall seemed to be against me building a home. Advice? make sure you give out accurate data on property lines, location of all utilities, speed up permits, make sure you have knowledgeable people to answer your questions,</p>
<p>We started approval process in October 2021 permit was not approved till July 2022 for a parking lot. Slow drawn out process very frustrating</p>
<p>Get new people who have a clue about the process. Get rid of the Mayor. She's clueless and has run the city to</p>
<p>Information should be sharable between Depts and Fire Dept</p>
<p>Steven and Armella were very helpful and guided us through the process despite all the hurdles put in front of us by members of the community.</p>

<p>We had a special situation in which a fire destroyed our home last year. When an insurance settlement came in, the city took 25% until permits were fully signed. While I disagree with this money being held, as it prohibits me from earning interest on it, this also created a hardship to pay contractors as our project neared completion. Although we were able to get half of the money that was held, I believe the process should be amended to provide the full sum of funds back to the homeowner as soon as rough-in inspections have been completed. Taking a rebuild project to the point of getting electrical and plumbing rough-in inspections approved should be proof enough of the homeowners intent to complete the project.</p>
<p>We are unhappy that we have to call each inspector individually to set up inspection there should be a main contact to call to get an inspection set up.</p>
<p>Bringing the inspectors and life safety into the plan review could be a step in the right direction. This could limit the number of items brought up at the close out of the project. We are constantly hearing that the City of Duluth inspectors are getting hung up on things that the inspectors in the Cities don't. Why is this? They go to the same trainings, they should be interpreting the code in a very similar way. This adds to the amount of surprises and nearly Always causes a financial impact and results in construction teams, not liking the city or understanding why they are so difficult to work with. We do a ton of work in the City of Duluth and have a good working relationship with the code officials, but that doesn't mean that they are easy to work with. Plumbing seems to be more collaborative to work with than the HVAC team.</p>
<p>My project this past summer went well. I hesitate to do any more projects in the City of Duluth due to the anti business climate and the high taxes and the extremely liberal city council and administration. If I could convince my wife to leave, I would liquidate everything I have here and move at least out of the city if not out of the state. Seeing beggars on many corners all the time turns my stomach. Tax paying citizens of Duluth should not have to tolerate that.</p>
<p>Not charging the full contract value for permitting when there are layers of contractors that pull permits. Example: if a GC pulls a permit on \$200K (and includes Mechanical, electrical and/or sprinkler), the others pulling permits are also pulling them based on their scopes value. A \$200K project for permits sometimes has permits pulled that are \$200K for GC, \$50K for Mechanical, \$40K for Electrical and \$20K for sprinkler. Total value on project is now \$310K worth of value for permits. Too pyramided. Should only be a total of \$200K worth of permits pulled.</p>
<p>Reduce what permits are needed and fees/inspections</p>
<p>It was a long time ago</p>
<p>Staff need to think of themselves as partners in the successful completion of a project rather than the seeing themselves only as gate-keepers or code police. As a consumer, it feels like they are looking for problems instead of solutions.</p>
<p>The city inspector had too much to accomplish and only was really available on Fridays. The WCA person needs more help.</p>
<p>Work on plan review turn around time.</p>
<p>More staffing for CSI especially in peak building season would be the most benefit. Timelines for turnaround on permit requests are ridiculous at times. Further an easing of permit requirements on light commercial buildings that would allow a drafter rather than a full blown architect to be needed to draw in a simple wall or door opening change would be helpful. Some requirements are way overblown. Always had a great relationship with the staff both at CSI and P&Z and enjoy working with them, but they are constrained by the overregulation of building in this city which makes everyone want to build on the outskirts of Duluth rather than in the city. If you truly want to increase a desire for construction as is hinted in the local paper you need to address the overregulation problems.</p>

<p>For one the I&I sump pumps that are to be done by plumbers are being done by unlicensed individuals. The city couldn't find anyone to do the jobs for there allotted amount so they are allowing in licensed landscaping contractors so the work. Not cool.</p> <p>Also the deal with comfort systems guys doing gas, heating and plumbing work. I am competing with my city? I pay there wages to compete with me? They don't need inspections? Why would I need inspections?</p> <p>Those are my two improvements they could make.</p>
<p>Don't allow landscaping contractors do plumbing work and have comfort systems stop doing our work.</p>
<p>Quicker turn around for permits. Sometimes the projects get held up because the permit took longer than what it should.</p>
<p>Overall been fine - sometimes gets sticky with solar setback requirements as we have been installing quite a few of those.</p>
<p>Permit was handled by the solar installation contractor.</p>
<p>Decrease turnover in CSI to improve service and institutional knowledge. Employee compensation is not comparable to other MN municipalities or State positions.</p>
<p>I have to comment here but this may not completely apply to the intent of your survey. Overall, City of Duluth is making it WAY too hard and EXPENSIVE for new businesses/new industry to move into Duluth. Duluth has seen some growth over recent years....don't choke it please.</p>
<p>Separate erosion control permit is [redacted] and it's the kind of thing that makes redneck Trump-supporting construction workers biased against the whole concept of controlling erosion on a construction site. Having to map all that out is ridiculous not only because there is little to no enforcement (which makes the permit fee seem dodgy) but because the people actually setting up the erosion control are seldom the ones applying for the permit, and they never see that map.</p> <p>It ain't that complicated. Just enforce the rules and people will follow them WITHOUT all the additional permit rigmarole.</p>
<p>More Inspectors so inspections happen in a prompt manner. For larger residential projects it would be nice to have inspections happen more quickly.</p>
<p>Permitting process is great, quick responses, fast processing of permits, attentive inspectors. Permit costs are very high, compared to other municipalities around the area.</p>

