It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis. Findings are highly confidential and any external dissemination or the promotional use of this information must be cleared in advance through CC&G and the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection.
INTRODUCTION

Background

The focus groups were conducted to elicit qualitative insights from San Francisco building professionals, homeowners, and community and industry representatives regarding their experiences and perceptions of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. Some of the specific topics discussed during the groups included:

- Building and Renovating Property in San Francisco
- Unaided Perception of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection
- Permitting Process
- Rating of SF DBI Service Attributes
- Public Perception of the Department of Building Inspection
- Visions for the Department’s Future
- Usage of the SF DBI Website
- Comparisons/Emerging Practices

Information and insights from these groups will be used to help develop a quantitative survey instrument to be administered among DBI customers. This quantitative survey will also provide statistically reliable results (as opposed to the data contained herein, which is qualitative and directional only).

Scope of Work

Two focus groups were conducted on July 31, 2007. Respondents in Group 1 were all contractors, architects, engineers, or other building professionals doing business in, and based in, San Francisco (“Professionals”). Respondents in Group 2 were all San Francisco residents who were homeowners (“Homeowners”). Respondents in both groups had recently or were currently engaged in activities requiring interaction with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection – Group 1 respondents on behalf of their clients, Group 2 respondents for their own homes. Each group included a cross-section of people belonging to each particular group, and represented a mix of different San Francisco neighborhoods, age groups, ethnicities, incomes, etc.

A third group (Group 3) was conducted on August 22, 2007 among Influential/stakeholder respondents. This group included prominent architects, engineers, and representatives from community, landlord, and merchant groups (“Influentials”). Respondents in this group represent firms which have heavy contact with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection or whose membership has heavy contact with SF DBI.

All three groups were conducted in San Francisco and lasted a full two hours each. Jon Canapary from Corey, Canapary & Galanis served as moderator and project director.

Please see the Appendix of this report for more specific information on the composition of groups and for examples of the forms and materials used on this project.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building and Renovating Property in San Francisco

- Positive traits of building and renovating in San Francisco included a lot of demand (*Everyone wants to live here*) and being highly profitable (either in the renovation work done, for Professionals and Influentials, or in the value of the home, for Homeowners).
- Negative traits included time, money, and frustration – all mentioned by all three groups.
- Homeowners cited their extreme frustration and fear of going through the permitting and inspection processes, largely due to a lack of knowledge. . . . You don’t know what hoops to jump through next . . .
- Professionals and Influentials also cited the fear of homeowners as clients, as well as the amount of time required to convince them to go through the permitting/inspection process. [It] takes hours and hours for a new client to understand what it takes.

Perception of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

- While SF DBI received very average ratings from all three groups, Homeowners tended to rate their experience lower than either Influentials or Professionals.
- Much of the Homeowners’ frustration and dissatisfaction seemed to stem from a lack of knowledge about the inspection and permitting processes, not knowing which person to speak to, or what steps to take next in the permitting/inspection processes.
- Although Professionals (Group 1) and Influentials (Group 3) gave SF DBI higher ratings, the Homeowners’ frustration impacted them in several ways. Both Professionals and Influentials indicated that education of clients about the SF DBI process was time-consuming. In addition, both Professionals and Influentials alluded to homeowners (who often didn’t know where to go or what to do) tying up SF DBI resources due to their lack of knowledge, thus causing everyone longer waits in line, delays to see staff, etc. Those representing small businesses (in Influentials) also said similar help should be available for them as well. Like Homeowners, small business owners were likely to go to SF DBI one or two times over a lifetime.
- Both Influentials and Professionals were aware of recent improvements and changes, and both groups indicated their ratings were higher than they would have been as little as 6-12 months prior.

It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.

Overall, how would you rate your experience with the SF Department of Building Inspection in the past year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>ONLY FAIR</th>
<th>POOR</th>
<th>DON’T KNOW</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influentials</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 3 Groups</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Permitting Process - SF DBI Service Attributes**

- Professionals rated their experience with SF DBI more positively than Homeowners. While both groups expressed many similar positives and negatives, Professionals indicated that there was always someone they could find who was helpful and able to answer their questions or help them – but primarily because they were more familiar with the department. *If you haven’t been there, you won’t know that, it’s more something you find out over time,* one participant noted.

- While Influentials were more likely than Homeowners to feel that they could get their questions answered, some of their lower ratings on other attributes stemmed from a sense of SF DBI taking too much time and/or stalling to make a final decision. Influentials also ranked staff’s courtesy and professionalism the lowest among the three groups. *One department looks at the other and no one wants to sign off,* said one participant.

**Feedback on Specific SF DBI Service Attributes**

- **Able to Solve Problems** – This was the most highly rated of any attribute. However, Professionals, who rated this more highly than other groups, acknowledged that the high rating was only because they knew who to go to in order to get what they needed.

- **Clear Communication of Fees** – While Professionals were relatively unconcerned with this attribute, Homeowners particularly were extremely frustrated by the lack of clear explanation of fees.

- **Courteous and Professional Staff** – There was some debate in each group as to whether discourteous staff was an anomaly, or part of a larger indication that cultural change is required. All groups, however, had a number of positive things to say about SF DBI staff, and many were concerned about employee’s working conditions. Homeowners were concerned about the verbal abuse (screaming, angry customers) employees had to deal with on a daily basis, while Influentials felt that the physical environment SF DBI staff worked in was detrimental to both the department as a whole and employees’ ability to do a good job.

- **Adequate Signs/Directions** – All participants cited the need for improved signage, as a minimum, with the addition of other useful guides, such as computer information kiosks and greeters on the ground floor, highly desired. Members of all groups mentioned many confusing, handwritten paper signs taped on the walls.

- **Straightforward Communication of Steps to Obtain Permit** – With more detailed knowledge, Professionals rated this attribute higher than the other two groups. However, this attribute was not given overly positive ratings by anyone.

- **Efficient Service** – One of the lowest rated service attributes, Professionals did give credit to SF DBI for recent changes, saying they did make service more efficient.

- **Well-Run City Department** – While this attribute received low ratings, Professionals again rated it higher than the other two groups, again citing recent changes at SF DBI which have improved the way it is run.
• Timely Permit Process – This attribute received average to below-average ratings, with Homeowners giving it the lowest rating. One Homeowner cited a process that took 11 months, while other group members cited no-shows and confusing directions. Influentials particularly said the lack of willingness to make a decision slowed down the process considerably.

• Timely Scheduling of Inspections – One of the higher rated attributes, most group members indicated that, once at the inspection stage, the process was relatively smooth and straightforward.

• Staff is Consistent, Regardless Who You See – This received below-average ratings from all three groups. Group members cited the lack of willingness to make decisions and different interpretations from different staff members as particularly common problems.

• Key Disciplines Are Clearly Defined – While this was rated average to above-average, some Influentials felt that key disciplines might be too well-defined, leaving gaps in projects.

• Plan Check (Professionals and Homeowners Only) – This attribute received average ratings from those who had gone through the process. While group members felt SF DBI was generally helpful and the process was positive, there was some frustration over vague comments.

Public Perception of SF DBI

• Although all three groups mentioned rumor and scandals, Professionals and Influentials were more concerned about less knowledgeable people believing everything they read or heard, and felt that public relations was a key component of any changes. Rumors impacted both groups, in that they often felt they had to dispel untrue or half-true perceptions formed by clients and other contacts.

• Both Influentials and Professionals also felt this created more work for them with clients, as they had to convince clients it was not only OK, but desirable, to go through the formal permitting process. This was particularly true on smaller jobs.

• Homeowners were less likely to have solid information and more likely to rely on information from the media, as well as partial or informally gathered information.

• Homeowners’ perceptions focused on their own experiences and those of their friends and neighbors. They were fearful, and worried one question on a minor change would trigger a full-scale overhaul.

Visions for the Department’s Future

• All three groups rated the current programs in place, Expansion of over-the-counter review process and Plan review checks by appointment, the most highly.

• Homeowners did not like the proposed Premium Services plans, as they felt it created a two-tiered system in which San Francisco’s wealthiest would receive much better service than the average homeowner. While there was some of this sentiment in Influentials, many in the group looked much more favorably on these proposals. Professionals were more ambivalent about fee-for-service proposals, rating them higher than Homeowners, but not as highly as Influentials.
Current and Proposed Programs

Programs Currently Implemented

- Expanded Over-The-Counter Review Process – While highly rated, there was some negative reaction stemming from the perception that the wait in line would be longer (since the time limit increased from 15 minutes to one hour). One group member explained, *If I’m in the line, it wouldn’t be as efficient; I’d have to sit there to wait for an hour to be the next person, I’d rather make an appointment.*
- Plan Review Re-Checks by Appointment – This was the most positively rated program, and group members felt it was long overdue. One group member observed, *Finally moving into the 21st century – make an appointment like the rest of us do.*

Programs Being Considered

- Customer Service Initiative – While generally regarded as positive, Professionals and Homeowners particularly had a negative reaction to the phrase “Customer Bill of Rights,” in that they felt it was too gimmicky and/or didn’t really promise them anything. Influentials were concerned with the idea of making a ‘guarantee’, and wondering what would happen if that wasn’t upheld. Influentials also pointed out that expectations of customers should also be stated, that customers should not be allowed to try and push through bad plans or shoddy work.
- Expansion of Electronic/Automated Services – This service was generally highly rated. However, group members raised concerns about ensuring that documents were actually properly received by the right person. Influentials particularly questioned whether this could be applied to extremely large graphical files. All groups thought it was a great idea for smaller documents, however. All groups also praised the expansion of web services, since most of them indicated a desire to do more via the web, from making appointments to checking on the status of a particular project.

