One-Stop Arlington Customer Advisory Working Group

Meeting Summary
April 10, 2018

WG member attendees: Jeff Adler, David Guillaudeu, Kenneth Hewitt, SeJun Lee, Sean O'Malley, Matthew Roberts, Kelly Shooshan, Betsy Stagg, Christopher Young

County staff attendees: Deborah Albert, Sadé Bowers, Steve Bridget, Allison Cook, Gwen Hancock, Yolanda Parker, Matthew Pfeiffer, Lavar Youmans

Working Group recap: Meeting commenced with staff and member introductions. The Program Manager reviewed the overall structure of the program by identifying the two key elements as the permitting software application, and the customer experience. The customer experience program focuses on four major areas: physical customer service, virtual customer service, change management, and training.

Open discussion with members were based on the following four questions:

1. How do you define customer service?
2. How do you define customer experience?
3. What is the current customer experience in Arlington County?
4. What does the future of the customer experience look like to you with One-Stop Arlington?

Comments/Questions from members are summarized below:

How do you define customer service?

- A genuine willingness to help customers.
- Staff that are cross-trained. This will help to ensure there is more than one person who can assist the customer when needed. For example, it is perceived that there is only one staff person to handle residential CO's.
- Staff that are well-trained, and very knowledgeable about all processes.
- Customer service starts with staff recognizing and acknowledging that not all customers apply for permits regularly. Special attention should be paid to first time applicants.
- There should be a better awareness of frequent recurring customers that represent clients. Staff should be cognizant of their time because it is very limited.
- Transparency: provide a department organization chart with contact information. This would be helpful to customers so they know who they should contact. It would be beneficial to identify supervisors or other reviewers when needed.

How do you define customer experience?

- Efficiency: current processes take an extended period of time to complete. Shorter wait times are desired as a form of a better customer experience.
- Clear communication about the permit process and status updates.
- A precise explanation of how Arlington calculates fees so customers have a better understanding.
- Consistent and up to date website content. Better management of changes and their effects across all the web pages.

- Currently customers must go back and forth between the ePlan portal and the Building Arlington website to check requirements for submission. Presently there are no dynamic links between the portal and the website. Having dynamic links would provide an improved customer experience.
- Online status checks that are in alignment and mirror the status that is in the portal. Currently this does not occur. The current portal does not show enough information. Statuses are not dynamic. Currently this only works for paper submissions, but not online submissions.
- Giving the customer the option to see comments as they are populated by staff. This will allow the customer the opportunity to try to address any issues earlier versus waiting until all reviews are complete. Being able to see comments during the review will save customer's time, which results in a better experience.
- Providing customers with a report for upcoming changes that will affect the current process. For example, a notification of changes to CO's that will go in effect within the next 30 days.
- Customers would like updates to limit their phone calls to staff. For example, like a read receipt that shows what is happening. Interaction is currently only at critical points of the process, such as when a review is completed. Customers are interested in seeing additional information throughout the review and submission process.

What is the current customer experience in Arlington County? How would you describe it to a potential customer?

- Single family homes: Arlington is consistent with the delivery time. This is very important to customers, and they expect staff to stay consistent and possibly in improve. It's helpful to have consistent delivery times that customers can rely on so they can confidently relay that information to their clients.
- Residential Projects: A very slow permit review process. It seems as though the initial review now takes a few additional days than it did previously.
- Residential Projects: ePlan is favorable since the review time is approximately 10 days for new homes and additions.
- The consolidation of DES staff members moving to the 10th floor was very helpful.
- New online payment: the DES final review for building permits create a stagnant part in the permitting process. Part of the process is manual, and staff must initiate. Customers must call or come in to the office to move the permit along just to obtain a placard.
- LDAs take longer than building permits, which results in a delay.
- The process to apply for a permit in Fairfax county allows customers to drop off all documents and leave. Approximately two weeks later the customer receives a call for any incomplete or inaccurate information. However, in Arlington, the applicant must wait in-person while the intake process is completed and answer any questions during that time. Customers would prefer if Arlington moved towards allowing customers to drop off and leave versus waiting to deliver plans.
- Arlington has case managers in Zoning for Site Plan 4.1. Arlington is the only jurisdiction that offers this service and it is very helpful to customers. Since Arlington has case managers it fosters the opportunity for all parties involved to keep track of all information at the same time. This is a very effective way to do business.
- Permit Expeditor: Clients will call the County and receive an update that differs from what their expeditor was told. This results in the expeditor explaining what the real process and policy is. This discrepancy puts the expeditor on the defense with their clients. Arlington needs to provide consistent information. It appears that permit technicians aren't always on the same page.
- Different agencies/divisions need to collaborate more effectively to ensure the same information is given out to customers.

What does the future of the customer experience look like to you with One-Stop Arlington?

- A streamlined business process that allows customers to receive permits faster.
- Customers would like to have the option to automatically populate their applications with frequently used general contractors by using a drop-down list in the application.

- Effective interdepartmental coordination among the different agencies. Information provided by the customer should be passed along to all groups. This will eliminate the need to repeatedly contact the customer for information that has already been provided.
- The option to drop off wall checks in a bin. This is preferred to waiting in-person while staff process the wall check, it would be extremely helpful because it saves time.
- A well thought out business process that streamlines all of the required steps for obtaining a permit.
- More self-service options; provide a customer kiosk for application submissions and assign a dedicated staff person who is available to help customers when needed.
- Customers would like the option of having appointment-based services. For example, when a customer receives a large volume of comments that they do not know how to address, they would like to be able to schedule an in-person appointment through the portal to review the comments and get assistance.
- A central interface that allows the customer to see the list of requirements associated with the selected permit they are applying for. Documentation that outlines the full process and the related checkpoints.
- Real-time access to posted comments.
- A permitting process that is 100% electronic from beginning to end.