<p>The system of rental licenses should be evaluated for its equity among populations based on wealth and education. The current system favors professional landlords with multiple properties because of the financial (including legal) and educational barriers to entry. From an economic standpoint, this bias likely increases rental prices, hurts lower and middle income home owners, and contributes to the housing crisis. For example, there could be more and better education for smaller potential landlords about the rental permitting process, such about the different types of permits available and how to become a landlord. As an example, when I contacted staff to ask about cost for a temporary rental permit for moving out of town for a job, the person I spoke with didn't know about this option and I believe gave me false information that was about the permanent rental code costs. A better designed set of communication materials would help to make the current rental license system more equitable. The rental code itself is at a relatively high reading level, as is the website, and likely it is hard to read and understand for the average homeowner. Cost is also a barrier to renting out one's home. Perhaps that was an unintended consequence of the rental code; to limit who can rent out their home based on wealth. Another recommendation is to add links to information about how to decide if renting out your home is a good choice. It is difficult to dig up this information on your own, but highly relevant to making the decision. Consider assessing whether or not adding a pre-rental permit consultation service like for the building permit process would be valuable.</p>
<p>I really don't have to say much improvements need to be made. Getting to know some of the new inspectors. They have been great. I do submit my permits by sending them by email to Kaleb. I think the online submission has never worked. The drop down never has my category to move to the next portion. I do remember using City of Minnetonka online and really liked their process. I have never had an issue sending the Kaleb but not sure that's the process City of Duluth wants me to use. But all staff are great and very much appreciative of all timely responses.</p>
<p>They could use more staff to review and interact with the public.</p>
<p>Having old plans on file is extremely helpful and in the end saves lots of money and headache for the homeowners. Over the last year or so Ive noticed that the quality of the scans are decreasing. I think this is because the lens and glass need to be cleaned and the light source is not bright enough. I mention it because it would be nice to see it fixed because of how helpful it is when it works. Thanks.</p>
<p>More staff with a higher level of experience, along with pay that is line with the other class 1 cities across the state. This should also help with employee retention.</p>
<p>Maintain a level of qualified staff that can ensure that the minimum code standards adopted by the State will be met and enforced. Cutting staff in this area will lessen the safety of Duluth's citizens and will allow substandard construction practices to take place. We all take for granted what these folks do when we walk throughout the built environment within the city, we assume that all of the buildings we do commerce with are code compliant. Overall, I believe that the people in the construction services department provide an established service that cannot be diminished.</p>
<p>Pay your inspectors more. They are amazing! Always there to help and answer any question. Duluth has the best inspectors I've ever worked with.</p>
<p>In all honesty I'm not sure as the department is running smoother than it ever has in the past 30 plus years I've been involved in building in the Duluth City limits.</p>
<p>Shorten permit issue times. Maybe the worst in the State of Minnesota</p>
<p>Take a "Work with" stance with the property owners. For years working with the City Inspector's office has felt like they've got 'the good ol boys' mentality. Vast improvement needed in professionalism and customer service</p>