Premium Services Being Considered

- Express Plan Premium Services
- After-Hours and Weekend Inspections
- Service by Appointment

There was a lot of negative reaction to all three of the premium services from Homeowners, who saw this as the introduction of an unfair, two-tiered system. Professionals were somewhat more ambivalent, agreeing that a two-tiered system was not desirable, but also acknowledging they had clients who would pay the additional fees. Influentials had the most positive reaction to the Premium Services, with one person stating, *Time is money. This reflects that.*

Homeowners and Professionals were more likely to say they wanted the services, but without the fees. Alternately, they suggested raising all fees and offering these services to everyone, rather than charging extra for these particular services. Some also suggested implementing other changes first, and revisiting the premium services once initial changes were already in place. Homeowners and Professionals were most favorable to after-hours and weekend inspections, as they felt the additional fee was most justified, due to staff overtime.
Usage of the SF DBI Web Site

While Professionals and Influentials had used the web site the most, all three groups felt that it could be better utilized. Group participants felt the web site should allow them to:

- Make appointments
- Track permits/approvals
- Read/download guidebooks or special sections just for homeowners, small business owners, and other infrequent visitors to SF DBI
- Download/print forms
- Print approved permits online, directly from their computers
- Make a microfilm record request
- View inspector assignments for particular areas
- Read/download vital sections of information, including building codes, Sanborn maps, and block identification

Comparisons/Emerging Practices

Professionals and Influentials felt that SF DBI is doing a number of things right – things they would like other departments to adopt. These include:

- SF DBI’s thoroughness. Other departments were accused of merely glossing things through or providing only boilerplate information.
- Influentials cited the depth of knowledge of SF DBI’s inspectors as particularly positive.
- Professionals cited the ability to walk in and talk to someone face to face, without necessarily having an appointment, as a positive.

Professionals and Influentials made the following recommendations for SF DBI, based on what they have seen at other Building and Inspection departments:

- Professionals and Influentials both felt that SF DBI should do more to coordinate with other departments, from having business licenses nearby to parallel plan checks.
- Professionals particularly noted the need for SF DBI to repair its relationships with the Planning Department and the Fire Department. Relevant comments included, Sometimes [they’re] so separate, [there’s a] lack of communication, and Building and Fire in SF war with each other too much . . .
- Influentials stressed the need for larger, more modern, revamped facilities as part of a complete overhaul of processes and environment (including updating the permit application). One Influential summarized his feelings as, It reminds me of walking into a hospital (SF DBI), and not a good one.
Wrap-Up: Mock Recommendations and Recommendation to SF DBI Director

The three groups made very similar recommendations in their final focus group exercises. Key recommendations included:

- Revamping SF DBI offices. In addition to improved signage, this included a better layout, more spacious offices, and a more positive, welcoming environment for visitors and employees alike.
- Streamlining SF DBI processes. All three groups felt a reorganization of how the department works could minimize the steps required, reducing the time and cost of permits and inspections.
- Improve/strengthen consistency of interpretation/clarification of jurisdictions. Professionals and Influentials, particularly, saw the need for staff training so that codes were interpreted in a uniform manner. *Sometimes it takes awhile to get a permit approved, other times it goes right through,* stated one participant. These two groups also felt that boundaries needed to be clarified between when an issue must be decided by SF DBI and when, for example, it should be decided by Planning.
- Improved Information, both online and offline. In addition to adding items to the SF DBI web site, suggestions included informational kiosks (self-serve and staffed) to guide those visiting for the first time. Special resources for homeowners and/or first-time visitors were also suggested.
- A single point of contact for each customer or project. All three groups stressed the need for one person they could contact within DBI who could guide them through the necessary steps, ensure needed approvals weren’t waiting on someone on vacation, etc. Homeowners particularly wanted this person to replace expediters altogether.
DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

Group 1: Professionals
Building and Renovating Property in San Francisco

- Professionals (Group 1) cited the amount of lucrative work as one of the primary positives about renovating and building in San Francisco, and this sentiment was shared by Influentials (Group 3), while Homeowners (Group 2) cited the pleasure of living in San Francisco and the resale value of their homes.

- Among the primary negatives mentioned by Professionals was the difficulty in educating homeowners about the permit and inspection processes. Professionals also cited the amount of time and effort it takes to bring a new client up to speed.

- Professionals also cited unclear or overly strict guidelines as a negative.

**General Discussion**

- Most difficult in Bay Area
- Very challenging
- Time consuming
- Frustrating
- Strict guidelines
- More strict guidelines than anywhere else
- Bread and butter
- Daly City is harder
- Lots of work
- Have to talk to clients to get them through the process
- Takes hours and hours for a new client to understand what it takes
- Have to get client to understand the building process and the regulations
- 90 per cent of the frustration is with the planning process

**Positives**

- Profitable
- Historic
- A lot of demand
- A lot of activity
- Property values higher
- Higher quality of construction
- People respect what architects do

**Negatives**

- Having to deal with the city
- Time, extent of projects
- Traffic
- Expensive
- There are no clear guidelines when dealing with historic buildings
- Planning commission is a bit of a special creature we could do without
- Restrictive
- Approvals -- too many needed
- Strict guidelines
Role of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

- Professionals, like other groups, stated the role of SF DBI was to ensure buildings were built safely by enforcing the building codes.
- Professionals also indicated that SF DBI has a role to collect fees (on behalf of the City and County of San Francisco, to contribute to public funds) and to educate people regarding building codes.

Role of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (SF DBI)

- Collect fees
- Make sure construction done to a certain level
- Avoid fire traps/health hazards in building
- Code enforcement
- Standard role – protect health and safety of population
- Assist in getting building permits
- Supposed to be public servants
- Throwing roadblocks at you
- To educate people what codes are and interpret the codes
Familiarity with San Francisco Department of Building Inspection
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- Nearly all Professionals were mostly very familiar with SF DBI.

It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.

1. How familiar are you with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat Familiar</th>
<th>Not Too Familiar</th>
<th>Not At All Familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Positive/Negative Reaction to San Francisco Department of Building Inspection
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- Professionals rated their experience with SF DBI more positively than Homeowners yet similar to Influentials.
- Professionals indicated that there was always someone they could find who was helpful and able to answer their questions or help them – but only because they were more familiar with the department. Said one participant: *Going through the process [the] first time [is] not a good experience; [you] have to figure out who to talk to and who you don’t.*
- Professionals indicated discourteous/unhelpful staff existed and were a problem, but could be worked around, making statements such as, *At times, there’s an attitude problem – not a sense they’re there to help you through the process.*
- Professionals mentioned streamlined procedures and the 4th floor reorganization as very positive aspects of SF DBI. However, they also felt the department was still somewhat disorganized.
- Professionals also frequently indicated that resolving code conflicts and obtaining clear answers to conflicting codes remained a negative.
- The amount of time required and the cost were also negatives.
- Some participants in the group cited being “stood up” for inspection appointments.

2. Overall, how would you rate your experience with the S.F. Department of Building Inspection in the past year? Would you say...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Mean (4 pt. scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Positives**
- Electrical permits online
- Procedures streamlined in many ways
- Can often walk out with a permit in 2-3 hours
- Quick process
- Permit tracking online
- Full service, availability to answer questions
- Can always find someone willing to be helpful/solve problems
- Fast service in plumbing permits over-the-counter
- New 4th floor setup very good because all departments are in one room
- Brown bag lunches – informative
- People at upper end of inspection try to help
- Friendly
- Trying to improve things, with fast tracking

**Negatives**
- Inconsistencies
- Inherent conflict in codes that need to be addressed
- Interpretations vary from person to person -- different answers on the same subject
- Fees
- Recordkeeping can be tricky
- Junior inspectors need to be trained properly
- One permit was more expensive than construction of the project
- Inspector sometimes thinks it’s OK to give me a 1.5 hour window, but comes in during the last five minutes
- At times, there’s an attitude problem – not a sense they’re there to help you through the process
- Biggest hurdle, how codes are interpreted, especially where there’s conflicts
- Some people are very responsive, others want to find reasons not to approve something
- General sense of disorganization which is very frustrating
- Inspectors – different approach than from in-house; with the field inspectors, most want to try and make things work, whereas in-house (in the office) folks want to look for reasons not to approve things
- Different inspectors enforce codes differently
- Maybe one or two, very limited, problematic – but resolution from someone else or supervisor
- When over-the-counter permit vs. plan check – they don’t have a fast way to get over-the-counter people through; one person spends hours and hours in front of you while you’re waiting, even though you just have 10 minutes’ worth of items
- Might need to differentiate knowledgeable/unknowledgeable

**General Discussion about why rated Excellent/Good/Only Fair/Poor**
- Good because they have district inspectors [who know all of the codes]; counties often only have someone who knows only one of 3 codes; that’s a positive that San Francisco has that the counties don’t
- Generally try to help you
- Don’t try to roadblock you too often
- Going through the process first time not a good experience; have to figure out who to talk to and who you don’t
- Why only fair – different answers to same questions, depending on who you deal with
- Can usually climb the chain of command if there’s a problem, but who wants to bother doing that?
- Can get hold of people, can leave messages, and people are helpful – you can actually reach person you need to
- Poor (why) – mainly because of cost, prices are quite high
### Written Comments Regarding SF DBI Overall Rating (Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Verbatim Comments – SF DBI</th>
<th>Group 1: Professionals</th>
<th>Self-Administered Questionnaire #1 Comments</th>
<th>(Question #3: Why Is That?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Generally OK, but uneven.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Many plan checkers are generally helpful but interpretations are often inconsistent from one person to another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The new over the counter efforts are a large improvement, but inconsistencies still abound.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlan</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>It’s mixed, depending who I am dealing with. Often people at the lower end official [sic] cannot make decisions so it can be a matter going up the ladder of command to get reasonable decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also it can be difficult to square special conditions in SF versus the state codes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good – once you understand submittal requirements. Generally staff is helpful in guiding through the process. Also Technical Services is a good resource for clarifying ambiguous sections of the code. Technical bulletins are helpful with San Francisco specific existing building conditions.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There could be more efficiency with permitting field changes during construction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roland</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very friendly and ready to help when necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In terms of electrical, plumbing permit is relatively quick process.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building permits are usually a long process, need improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Junior Building Inspectors need more training as to how to deal with contractors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>Objectivity of code interpretations by individual plan checkers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Waiting in line – non-professionals require extra time for processing.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having to wait now in the plan check line for basic code questions – no direct person to go to.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive – the new 4th floor over-the-counter with divisions on one floor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>High fees.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parking ticket every time I pull a permit in person.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plumbing over the counter permit OK.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building permit too long of a wait and they send you to the wrong floor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Generally good service. I have a major problem with the disorganization of the department.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One stop permit review may help improve this problem. So far, my experience with this has been mediocre. They had no phones!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan G.</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Too Expensive. Small deck permits can cost more than the deck.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Too long. 3+ months on last deck permit before receiving plan check comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Historical planning – guidelines sound like Dr. Phil. No idea what they mean.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fire department – inconsistent on definitions of stories.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>More friendly attitude toward to the public and shorten the time of review the project.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>They have implemented over the Internet permits for electrical.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They have not put the district inspectors’ map and assignments online. We call on the phone every time to confirm the proper inspector.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in the interpretation of the code are not published. There is a fear of making code changes.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Types of Permits Applied For/Received (Professionals Only)

- Professionals applied for and/or received a wide variety of permits, from remodeling and electrical permits to more extensive projects that required plumbing, electrical, and general building permits.

