Value Task Force
Building Inspection Department Final Report

General Summary

The primary mission of the Building Inspection Department (BI) includes the administration and enforcement of health and sanitation, building, plumbing, electrical, and erosion codes. The department has a 0.89% impact on the city's total operating budget. Department revenue for 2011 was $549,029 vs. expenses of $280,983. Salary & benefits consume 94% of this department's expense budget. Historically, revenues have exceeded expenses for the past ten years.

Four employees staff the BI department – all full-time. This department is one of few we've reviewed whose revenue exceeds expenses, and whose revenues support the general budget. Overall, the VTF believes the department is running near top efficiency.

Findings

A. This is a very well-managed and well-organized department. There is sufficient cross training and depth to handle all the inspection needs.
B. Contractor teaching classes are a good investment. BI works with teaching classes for contractors which help in less-stopped jobs. This develops rapport with contractors and results in less confrontation on jobsite issues.
C. Time is spent on projects that do not materialize – estimated at about 100 hours per year.
D. BI has ability to provide local plan review – highlighted by the plumbing plan review. They can turn around an approved set of plans in less time than many other BI departments.
E. The AA II (Rosemary) has the ability to issue specific-type permits at the counter – including roofs and water heaters. This is a benefit to the department because an inspector does not need be present, therefore avoiding inconvenience and time wasted for customers at the counter.
F. Among major purchasing vendors: US Cellular, AT&T
G. A first: No budget allocations are evident from this department to other departments.
H. Revenue exceeds expenses (net +$268,076), and revenues support the department's general budget.
I. City-Wide ISO Rating of 2.
J. Inspections are down, but overall workload hasn't changed with the demands of plan reviews, training, and scanning.

Recommendations

A. Analyze the cost of BI department against other similar sized communities to highlight the benefit of local plan review. If West Bend is more expensive, prove that the cost is worth the benefit.
B. Streamline the permitting process using the software currently available. Include exploring the benefit of allowing credit card payments, on-line permit applications, and expanding the use of the MUNIS accounting system. Doing so creates efficient and convenient solutions that reduce the need for customers to come to the counter for simple permits. ***(Note: Gwenn Soldner,***

Superintendent, reported to the VTF that these items have been incorporated into the department's 2013 budget request. Additionally, BI is requesting funds to allocate for consultation fees to expand the use of MUNIS).

C. Measure the cost of permits vs. the number of permits issued to ensure the city does not cost itself out of good building inspection services. The department is currently revising its permit fee structure based more on square footage vs. specific line items. This fee structure analysis should be done every one to two years. ***(Note: Council recently approved implementation of a new fee structure – to begin 1/1/13).***

D. Practice smart purchasing strategies: Investigate as a whole the purchase of similar cell phone plans (in all departments), as well as group purchasing for office supplies. Aim for the use of one policy and one vendor to benefit from bulk purchasing. Consider a pre-owned vehicle purchase vs. new vehicle purchase to maximize value.

E. Implement a mentoring program in anticipation of retiring assistant. Coordinate with a succession plan.

F. Highlight the department's capabilities and attributes through a marketing collaboration with ECD Department. Include items such as the city's favorable ISO rating. Consider partnering with local media (West Bend Daily News, WBKV radio) to develop a column / radio show.

G. Continue the very good practice of marketing the department's inspection services to other communities – including Building Inspection's ability to perform state plan reviews.