<p>STOPPING A JOB ONSITE BECASUE IT IS OUR RESPONSIBLILITY TO GO ONLINE, PRINT OUT PERMIT, SCAN TO PHONE SEND TO GUY ON JOB ETC. OR STOP THE DAY TO GO DELIVER ETC. WHEN THE INSPECTOR CAN SEE RIGHT OFF THEIR PHONE THAT IT IS APPLIED AND IN PROCESS - MOST ARE EMRGENCIES THAT TURN INTO REPLACEMENTS? ASKING FOR RESPECT TO BE AWARE THAT SHUTTING DOWN A JOB LOSES US MORE MONEY AND TO BE VIGILANTE OF THAT - ESPECIALLY WHEN CONTRACTING IN THIS CITY FOR OVER 40 YEARS. WORKING WITH US MORE - RATHER THAN AGAINST</p>
<p>The team needs to be more consistent. They need to use more common sense and think of the greater economic impact and what's actually practical and reasonable rather than putting their personal ideas first.</p>
<p>Send out information on yearly Basis with tax notice of required steps for permits and needs of permits via United States Postal Service.</p>
<p>Stop letting places like Heirloom and out of town property owners dictate housing costs solely to turn a profit. Make housing affordable based on cost of living in st. Louis County.</p>
<p>Hey Mayor Larson, you do realize that all Duluthians are aware that your priorities are in the downtown and not with the residents? How can you sepnd so much money on renovating business front streets, and so little on even basic upkeep of residential areas? Your voters come first, unless you care more about your donors? In thay case, keep doing what you are doing. No amount of ad money will get you reelected when your populous shares such a disdain for your policies of "Business First". Housing is such as issue, but the head of Heirloom sits on one of these commisions? Every single tenant, in this entire city, knows to steer clear of Shiprock and Heirloom. How about practicing some egalitarian ideals, and stop placating those who would price us out of this city we call home.</p>
<p>Remove heirloom properties personnel from being involved with making business decisions for the city. Their practices ensure the continued poverty of a large portion of duluth residents.</p>
<p>Otherwise when i dealt woth the city regarding removing problem trees from the boulevard in front of my house they were helpful.</p>
<p>I'd say the only issue when I'm applying online is the lack of instruction to find an address. I talked to bill so I know now what to do.</p>
<p>Permits take too long. We get permits from many municipalities throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin and Duluth takes longer to get permits back than anyone. It's not close. Dedicate people, full time, to permitting or form a Task Force to find how to operate more efficiently. I apologize to customers ahead of time when dealing with Duluth. The most basic permits, that could be issued the same day, take 3 weeks. It's ridiculous.</p>
<p>Our building has historic preservation so that process was a nightmare and we were not allowed to add certain lighting to the exterior of the building. This should have been determined at time of permitting and not by a historic preservation committee.</p>
<p>faster service, we get last min requests and we pull permits for following day.</p>
<p>Respond to emails faster and notify folks when their applications have been approved.</p>
<p>Na</p>
<p>We apply for permits for "no parking" or "alley obstruction" often during the summer months. The process is quick and easy. We pass the cost along to homeowners. They understand but sometimes get feedback about it costing a bit. \$49 plus the cost of the no parking signs, if needed (not needed for alley obstruction). However, your costs are a lot less than St. Louis County (\$200). We follow the permits process but feel others don't in our industry.</p>

<p>My feedback as a realtor in this city, the I & I workers, from the office scheduling to the inspectors are absolutely wonderful! Great people for us to work with! I would also add, that whenever I have called the city with questions about a specific property they have been really helpful.</p>
<p>The public/clients need to understand that the permit process is not an overnight option. The City only reviews what information for application that was submitted, if there is missing info or wrong info the process will take longer. Inspections have never been an issue for scheduling for next day or even same day, most other larger jurisdictions have a lead time of 1 week or more before completing inspections.</p>
<p>no need to improve. I have been happy</p>
<p>I am satisfied with the city's inspection dept.. I would only have 1 thing to complain about as a freelance drafter, is that; enforcing engineering on more things adds cost & time that are typically unnecessary, it creates quite an inconvenience (i.e. any deck 8' off the ground needs engineering, not called out in the IRC).</p>
<p>I own property on park point. When I purchased the 4 lots more than 20 years ago, it was a nightmare dealing with the city. Recently I have had to replace the main sewer line to the house. The process was very streamlined and dealing with the city was easy and helpful. I even learned of a program that helped pay for the project. A person from the city even stopped by my house with a form that needed my signature. I also own several rental properties. The licensing and inspection process is more customer friendly lately. In short, I am consistently surprised by the quality and expertise of those city employees I have encountered.</p>
<p>I deal mainly with the inspection process because we are mostly working for general contractors as a subcontractor. The inspection process has been absolutely great to deal with. All the inspectors are very accommodating and helpful. Thank you.</p>
<p>Specifically for short-term vacation rentals, I don't understand why I have to resubmit a whole new application, go through the review process, and pay all applicable fees (again) at the expiration of the permit. Especially, since I presume, the city still has all my previous information on file. I understand this is most likely a Planning Commission and/or City Council issue but is non-the-less a duplicative and unnecessary requirement.</p>
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<p>Where to start...</p> <p>Lower fees. Fewer forms. Shorter review process. Field inspectors should not have the power to hold up a permitted job just because they don't like the design. The "burden of proof" in a design review should be on the plan reviewer to show how/why a design is NOT code complaint...not on the design professional to prove that a design IS code compliant. Design professionals who certify drawings should be given the benefit of the doubt on the accuracy of design, not 2nd guessed and questioned at every step.</p> <p>Things are better with Wendy in charge than they were with Dan or Duane, but there is a long way to go before the City will ever be considered "business friendly." Economic development happens here in spite of the City of Duluth, not because of it.</p>
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Maybe hire private field inspectors, less documentation requirements, no paper plan docs on site- this old school, less routine projects and/or items going to Planning Commission, hire private plan reviewers, better E-permit system. Add more permits to E-Permit platform, eliminate permits for water heaters. Permits for e earthing is too much. Many communities around Duluth do not require t and I would say there installations are equal too or better than Duluth.

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