**Briefly, what type of permit(s) have you applied for/received in the past year?**

- Electrical permits
- General building permits
- Plan checks
- Building permits - plan check and over-the-counter
- Addition/remodel and plan check
- Everything, from over-the-counter to board of appeal
- over-the-counter and plan check, remodels, additions
- Electrical, plans
- Building permits, plans
- Plumbing, building, electrical, sidewalk
- Plan check
- Remodeling, addition, plan check, over-the-counter
SF DBI Service Attributes - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

- Overall, Professionals rated SF DBI’s services more highly than Homeowners and Influentials.
- “Straightforward communication of steps to obtain permit” was one of the lowest rated attributes. One Professional said, The majority of people who go there don’t know where to go, people are spun around for 3-4 hours. Professionals clearly felt that other customers were having to take more time, and such inefficiency was tying up SF DBI resources as well, thus impacting them. Agency disorganization in general, conflicting code interpretations, and difficulty in tracking a request were also cited.
- Professionals rated “Staff is consistent, regardless of who you see” the lowest of any attribute. Participants gave examples, such as, [I] had a project where the inspector said fire escape couldn’t be done that way – but it was in plans that way and [I] had to change it (plans had been approved that way). [I] had a problem with [an] inspector who said probably it’s OK, then found out later someone else came by and gave [a] different opinion, and said no, it’s not OK.
- The attribute “Timely Permit Process” also received a low rating from the Professionals group. Members particularly expressed frustration at the way items tended to be slowed down or lost once submitted. Usually you have to watch online and then pick up the phone and say, “You got this last week, what have you done about it?”; if you don’t stay on it, it’s still there one month later.
- Professionals rated “Able to solve problems/answer questions” most highly. However, they acknowledged an initial learning period to reach that point. One participant alluded to this initial confusion by stating, If you haven’t been there, you won’t know that, it’s more something you find out over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Applies Strongly</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>Clear communication of fees</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Well-run City department</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Timely permit process</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Timely scheduling of inspections</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff is consistent, regardless who you see</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Key disciplines – building, plumbing, electrical – are clearly defined and do not overlap each other</td>
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<td>Plan Check</td>
<td>0 7 1 1 0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
San Francisco DBI Service Attributes - Discussion
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

### Able to solve your problems or answer your questions
- Always people you can find who know the answer (but if you haven’t been there, you won’t know that, it’s more something you find out over time)

### Clear communication of fees
- Real clear
- Often don’t look at what fees are
- You’re notified prior to the fee
- When you walk in you know what it’s going to cost
- 2 – don’t know
- Not as clear, often learn what it is only after you get permit
- Not always clear what applies
- Planning signs off, not always clear whether it applies
- If not applicable you still have to pay sometimes – not clear/fair
- I know what they’ll be, not because it’s been communicated, but because I’ve done it so many times
- Often we don’t care – don’t really care to find out (1 person states)

### Courteous and professional staff
- Sometimes
- Usually (4 people)
- Usually courteous, helpful
- Ok
- They answer the questions
- Ask for advice, you get it
- They are courteous, professional, doing their job; they’re not going out of their way NOT to work with you

### Adequate signs/directions inside facility (on Mission Street)
- There is a problem with the number system (which # to pull) or they’re not keeping numbers going
- Planning and building mixing
- You walk in the front door and there’s stuff going on there, but you usually have to go to the fourth floor; that isn’t clear
- Need to hire a graphic designer for signs
- Marker/follow where to go needed
- Stuff is stickered/taped all over
- Signs not very clear
- Need paths/footprints to follow so people know where to go

### Straightforward communication of steps needed to obtain your permit
- Not very straightforward ("Oh, we forgot to tell you, you also need . . .")
- Inconsistent
- Don’t like the security guard -- he sits on his ass and reads the paper, but if you lean against his desk he gets upset; doesn’t seem helpful
- When you pay for permit, one guy sits on the end, and he acts as if he has all types of authority to reject the permit when he doesn’t
- Sometimes, you have to do stuff like count the trees on the lot and there aren’t any trees there – strange things like that
**Efficient service**
- Not necessarily efficient
- Do they have a separate area for "homeowners, start here?" – should have that
- People will be sent right to 3rd or 4th floor
- You’ll be directed to a department, but not necessarily where you need
- Need to tell people where to go
- Someone who doesn’t know the area can be sent to the wrong place
- The majority of people who go there don’t know where to go, people are spun around for 3-4 hours
- The system is geared for professionals who go there over and over again, not someone who's a homeowner going for the first time
- New procedures very efficient
- New fast track good – much better; process is days now, not weeks
- Every time we want to get an inspection, we call to find out who has that inspection – we’d like to have that online; that would make it more efficient
- If planning department has to mail things out, you're shepherded away from OTC, even if it's a relatively simple thing, making process longer

**Well run City department**
- For what it’s doing, yes
- If you know where you’re going, yes
- Too early to tell
- Was poorly run before, but new guy in charge
- Before, bottom of the barrel; too early to tell right now

**Timely permit process**
- No
- Not if you have to submit
- Usually you have to watch online and then pick up the phone and say, "You got this last week, what have you done about it?"; if you don't stay on it, it's still there one month later
- When you call up, [it’s frustrating when] the person it’s been assigned [to] is on vacation for 2 weeks; it sits on their desk
- Why not make every project parallel plan check?

**Timely scheduling of inspections**
- Good/pretty good
- Could be tighter
- Need more inspectors
- They’re all overworked
- Don’t have to wait that long, usually have a window
- In one instance, we waited 4 days, for a plumbing permit, meaning the gas was off for a restaurant trying to open (too long)
Staff is consistent, regardless who you see
- That’s not true
- Not consistent
- One guy tells you differently than the other
- Even though process is faster, still inconsistent
- Pretty good, not too much of a rollercoaster ride, getting better
- Last five years has been improving – people more relaxed, doing their job
- Had a project where the inspector said fire escape couldn’t be done that way – but it was in plans that way and had to change it (plans had been approved that way)
- Had a problem with inspector who said probably it’s OK, then found out later someone else came by and gave different opinion, and said no, it’s not OK

Key disciplines – building, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, major projects – are clearly defined
- Basically they keep hands off each other’s stuff
- Not too muddied
- Had a situation where plumbing didn’t want to sign off on how furnace was installed; building inspector didn’t want to sign off either and threw it back to plumbing inspector; no one wanted to take responsibility; had to go and see head of plumbing department to resolve it
- There are occasions when there is a problem

Provide clear comments and correction on plan checks
- Usually don’t have a big problem, usually they try to think out what the issues are
- Plan check can be helpful – one project previous owners got permits but didn’t go through the plan check process
- Many counties use boilerplate, but SF tailors it to your plan, and it’s a much better process; they actually read and respond to your plan
- Sometimes won’t get all corrections the first time
- One time, major part of plan changed, essentially negating the project, but it wasn’t presented as such
- Comments can be kind of vague, especially if not familiar with codes/specs in detail
- Own project – had to make some corrections, and had to go back and forth several times on issues, because notes made on plan check corrections were too vague
Public Perception of the Department of Building Inspection (Unaided)  
(Exhibit A)

- Professionals emphasized that, although they had heard some rumors, this had not been their experience, but rather, was the public perception, and stressed the need for public relations. Their reaction was somewhat similar to the Influentials, as both groups felt there was too much negative press, and therefore, the average San Francisco resident probably thought worse about SF DBI than was truly justified. Said one participant, *When the newspaper reports it, everyone assumes everybody is taking money, because they found one.*
- Both Influentials and Professionals also felt this created more work for them with clients, as they had to convince clients it was not only OK, but desirable, to go through the formal permitting process. This was particularly true on smaller jobs.
- Professionals were somewhat concerned about how recent changes affect the morale of the inspectors they work with.
- Almost all Professionals were aware that there was a new SF DBI Director and that he had already made some changes. As one participant said, *He came in saying, "This is a terribly disorganized department and I’m going to run it more efficiently."*

**Public’s perception of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection**

- Scared out of their minds
- Cumbersome
- Don’t want to go there
- Scared to deal with them
- Bribes, corruption
- Roadblock, not an agency geared towards helping you do what you want
- If inspector comes in, he’ll find everything under the sun that’s wrong (I reassure my clients that this isn’t the case)
- Heard people talk about having to bribe them
- They need to do public outreach
- Public needs to be educated about the value of going through the permit process, people aren’t aware of that
- Mostly viewed as expensive
- A lot of people try to not go through it – “why do we have to do this?” – especially on small jobs
- Need to put out some PR – it’s good that the inspector comes by and makes sure it’s done right

**Awareness of any major issues/problems facing the Department**

- Newspaper articles – reporting re: residential inspectors have tainted the entire view of DBI
- Taints ethics as a whole
- When the newspaper reports it, everyone assumes everybody is taking money, because they found one
- Expeditors – that’s the group that has great influence, perception of great influence
- Expeditors establish relationships with DBI or used to work there, so they have an inside track
- Sometimes they do have an inside track
- Expeditors have roadmaps to having things done efficiently – sometimes I’d rather pay for that
- Sometimes that tarnishes our image with our clients, since clients assume expeditors can do the job and we can’t
- Unclear what is required to be an expediter, asked what the criteria is, and was told there is no criteria
- If something could blow up into a big deal and I’d rather keep it minor I’ll use an expediter
- Expeditors have a purpose, but they run up the costs by thousands of dollars, and it’s very frustrating when the plan checker’s wife works as an expediter, for example; why can’t I get a permit overnight like the expediter does, especially if everything is above-board?
- They work behind the counter – but signs are right there, no public access
- No experience with it
- Clients ask if they should hire one and I say I don’t really know how they’ll do it more efficiently, don’t understand how that works
- Image amongst professionals is that the expediter issue tarnishes the department more than any other thing
- Should fix the system -- so everyone else is fast like an expediter, but don’t slow down the expediter to everyone else's current pace
- Inconveniently located, awkward location
- Parking is too expensive
- Need to project themselves as public servants
- Some participants – more as public servants; others – they’re there to enforce the code, not to hold your hand
- Can still be helpful while enforcing the codes

### Awareness of current changes in the Department; General (unaided) awareness

- Big thing – 4th floor (2-3 months ago) go to one room and you have planning, building, electrical, plumbing all right there; start downstairs and go to 4th floor if it’s over the counter (many participants aware of 4th floor changes)
- Aware that they’re reorganizing -- have been there twice and they were shut down for a meeting
- I pull a lot of permits online – I only visit when there’s a glitch with that

### How many aware that new SF DBI Director was appointed in February of this year? Reaction.

**Yes, aware – 8 (out of 10)**

- One person knew name of new Director
- I know he went to Penn State
- I know he came from San Diego
- Came in talking tough -- made some harsh comments towards the inspectors
- Everyone is enthusiastic to see someone come in and try to do that (talk tough, make changes) – it was a rudderless department before that
- Some inspectors I deal with feel they’ve been accused; they've been there for 20 years, and now a stranger is coming in and accusing them of bribes and other things when it’s just a couple of bad apples
- He came in saying, "This is a terribly disorganized department and I'm going to run it more efficiently"

### Exhibit A

**San Francisco Department of Building Inspection**

**AT-A-GLANCE**

**Mission**

Under the direction and management of the seven-member citizen Building Inspection Commission, to oversee the effective, efficient, fair and safe enforcement of the City and County of San Francisco's Building, Housing, Plumbing, Electrical, Mechanical, and Disability Access Codes.

**Background**

The Department of Building Inspection (DBI) was created by voter referendum under Proposition G in 1994. The charter amendment established the body known as the Building Inspection Commission (BIC) which was designed to provide representation for the various communities which interact with the Building Department.

**Permit and Inspection Activity for 2005-2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>288</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Permits Issued</td>
<td>60,971 (25,726 Building; 14,201 Electrical; 16,492 Plumbing; and 4,552 Miscellaneous Permits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Construction Valuation | Over $2.5 billion |
| Number of Inspections | 131,563 |
| Number of Construction Permits Approved in One-day or less | 89% |
Reaction to News Article and Proposed Changes (Exhibit B)

- Professionals were generally positive about the news article and proposed changes. As one Professional noted, *He's made the right decision to shake up the department, correct the problems.*
- Some members felt the article was not specific enough, or wanted a specific timeline for the changes mentioned in the article. (These concerns were raised in all three groups.)
- Professionals questioned why the Planning Department is not being reorganized as well. Most group members felt (as one stated), *Planning department needs to be changed too--should be changed in conjunction.*

### Reaction to article

- Very positive, let’s hope it works as well as it sounds like it’s working
- I don’t think it says anything
- It’s always been the planning department that’s difficult
- You want to impress me, get rid of Neighborhood Notification
- Made the right decision to shake up the department, correct the problems
- Sounds really substantive
- Relatively positive article for a paper that’s been more of an adversary
- I like the word transparent -- sounds like it’s more open so you can see what’s going on
- Seems like the building department changes – but does city planning have changes too?
- Planning department needs to be changed too -- should be changed in conjunction
- If planning and building were one department, it would be more efficient
- Problems w/planning are usually overarching, high-profile problems; but DBI deals with a lot of the smaller, lower-profile issues, and these changes are dealing with them, making everyone’s life easier

### Positives of proposed changes

- Before if there was ambiguity, you had to wait – now it’s more instantaneous
- If someone made a bad call before, it would stick, but now it’s more likely to be changed
- The whole notion of customer service issues is new (addressing them)

### Negatives of proposed changes

- Looking at codes, which codes make sense, needs to be done
- There were major changes to building code around 2000, but they haven’t addressed those; have been addressed only in terms of local equivalencies

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**Editorial**

**Building Inspection’s new broom**

The San Francisco Examiner Newspaper, The Examiner

2007-06-19 10:00:00.0

SAN FRANCISCO - The Department of Building Inspection has long been one of San Francisco’s most troubled agencies. It was investigated by the FBI and blasted by the grand jury and City Controller’s Office as unresponsive, inconsistent, susceptible to cronyism and political pressure, and in general a hotbed of improper favoritism.

Mayor Gavin Newsom made a 2003 campaign promise to reform the department. He named Amy Lee as acting director; but it was not until March 2007 that The City finally found a permanent director with a track record of implementing meaningful restructuring.

Isam Hasenin, 48, arrived from San Diego, where he was credited with streamlining a cumbersome permit process during his five years as chief building officer. In 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him vice chairman of the California Building Standards Commission, which oversees building code changes statewide.

During his confirmation hearing, Hasenin pledged that the Department of Building Inspection would become fair, transparent, straightforward and ethical for all clients. He said he would spend his first months “aggressively examining the nuts and bolts” of the department and return to the Building Inspection Commission with specific "action steps" for “a new day at DBI.”

Last week, Hasenin fulfilled that timetable, bringing the commission more than 50 recommendations comprising a viable approach for fixing the department. Most striking among the new director’s program is that many of his action steps are so fundamental it becomes almost startling to realize they haven’t already been done here.

Only a deeply flawed bureaucracy with pervasive mistrust of change could for so long have avoided instituting customer services as basic as these: service-by-appointment reservations; staff commitments to specific deadlines that eliminate unpredictable delays; guaranteed second opinion service offering rapid hearings with senior officials on request; comprehensive universal permit application form to end duplication and overlapping.

In addition, Hasenin presented plans for a greatly expanded one-stop customer service center and an enhanced over-the-counter service where rotating teams could approve permits on smaller projects within one hour. There will also be a "Customers’ Bill of Rights” giving the public clear, realistic and predictable expectations about their permit-application process.

The Examiner applauds these long-needed initiatives finally being launched under the impressive new leadership of Isam Hasenin. It is crucial to the future of San Francisco that the Department of Building Inspection functions with efficiency and fairness for city residents trying to remodel their homes, and for contractors and builders trying to construct projects adding to The City’s livability.
Visions for the Department’s Future - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

- Professionals were most enthusiastic about the first two programs, Expand over-the-counter service and Plan review re-checks by appointment. However, there was some concern that Expand over-the-counter service could take more time for some members. *I don’t want to wait longer than I already am*, said one Professional, while others felt that any positive outgrowth would not directly impact them.

- There was strong resistance to the phrase “Customer Bill of Rights.” Professionals said it *sounded silly*, or that it *wasn’t believable*.

- Like the other two groups, Professionals were least favorable towards the fee-for-service programs in general, feeling that this would create a two-tiered system that would negatively impact most people. But there was some acknowledgement that some of their clients would want these premium services. Others suggested raising all rates so that premium services could be offered without an additional charge.

- However, there was some ambivalence about the fee-for-service program Service By Appointment. While group members gave this a low rating, it nonetheless received 3 votes when participants circled the two programs that would have the most positive impact. Comments ranged from *Sounds good* to *As long as it isn’t required*.

- After-Hours and weekend inspections were also somewhat accepted, with one participant explaining, *[It] requires overtime, so if people want to pay for it, it’s OK.*

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

<table>
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<th>Program (# of times circled in parentheses)</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
<th>NA/Blank</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>Customer Service Initiative (3)</td>
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<td>Expansion of Electronic/Automated Services (3)</td>
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<td>After-hours and weekend inspections (0)</td>
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<td>Service by appointment (3)</td>
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*Note: Two participants in Group 1 (Professionals) did not circle any options. Participants were asked to circle up to two options.*
Visions for the Department’s Future – Discussion  
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

Programs Currently Implemented

a. Expanded over-the-counter review process
- I don’t want to wait longer than I already am
- If I were an architect, I’d be thrilled, but for me I don’t like it
- I don’t see any improvement right now
- Best thing they’ve done in years – cuts a week out of our budget
- Can’t get bigger projects OTC anyway
- For commercial it works well
- Have gone through it – and gotten through slightly larger projects quicker
- Now there’s maybe 1 person ahead of you, whereas before it was more like, ‘take a number’
- Don’t know if I’ve encountered it, but the thing I find helpful is how knowledgeable they are in terms of what to look for; well trained; know exactly what to look for in any set of plans
- Seems like historical planning isn’t really part of this change
- As a specialty contractor, it doesn’t do anything for me

b. Plan review re-checks by appointment
- Any time you have an appointment it’s a good thing
- They do that anyway
- I’ve been able to do that anyway; it’s not really new; but it’s positive
- Fantastic
- Frees up the counter for everyone else

Programs Being Considered

c. Customer Service Initiative
- Good thing
- Customer bill of rights sounds silly (sounds like the airlines) and more PR than anything else
- Other items sound good, but the second opinion isn’t as big a deal -- it doesn’t come up too often
- Don’t see the positive in it -- would rather people are trained so second opinion isn’t needed
- It’s good – more access to higher authority if you’re not happy with staff decision
- Bill of rights – not believable

d. Expansion of Electronic/Automated Service
- Prefer face to face; when I send email I don’t know what’s going on
- I love it
- I’d like it if they will review it quickly
- Saves time
- Getting plans printed can take 4-5 hours, so it saves time, submit from your office
- Good thing but ONLY if they respond in a timely way
- Practical difficulties – with paper copies, they’re making changes, notes, etc.,
- Can’t make paper changes, notes, etc. any more – don’t like that
- Went in to make some plans, OTC, made a few notes on the plans (signed and dated) and the plan checker said you won’t be able to do that any more – do a whole new set of plans for minor things, maybe just one sheet out of the whole set, etc.; that's not good
- Plan check comments, etc., would be good, email .pdfs, that would be great; I always get letters in the mail now and it wastes a couple of days
- If it's 4:30 in the afternoon, though, you can send it and don’t have to worry about getting to their office before closing, etc.
**Premium Services Being Considered**

**e. Express Plan Premium Services**
- We already feel we’re paying a premium
- People with more money will always be in line ahead of you
- Financially, it would be a killer – creates a two-tiered system
- It’s like a bribe, only legal
- I have high-end residential clients who would pay for it, but others who couldn’t afford it
- I could go both ways; it’d be nice to do something fast, but it is going to slow down everyone else
- Would rather see them be more efficient first, then revisit this at a later date
- Quite dangerous – unless you have a model in another city
- It’s a two-tiered system

**f. After-hours and weekend inspections**
- Advantage to this if you want to get a project done quickly
- Question is how short a notice
- Consider raising the rates so it’s consistent, one rate, whenever you need to get the inspection; raise the rates to cover it
- They don’t need to pay people extra to work on Saturdays; just schedule people to work on Saturdays and take other days off
- Requires overtime, so if people want to pay for it, it’s OK

**g. Service by appointment**
- Sounds good
- Wastes so much time now
- Extra fee is the problem – should just be one fee regardless
- Why pay more? Should be standard
- As long as it isn’t required – still want to be able to walk in; I don’t want to be told I have to make an appointment
- I don’t like their coming up with new ways to add revenue; they’re already the most profitable department in the City
- For what we’re paying, they should figure out ways to make it more convenient for us WITHOUT us paying more
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Somehow deal with inconsistent code interpretations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlan</td>
<td>Look into how code applies to specifics of SF more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>- Parallel processing is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PDFs of plan check comments available – possibly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- More efficient service @ CPB for payment – when busy, the wait can be 1-2 hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roland</td>
<td>1. Clear directions to different departments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Reduction of fees for over the counter permits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Let ALL staff know that they are public servants – our taxes and permit fees pay their salaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Raise inspection fee fix price for 2 years, any time inspection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan G.</td>
<td>- Get rid of neighborhood notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reduce permit taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Restrict passage of new laws/rules that restrict building or impose a minority’s beliefs on others, i.e. environmentalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Trees are not sacred, we can plant new ones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usage of the SF DBI Website

- Everyone in the Professionals group had used the SF DBI website. Group members were very enthusiastic about additional online services, such as appointments and codes, which might be added to the web site.

How many have used the SF DBI website?

All 10 have used the site

Most important/useful features of site (whether have or have not used it)

- See where permit is
- Block identification
- San Francisco codes available (should be on there)
- Appointments (should be there)
- Who’s an inspector for what area (should be on there)
- Sanborn maps (orig. historical maps used for some things)
- Permits (current); do more of that
- Microfilm; to see permits submitted; would be good to have those on web
- Microfilm record request (should be online); now it’s a tedious process, submit ID, come back with money, etc.
Comparisons/Emerging Practices
(Professionals and Influentials Only)

- Professionals had high marks for SF DBI’s accessibility, its thoroughness, and the ability to get relatively simple permits in a short amount of time.
- The Professionals group felt that SF DBI should do more to coordinate with other departments, from having business licenses nearby to parallel plan checks.

Positives (things San Francisco DBI is doing, or doing better, than other areas)
- In San Francisco, you can walk in and talk to inspectors; in Berkeley, you have to make an appointment, no matter what you’re doing
- For a non-binding permit, can get it in a couple hours; longer in other areas
- SF DBI is very thorough

Negatives (things San Francisco DBI should do better, or introduce, that are already being done elsewhere)
- Smaller towns have the business license and building department right next to each other so you can go and get the business license and permits for your business building at the same time; in SF there’s distance
- Relationship between building and planning – sometimes so separate, lack of communication
- Building and Fire in SF war with each other too much compared with other cities/counties
- Parallel plan checking between building and inspection
- In Daly City, tighter on street/sidewalk, e.g. 4-5 inspections for 1 water main; but they’re checking to maintain the quality, whereas a sidewalk permit in SF is a fee that is paid, there’s never an inspection; if there’s a fee for an inspection, there should be an inspection
Mock Building Inspection Committee

- Better signage, streamlining, and eliminating favoritism/perceived favoritism (expediters) were the primary recommendations.
- Like the other two groups, Professionals also mentioned separate or additional services for homeowners and/or those who are using SF DBI for the first time and don’t use SF DBI regularly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group #1 – Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Eliminate favoritism (perception)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More online activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better graphics for departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Separate information desk or orientation for homeowners vs. professionals or those with more experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better code interpretation and consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More rapid approval of products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Central permit – streamline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Eliminate favoritism perception – expediters, for example, people getting disparate treatment,
- More online activity (look at permits, etc.)
- Better graphics for departments (especially as homeowners), especially if there’s a change
- Some type of separate info desk/orientation for homeowners/separate from professionals
- Better code interpretation for consistency and more openness around that; more information sharing; right now there's a fear of creating new code that prevents supervisors from sharing information regarding code interpretation
- More rapid approval of products (standards, testing) as new materials, etc. come available
- Central permit streamlining – sometimes it takes awhile to get a permit approved, other times it goes right through

Wrap-Up (Final Comments)

- Put everything online
- Keep accelerated OTC plan check moving and work out the wrinkles
- Encourage entire staff to act as public servants
- Education of the public – e.g. value of getting permits
- Prioritize permit applications that don’t have plans so the waiting period is lessened
- Make code books as small as possible
- Give more training to junior inspectors
- Better coordination with planning department
- Public relations to city residents, let them know getting permits is the way to go, open people’s eyes to doing things right; explain why doing illegal work to avoid the fees is a bad idea
DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

Group 2: Homeowners
Building and Renovating Property in San Francisco

- **Homeowners (Group 2)** cited the pleasure of living in San Francisco and the resale value of their homes as positive aspects of renovating property in San Francisco.
- Like the other two groups, **Homeowners** mentioned the difficulty and lack of knowledge/education for them about the permit and inspection processes. Homeowners particularly cited the frustration of not knowing where to go or what steps to take next, while the other two groups noted how this tied up SF DBI resources.
- **Homeowners** indicated they felt some frustration at being at the mercy of both the permit/planning process and contractors, largely due to their lack of knowledge.

**General Discussion**

- Headache
- Don’t do it
- Complicated
- Expensive, lots of paperwork, lots of rules and regulations to follow (or ignore)
- Doesn’t feel encouraged
- But we all choose to live in old homes and there’s a lot of work that needs to get done
- You don’t like having inspectors telling you to do x, y, and z and jumping through all these hoops, and you don’t know what hoops to jump through next
- Redundancy in fees is a killer
- The city says you have to do one thing, plans are drawn according to city whether or not they’re rational, and you pay all over again to make a project work; it’s months in time and 6, 8, 10 trips for one modification on a curb cut
- Extremely expensive
- None of the rules and regulations protects you from a rotten contractor
- Issue of identity vs. issue of reality – was warned about the image, but reality may or may not be as awful as you’re warned; my reality is we passed, had a happy ending; perception probably worse than reality

**Positives**

- Lucrative
- Potential
- Creativity
- Resale value
- Everyone wants to live here
- Lucky that I’m able to live here
- Historic preservation
- Surprisingly good experience with DBI

**Negatives**

- Complicated
- Risk
- The process
- Subject to tenants’ rights
- Always get a parking ticket when you try to get a permit
- Unfriendly
- Paperwork
- Confusing
- Lack of coordination (e.g. upstairs, then back downstairs, back and forth)
- Bouncing around city offices (often have to go down to 9th Street, then back to Howard Street)
Role of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

- Homeowners stated the role of SF DBI was to ensure buildings were built safely by enforcing the building codes.

Role of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (SF DBI)

- Safety
- Standards
- Make sure building code is followed
- Consistency in terms of issues of safety, following rules
- Make sure your house doesn’t fall down
- Assurances that work has been done to a certain standard
Familiarity with San Francisco Department of Building Inspection
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- The majority of Homeowners were only somewhat familiar with SFDBI. While some Homeowners indicated they had had a fair amount of contact with SFDBI, they did not necessarily feel they were more familiar with the agency as a result. As one Homeowner stated, *I’ve pulled a number of permits over the years, and how it operates is still a mystery to me.*
- Homeowners were more likely to be familiar as a result of third party sources – i.e. what they heard in the media or what their contractor or other professional told them – and this information was often incomplete or inaccurate.

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

1. How familiar are you with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat Familiar</th>
<th>Not Too Familiar</th>
<th>Not At All Familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeowners</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Not very
- Somewhat
- I’ve only gotten the one permit
- Mostly what I’ve read in the paper
- Mysterious; I’ve pulled a number of permits over the years, and how it operates is still a mystery to me
- I started going down there myself because of all the changes; I saw people down there screaming and shrieking, because you can sit there for 3.5 hours
General Positive/Negative Reaction to San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- Homeowners rated their overall experience with SFDBI lower than either Professionals or Influentials.
- While all groups indicated discourteous/unhelpful staff existed and were a problem, Homeowners had some disagreement as to whether discourteous/unhelpful staff were the exception to the rule or part of an overall cultural norm.
- All groups, including Homeowners, indicated the amount of time required and the cost were negatives. One participant said, Budget, timing way off - should have been 2-3 months, and it was 2-3 years.
- Homeowners alluded to not knowing or understanding the processes, thus further raising the cost in time and money for them, and adding to their negative reaction. Said one Homeowner: It was intimidating, unfriendly, and felt like I had to go through hoops with each of these people, but once I could connect with them, they were helpful; I felt like I had to prove myself; don’t really seem to know what are the rules.
- Some Homeowners cited being “stood up” for inspection appointments.

It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.

2. Overall, how would you rate your experience with the S.F. Department of Building Inspection in the past year? Would you say...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Mean (4 pt. scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positives
- Competence
- Easy to get to
- Trying to preserve SF architecture
- Knowledgeable
- Ultimately helpful
- Surprisingly patient
- Helpful

Negatives
- Not efficient
- Corrupt
- Understaffed
- Rude to the customer
- Confusing
- City owes a responsibility to everyone to have a better method of educating any prospective applicant what the process is, inspections, details of the work
- Costs exorbitant
General Discussion about why rated Excellent/Good/Only Fair/Poor

- **Why Excellent? (1)**
  o Low expectations when I went in, and it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be
  o It is a bureaucracy, but it’s necessary
  o Very patient, I made it through the system; didn’t feel screwed over; felt it would be corrupt and it wasn’t
  o Treated fairly
  o I was mostly pleasantly surprised
  o Web site good

- **Why Good? (2)**
  o Went and only took me 3 trips and I got my permit; only 2.5 hours waiting once another time
  o Courteous professionalism
  o No one was rude to me
  o Person who helped me was humorous/nice
  o It wasn’t the hellhole I was expecting
  o Architect had made it out much worse; he went with me and ‘warned’ me, but warnings didn’t pan out
  o I got what I came for

- **Why Only Fair? (4)**
  o Budget, timing way off – should have been 2-3 months, and it was 2-3 years
  o Every change takes a couple of months
  o Extremely pricey
  o Had some really good inspectors who were kind/helpful, but had some that should never have gone into public service, abysmal, tainted experience
  o Expectations very low, had a few experiences that went very smoothly, but had a couple of experiences that really tarnished it; hate to put it all on one person, but one person in particular who was unbelievable because a) he was in public service and b) he was allowed to go on treating people that way, notorious for it; timing issues as well
  o Had a TIC and handled condo conversion requirements for [entire] building and had another person leaning on me
  o Once through the permit process, people are nice – they (inspectors) get out, they get fresh air
  o It was intimidating, unfriendly, and felt like I had to go through hoops with each of these people, but once I could connect with them, they were helpful; I felt like I had to prove myself; don’t really seem to know what are the rules

- **Why Poor? (2)**
  o The process; I’m in month 15 of just construction on the garage in front of the house; thousands of dollars to get the first permit; if there’s any change, you pay almost as much all over again just for a curb cut; but the original permit was never used; you pay and pay and pay and pay; the original curb cut was wrong and I’d already paid; because it went over 2 feet the bill from the water department went from $2,500 to $4,300
  o I had 2 very bad experiences; last fall I was stood up 2x waiting for inspector to come after taking the day off to meet him; currently going through condo conversion process -- it was a joke, they picked out minor things; inspectors on my property for hours; they didn’t notice illegal deck rotting away, but noticed other minor things; it was a waste of taxpayer dollars
  o One inspector said there’s a roll of the dice as to who comes out; there’s no consistency in application of condo conversion rules
## Written Comments Regarding SF DBI Overall Rating
### (Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Verbatim Comments – SF DBI; Group 2: Homeowners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>You can’t plan and budget your project. The plans are reviewed too slowly. A lot of burocratism [sic]. So many regulations applied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>The process is complicated, time-consuming, aggravating. The costs associated with each permit are high. Many charges, even if the problem originated with DBI, are almost as high as the original permit. Outrageous. Each time another department e.g. water, PG&amp;E, is involved, the time increases exponentially. I am now in month 15 of adding a garage after waiting months for the permit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>I had some pleasant experiences, especially once I had the permit(s). Inspections were smooth – polar opposite of permit process. But getting permit proved to be stressful and ultimately left me with the feeling of not wanting to do that for a very long time . . . maybe even forego further renovations in the at least near future (1-2 years).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>I had to deal with several inspectors, a couple of whom were helpful and informative, and a few who should definitely NOT be in public service. The good ones shined, and the bad ones tainted my whole experience. The office itself seems chaotic and disorganized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>I had low expectations; I expected delays, incompetence, corruption. I experienced some bureaucracy, but not as annoying as, say, going to the DPT. Having to wait 11 months (I think) for my condo inspections was terrible, but I knew this in advance, which helped. The inspectors were competent and professional and on time, and contradicted my good-old-boy corruption-tainted stereotype. I like the website. (on back) Our complaints are all about limits, resources, equality, fairness. E.g. 311/DMV. Not adequate time for last exercise. Roomful of SF property owners. Glad to have my opinion heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thom</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>I felt process was professional, but it featured too many layers of bureaucracy. When I called for inspections, I learned after the fact that no framing inspection could be conducted UNTIL plumbing and electrical were done. The city has an affirmative duty to educate the public about the overall nature of 1) applications; 2) processing; and 3) inspections. Additional educational materials in print and on the web must be made available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>[vacillated between Good/Fair] Good – got the permit, street parking, etc. Got what I went for. Fair – Intimidating, unfriendly, seemed there was a hurdle I had to jump over, or prove myself. Doubt. Once I figured out how to ‘befriend’ the person, it was OK. Repetitive process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harland</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>In only three trips to the building department I got my permit. (Permit was simply to add a half bath.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>I was ‘stood up’ twice by building inspector after I took time off from my job to meet him at job site. I got the ‘run around’ when applying for permits at DBI office. My pre-condo conversion inspection was a joke – inconsistent, incomplete, inefficient, and bureaucratic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SF DBI Service Attributes - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

- Homeowners expressed the most concern over not knowing where to go, an apparent lack of efficiency, the timeliness of the process and scheduling inspections, and the ambiguity of fees.
- Homeowners generally felt that staff was helpful, and rated “Courteous and Professional Staff” most highly. But as one participant noted, People are courteous and helping me solve problems, but they’re helping me solve problems someone else in their department created.
- Homeowners’ comments highlight the fact that much of their frustration comes from not knowing or fully understanding the various permit requirements and processes.
- Homeowners rated Efficient Service the lowest of any service attribute. Reaching SF DBI staff, and/or being stood up for appointments, appeared to be the driving factors behind the low rating. I had someone [I paid] waiting for me [waiting for the person from SF DBI because I could not] – [SF DBI] came at the very end of the time frame; another time, they came 2 hours late (said they would come between 12:30 and 2:30 and they showed up at 4:30).
- “Timely Permit Process” also received low ratings from the Homeowners. Not timely at all; before even doing the plans it took 11 months, said one participant.
- “Staff is consistent, regardless who you see” was also rated low by Homeowners. As one participant noted, [It’s] the worst part about DBI.
- Homeowners rated “Able to solve problems/answer questions” highly, citing examples of staff help, even when they didn’t know they needed it. One participant explained, A couple of things I hadn’t thought of and the guy at the desk made the notation on my drawings.

**It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Applies Strongly</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to solve problems/answer questions</td>
<td>3 1 3 1 1 0</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear communication of fees</td>
<td>1 0 5 1 2 0</td>
<td>5 2 3 2 1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courteous and professional staff</td>
<td>5 2 3 2 0 0</td>
<td>0 3 3 2 1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate signs/directions inside facility</td>
<td>0 3 3 2 1 0</td>
<td>0 3 3 2 1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straightforward communication of steps needed to obtain your permit</td>
<td>0 3 0 4 2 0</td>
<td>0 2 1 3 3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient Service</td>
<td>0 2 1 3 3 0</td>
<td>5 2 3 2 1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-run City department</td>
<td>0 1 4 1 2 1</td>
<td>0 1 4 1 3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely permit process</td>
<td>0 0 4 2 2 1</td>
<td>1 5 1 1 1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely scheduling of inspections</td>
<td>1 5 1 1 1 0</td>
<td>0 1 4 1 3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff is consistent, regardless who you see</td>
<td>0 1 4 1 3 0</td>
<td>0 1 4 1 3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key disciplines – building, plumbing, electrical – are clearly defined and do not overlap each other</td>
<td>0 3 2 1 2 1</td>
<td>1 1 2 2 0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Check</td>
<td>1 1 2 2 0 3</td>
<td>1 1 2 2 0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
San Francisco DBI Service Attributes - Discussion  
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

**Able to solve your problems or answer your questions**
- Low; I had a report on a condo conversion and presented it to inspector and said, what does it mean; he says, read it again; very unhelpful
- A couple of things I hadn’t thought of and the guy at the desk made the notation on my drawings and I didn’t have to do anything; rated pretty high
- Writing things in for me during planning: Allen was the guy’s name – if there’s something you don’t know about the code, call him, he’s excellent
- Had an inspection as part of a series and learned about the order of how things had to be done; person who helped me was very friendly and accurate, but would have been nice to know that earlier

**Clear communication of fees**
- Low; they tell you how much they think it will cost and your contractor says, just tell them you’re doing that yourself; everyone tells you not to tell them anything; sometimes they charge you $44 and sometimes it’s $900; it’s not very clear
- I’ve had at least 6 permit renewals and it’s a mystery how much it’s determined each time; it’s different every time; I just write the check; I still don’t know how they figured it out
- Virtually non-existent communication of fees
- E.g. curb cut; no explanation as to why the fee had to be paid again
- You don’t know what the fee is until they tell you and you’re sitting right there

**Courteous and professional staff**
- Yes
- Average
- For me, it goes back to first question; people are courteous and helping me solve problems, but they’re helping me solve problems someone else in their department created
- I had an obscure question about the code; the plumbing guy wasn’t there but the electrical guy was able to help me; I tend to be able to reach people I need to and not get through a phone maze
- Varies from person to person; some are polite like Gil Chavez (sp?), but it depends on the person
- Other times, you get there at 3 [PM] and the line closes, but no one tells you an area closes
- A lot of handwritten signs

**Adequate signs/directions inside facility (on Mission Street)**
- Have to do the up and down the elevator route a lot
- Not very professional; a lot of handwritten signs, some with arrows and circles
- A lot of people for whom English isn’t a first language, and it’s confusing
- A lot of places have take-a-number setups and it’s confusing what the number is for; you can wait in the wrong section for hours; so you take 3 different numbers from different places and hope one of them is right
- Can’t tell from signs if you’re in the right place
- Lines close off at various times and there’s no sign posted as to when some areas open/close or lines close off
- There’s a couple people acting as reception on the first floor; I think they’re wonderful
Straightforward communication of steps needed to obtain your permit
- Pretty clear; I got a nice detailed letter; but when you get into the working part of carrying out the work it gets confusing
- The letter spells it out very well, but once you start down the process, things go awry
- Department has to deal with both homeowners and professionals so they don’t necessarily tailor their answers because they don’t know the knowledge level of the person calling; sometimes assuming person knows more than they do
- Wish they had two people, one assigned to homeowners, one to professionals

Efficient service
- Very low, because of my experience being stood up; called the inspector 3 times and left message, but never heard back
- Really depends on who you talk to; sometimes great, sometimes not
- Had someone waiting for me – came at the very end of the time frame; another time, they came 2 hours late (said they would come between 12:30 and 2:30 and they showed up at 4:30)

Well run City department
- Each city department has its own rules and there’s no communication among them; and breakdown between electric, gas, city departments, etc.
- It was OK; you can find your permit online; I was amazed by that
- Street cleaning is a 10 and DBI is a 1
- Adequate; not superior
- Rating fairly high, mainly because I could make my way through it OK
- I can’t say it’s well run, BUT -- I can’t think of any way to run it any better myself; all of us have different situations and we’re not just renewing our drivers’ licenses; they’re trying to have lines for every situation, but you can’t always do that; they do a decent job compared to other departments, but it’s still not good enough

Timely permit process
- Varies
- Average; could be better (3-4 people in agreement)
- Not timely at all; before even doing the plans it took 11 months

Timely scheduling of inspections
- It took a few days
- 11 months for a condo conversion inspection
- Once you do the work, they come right out
- It took 11 months for the first part, before the work is done
- For condo conversions there’s one guy; the rest of it goes pretty well

Staff is consistent, regardless who you see
- I remember going and putting my name on clipboard, then being told to take a number; confusion as to whether to do one or the other
- No, not at all
- Worst part of DBI
- You’re not entitled to see the same person – whoever is up next is who you’re assigned to; so you could have someone you've never dealt with before, runs the gamut whether the person is knowledgeable
**Key disciplines – building, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, major projects – are clearly defined**

- Had a plumber putting in a bathroom fan and it was too close to the window; even though it was required there was nowhere to put it to keep it far away enough from the window to meet code; there was overlap of codes and it wouldn’t work
- Had to get both electrical and framing permit; electrician said he could get permit; I thought, OK, that's odd that he can get his own permit; some inconsistency in the process; it seemed like the electrician could get permits I could not

**Provide clear comments and correction on plan checks**

- Did make notations, changes, very clear
- They were helpful, did make notations
- Had gone through just about every single hoop and a supervisor walked by and said, ‘no’ and so I had to start something all over again; this was after months and months; I called and he said some big scandal had broken the week before and they were cracking down

**(Written comment regarding plan checks, from questionnaire)**

- Hillary: “It was awful. I had a very minor change to make (remove 2 French double doors) and was supposed to get plans. Well, I thought I could do this on my own – wrong. I had to pay $300 for this!!!!!”
Public Perception of the Department of Building Inspection (Unaided)
(Exhibit A)

- Homeowners talked more about what they had heard or read in local media, and more often reported rumors or piecemeal information when it came to overarching changes, politics, or scandal. For example, 8 out of 10 of the Professionals Group had heard that a new Director had been appointed to SF DBI, but none of the Homeowners Group knew of this.

- 6 out of 9 Homeowners had heard of Expediters before the focus group. While the perception of expediters was generally negative, they also liked the idea of someone to shepherd them through the process. When I’m there myself and waiting I wonder whether I should just hire one, one participant explained.

- Homeowners’ feedback about SF DBI was more focused when discussing perceptions or alleged changes that directly affected them. Nightmare, and scary if you’ve never been, were pointed comments about the public’s perception. When asked about changes at SF DBI, participants pointed to a doubling of fees and a new inspector for condo conversions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public’s perception of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Nightmare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Corrupt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bureaucratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Broken system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Scary if you’ve never been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not independent (tied to political agendas depending on who’s in power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cronyism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reactive – e.g. when deck collapsed, suddenly it was tough to get a deck permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Possibly corrupt – a lot of independence of inspectors, don’t know if they’re taking bribes; doesn’t seem to be a lot of oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When you’re in the middle of the inspection process, you wonder if they can be paid off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expediters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Corruption – expediters; who’s paying whom; someone was fired for accepting money from expediters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Article about one inspector buying someone’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Before I had involvement I heard the stories too; but when I heard about expediters I was just outraged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expediters**
- They exist
- People who seem to have the appearance of political connections with DBI
- It’s not just people who are smart, but who are connected
- Our architectural firm actually sent an assistant and called it an expediter (but it wasn’t someone whose job is to run it through, merely to wait in line)
- Expediters are retained and paid by a client because they have a connection in DBI
- Expediters were recommended to me twice, like a lobbyist, to get it through
- When I’m there myself and waiting I wonder whether I should just hire one
- Expeditor used 2 different ways – some just kids paid to wait in line
- Ed Jew scandal – putting permits through, expediter was involved

**Participants who had heard of expediters before this evening’s focus group: 6 (out of 9)**
Awareness of any major issues/problems facing the Department
- Supervisor Ed Jew taking money for building permits; peripherally tied to DBI
- Corruption
- Something around Chinese New Year, a guy appointed as the head of it
- Someone had to be fired because he was accepting bribes
- My perception is that’s what these focus groups are about – to try and change the perception
- Where’s the public accountability – according to this there’s a 7-member commission; who are these people, how are they appointed, etc. I’ve never heard of them
- People get irate because of the problems, and employees are abused by customers as a result (being yelled at all the time); so changes are in their own best interest, for the well-being of employees

Awareness of current changes in the Department; General (unaided) awareness
- I heard something in the last year with somebody stepping down because of corruption, but can’t remember what it was
- Doubling the fees
- Another building inspector for condo conversion

How many aware that new SF DBI Director was appointed in February of this year? Reaction
None of the participants really knew – confusion re: Amy Lee and news regarding other City departments, etc.
- It’s interesting I don’t remember something positive, which that is
- And it’s good to hear there’s been improvements
- Want to know what his qualifications are

EXHIBIT A
San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

AT-A-GLANCE

Mission
Under the direction and management of the seven-member citizen Building Inspection Commission, to oversee the effective, efficient, fair and safe enforcement of the City and County of San Francisco’s Building, Housing, Plumbing, Electrical, Mechanical, and Disability Access Codes.

Background
The Department of Building inspection (DBI) was created by voter referendum under Proposition G in 1994. The charter amendment established the body known as the Building Inspection Commission (BIC) which was designed to provide representation for the various communities which interact with the Building Department.

Permit and Inspection Activity for 2005-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Number of Permits Issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>60,971 (25,726 Building; 14,201 Electrical; 16,492 Plumbing; and 4,552 Miscellaneous Permits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction Valuation</th>
<th>Number of Inspections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over $2.5 billion</td>
<td>131,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reaction to News Article and Proposed Changes (Exhibit B)

- Homeowners were generally positive about the news article and proposed changes. They expressed surprise that so many positive changes were happening. Explained one participant, . . . *It’s a lot more happening than I knew was happening; I didn’t realize there was a new person who’s got a real track record with great potential and specific steps he’s taking.*
- Some members of all three groups felt the article was not specific enough, or wanted a specific timeline. (This was a common sentiment among all three groups.)
- The phrase “Customer Bill of Rights” generated some cynicism and negative feedback. *[It] seems like something that isn’t really going to make my life better,* noted one participant.

EXHIBIT B

Editorial

Building Inspection's new broom

The San Francisco Examiner Newspaper, The Examiner

2007-06-19 10:00:00.0

SAN FRANCISCO - The Department of Building Inspection has long been one of San Francisco's most troubled agencies. It was investigated by the FBI and blasted by the grand jury and City Controller's Office as unresponsive, inconsistent, susceptible to cronyism and political pressure, and in general a hotbed of improper favoritism.

Mayor Gavin Newsom made a 2003 campaign promise to reform the department. He named Amy Lee as acting director; but it was not until March 2007 that The City finally found a permanent director with a track record of implementing meaningful restructuring.

Isam Hasenin, 48, arrived from San Diego, where he was credited with streamlining a cumbersome permit process during his five years as chief building officer. In 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him vice chairman of the California Building Standards Commission, which oversees building code changes statewide.

During his confirmation hearing, Hasenin pledged that the Department of Building Inspection would become fair, transparent, straightforward and ethical for all clients. He said he would spend his first months "aggressively examining the nuts and bolts" of the department and return to the Building Inspection Commission with specific "action steps" for "a new day at DBI."

Last week, Hasenin fulfilled that timetable, bringing the commission more than 50 recommendations comprising a viable approach for fixing the department. Most striking about the new director's program is that many of his action steps are so fundamental it becomes almost startling to realize they haven't already been done here.

Only a deeply flawed bureaucracy with pervasive mistrust of change could for so long have avoided instituting customer services as basic as these: service-by-appointment reservations; staff commitments to specific deadlines that eliminate unpredictable delays; guaranteed second opinion service offering rapid hearings with senior officials on request; comprehensive universal permit application form to end duplication and overlapping.

In addition, Hasenin presented plans for a greatly expanded one-stop customer service center and an enhanced over-the-counter service where rotating teams could approve permits on smaller projects within one hour. There will also be a "Customers' Bill of Rights" giving the public clear, realistic and predictable expectations about their permit-application process.

The Examiner applauds these long-needed initiatives finally being launched under the impressive new leadership of Isam Hasenin. It is crucial to the future of San Francisco that the Department of Building Inspection functions with efficiency and fairness for city residents trying to remodel their homes, and for contractors and builders trying to construct projects adding to The City's livability.

Reaction to article

- Exciting
- Great
- All of these things are like what they did at the DMV, and it’s a lot better
- I once compared my experience at DBI to DMV and the DBI folks were VERY offended
- Just the service by reservation is a real plus
- Very favorable – it sounds like they know there’s a problem and they’re trying to do something about it; it’s a lot more happening than I knew was happening; I didn’t realize there was a new person who’s got a real track record with great potential and specific steps he’s taking
- Timeline for implementation? It sounds good, but I was in the process in May and I didn’t find it all that wonderful
- It’s hopeful
- For new people entering the condo conversion process or whatever, it’s very helpful, changing the obvious -- appointments, for example
- It’s encouraging that this guy did this in San Diego, so he should know what he’s doing
- But he doesn’t know City politics
- I’m hopeful, but it doesn’t have a lot of specifics
- He’s supposed to be pretty good, but I haven’t seen the benefits
- Like the specific reforms at end of article
- Sounds too good to be true
- Cautious optimism
- Just having a plan being worked on and good intentions is an improvement already
Positives of proposed changes
- Customer bill of rights gives a possibly clearer expectation when you begin process so you don’t feel you’re down a rabbit hole
- I like the one-stop, so you won’t find out you’re in the wrong area when you’ve been waiting for an hour
- One permit application so you don’t fill out the wrong one
- It seems like they’re encouraging you to make changes and they’re wanting to say yes if possible; right now it feels very discouraging and you have to beg them to say ‘yes’
- It’s clear, realistic, and predictable
- It’s equitable

Negatives of proposed changes
- What about ombudsman? Someone to assist you going through the maze
- Ombudsman -- that’s kind of like the expeditor [say other participants]
- Customer’s bill of rights -- seems like something that isn’t really going to make my life better
- Customer’s bill of rights has to go along with customer service training for staff (like at DMV) and an employee assistance program to help them deal with the stress
- It’s not really a bill of rights - it’s articulating the process in a clear, concise way; but who’s going to ensure that happens?
- No timeline – next century? By November elections?
- Nothing about how to change the culture of the department
Visions for the Department’s Future - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

- All three groups, including Homeowners, were most enthusiastic about the first two programs, Expand over-the-counter service and Plan review re-checks by appointment. Homeowners generally felt these should have been in place. As one participant explained regarding re-checks by appointment, *I would expect this; you don’t have your teeth rechecked and wonder when you’ll be seen.*

- Homeowners were least favorable towards the fee-for-service programs in general, feeling that this would create a two-tiered system that would negatively impact most people. As one participant explained, *I don’t want a two-tier system; I don’t want to wait for hours and have someone speed past me.*

- However, one fee-for-service program, Service by appointment, received two votes from Homeowners as programs they would use. Homeowners rated this the highest of any premium service; however, many in the group felt, as one person stated, *[it] should be available without a fee.*

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*Note: One participant in Group 2 (Homeowners) circled only one option. Participants were asked to circle up to two options.*
Visions for the Department’s Future – Discussion
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

Programs Currently Implemented

a. Expanded over-the-counter review process
- Good if you’re sitting there receiving the additional attention – but if you’re waiting, you’re pissed off (because you have to wait longer)
- It would be really worth it – you’d spend 1-2 hours more waiting, but it would be better than waiting 11 months
- It’s a great idea if it’s part of a whole plan – but some employees might not be needed as much; assume this is part of an overall staffing plan
- OTC – I think of it as the express lane, and assume I should get in and out fast; but then I’m waiting and waiting and wonder what people are talking about that’s causing me to wait so long – they should divide it between people with and without architectural plans
- Would expect that they would hire more people to minimize the additional wait time

b. Plan review re-checks by appointment
- Great – otherwise you wait 2 months for a recheck and receive a letter in the mail; it takes much less time this way
- It would be nice if you could schedule a time and do this – since you can’t handle plans yourself internally (you can’t walk your plans to another area or floor, for some reason)
- You wouldn’t have to just sit and wait and wonder when you’d be seen
- I would expect this; you don’t have your teeth rechecked and wonder when you’ll be seen

Programs Being Considered

c. Customer Service Initiative
- It's common sense
- Quality control is good (having a second opinion)
- Universal form is great
- Just the concept of customer service – we do pay these people’s salaries and I do expect to be treated like a customer; this speaks to changing the culture, having people not be as antagonistic towards customers
- This is the heart of it – predictability, timeliness
- I think it’s great but then I go back to my situation – it was after 7 months that a supervisor added things; had a bad experience with a second opinion; it’s all contingent upon who you get; wouldn’t want to force a second opinion
- This second opinion should be there anyway; I rated this kind of low; bill of rights – should be there anyway

d. Expansion of Electronic/Automated Service
- 2 reactions; in theory it sounds good; but in practice I don’t want to put something into a faceless machine and then be told, ‘we don’t see it in our computer’; but I do like it for informational purposes – I just don’t want to submit it online
- Face to face interaction in some cases is very important/a positive; don’t want to do away with that entirely
- Need an acknowledgment if submitting online so I have confirmation
- If I believed they cared enough to confirm receipt, this would be fine
- I’d rather be sitting across from someone and listen to him face to face than do it online
- General expansion of web-based services is good as long as it’s not required; in-person option should be an option still; not everyone has a computer and there are situations where you don’t want to interact online, you want/need the face to face interaction

Premium Services Being Considered

e. Express Plan Premium Services
- Don’t like it – if I’m not willing to put up the money I’ll have to wait even longer
- It’s efficient – I’d rather have done that than wait as long as I did
- I don’t want a two-tier system; I don’t want to wait for hours and have someone speed past me
- Lots of concern about two-tier system [6 heads nodding in addition to person speaking]
- Good service should NOT be premium service
- Retool/reallocate service – don’t create a two-tier system
- On one hand you have a customer bill of rights – but over here they’re going to charge a fee for a guaranteed turnaround time, which sort of indicates there isn’t one; seems conflicting
- Seems like whether you fly first class or coach on the airplane; doesn’t think it’s a big deal
- Hopefully, everyone else isn’t having to wait weeks and weeks and weeks

f. After-hours and weekend inspections
- Not necessary
- Should be able to get it done during normal business hours (most agree)
- I like extended hours but don’t want to pay the fee
- Same two-tiered system
- Makes it somewhat more justifiable since people have to be paid more to work then
- Why not think of DBI as 24/7 agency, like cops and fire?

g. Service by appointment
- If an additional fee, don’t want it
- Should be available without a fee
# Visions for the Department’s Future – Written Comments (Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Have available list of recommended engineers and architects the public can use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>For non-industry people or first timers: Like the DMV, you should have the option of going to a general window to briefly, but semi-detailed information, get pointed in the right direction. The security guard has the biggest desk in there! It should be where this ‘help’ person is. Plus, a phone number should be available that has a willing, helpful person on the other end. This person should want to help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>I do not believe that good service should be labeled ‘premium’ service with a fee attached! These are good ideas that should be implemented in the name of efficiency and convenience to taxpayers, not just those who pay more!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Outrageous waits and delays should at least afford me equal treatment. Expedited service for the wealthy doesn’t make me happy. I would LOVE increased across the board fees allowing for after-hours and weekend inspections by appointment. But not a whiff of favoritism/special treatment for the wealthy. No 2-tier system. I am willing to pay more for better/faster service as long as it is uniformly applicable. That is, raise ALL fees. Customer Bill of Rights is too theoretical to matter to me. (Like saying “Have a nice day!”) It’s facile. I’d rather have a commitment to give me good service, timely, etc. How about something like 311 equivalent? One stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thom</td>
<td>Changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public communications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To whom it may concern,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I credit you with attempting to ‘fix’ a broken system. However, if you wish to introduce a multi-tiered ‘premium’ service system into a PUBLIC TRUST, you run the risk of increasing the stratification of service in a city already facing enormous demographic and economic changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A municipal service that exists to serve all its citizens must offer services equitably. To that end, if the department wishes to increase its efficiencies, it can be accomplished by a reallocation of current resources, rather than offering ‘premium’ services with an expectation of additional revenues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>Some good ideas, but ‘additional fees’ negates intent. How is this different than paying expediters?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Easily accessible Internet access to SF building code so public can research questions and issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usage of the SF DBI Website

- Only about half of Homeowners had used the SF DBI web site.
- Homeowners indicated that some additional services on the web would make it more useful, including how busy SF DBI is at a given time, fees for standard items, and what to expect when going through the building/renovation processes.

**How many have used the SF DBI website?**

4 (out of 9) have used it

**Most important/useful features of site (whether have or have not used it)**

- Would like to see building code online
- Knowing where my plan/permit was in the process (is on there but didn’t know it)
- How-to guide
- Welcome/what to expect
- What you will pay
- It’s great they have people’s phone numbers
- Condo conversions – more info would be nice
- Live chat feature
- Ability to make an appointment (need)
- Find out how busy they are at the time (like DMV)
- Who’s who with a photo
- Found web site kind of confusing — make it easier to navigate; has more to do with the City as much as DBI
- 7-member building commission – would like more information about them, from them, and to have a report from new director, update as far as what is going on
Use of Professionals and Departmental Distinctions
(Group 2 - Homeowners Only)

- About half of Homeowners submitted plans or got permits themselves.

**Use Professional Architect/Engineer when you submitted plans/got permits?**

- Did it myself (5 of 9 participants)
- Yes; used architect and engineer; at one point engineer had to go down and get permit, but otherwise I did
- I had both architect and engineer; for awhile, the architect went down; but when revisions started coming in I took over because I was paying him
- Used professional architect/engineer and I was going all the time
- Yes, using both and I went as well

**How many, before coming into this group, understood DBI and Planning are separate?**

7 (of 9) understood

**What are the differences? Is that clear?**

- They are two autonomous agencies
- One makes one decision and one makes another, and you often get caught between them
- Not clear to me that they are two separate agencies (2)
- Yes, clear to me (7)
Mock Building Inspection Committee

- Homeowners mentioned streamlining and eliminating favoritism as recommendations.
- Homeowners also mentioned a better layout of DBI offices, and greeters at the entrance to help give general direction and answer questions.
- Outreach was also a key component of Homeowners’ recommendations.

Group #2 – Homeowners

- Changes
  - Ombudsperson (aka ‘the people’s expediters’)
  - Clear, consistent, simplified process
  - Keep promises
  - [Better] layout of DBI office
  - Greeter who explains process – at kiosk
  - No favoritism in process (no two-tiered)
  - Sensitive advocates for specific services
  - Service by appointment

- Outreach
  - Public information sheet (‘how to’)
  - New ads in media
  - Touchscreen (info kiosk) in office
  - Enhanced web access

Wrap-Up (Final Comments)

- Improve the perception, increase my faith that the system will be fair – not necessarily faster or cheaper, but fair
- Simplify process
- Appointments
- Walk in the shoes of people who have had problems
- Time frames
- Appointments (2nd)
- Train staff to know whether they’re talking to contractor or homeowner and adjust accordingly
- Customer service training
- Let people know what to expect, not open-ended
DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

Group 3: Influentials
Building and Renovating Property in San Francisco

- **Influentials** praised SF DBI's thoroughness and knowledge, which they tied to the value and the quality of completed renovation/building work in San Francisco.
- **Influentials (Group 3)** were most frustrated by the amount of time and cost of renovating and building in San Francisco.
- **Influentials also cited the fearfulness felt by many homeowners and clients, as well as some contractors outside of San Francisco, as negatives.** One Influential noted, *A lot of clients ask, are you familiar with the process? That’s the first thing they ask is how familiar you are with DBI.*
- **In addition to the length of time,** Influentials also noted the element of surprise and the frequency of community input as negatives.

### General Discussion
- More difficult here than other places
- Very challenging if you are intimidated
- A lot of homeowners/clients are intimidated
- A lot of clients ask, are you familiar with the process? That’s the first thing they ask is how familiar you are with DBI
- When I talk to contractors outside SF, they always say, how can you do it in the City? I can’t do it; they are intimidated by the process of getting permits, inspections, etc.
- We have an overabundance of community input into every project and renovation that goes on; we let general community control too much of the design, renovation, planning

### Positives
- When a project is done, it is usually pretty good; very nice once it’s done
- Inspectors I deal with are all plumbers and speak the language
- The personnel at DBI are generally very knowledgeable
- Highly profitable
- Many projects go through process smoothly (if you run into right official at DBI)
- If you’re restoring a building, you can use state code, which is more lenient
- Recent change in structure works a lot better – specifically, the way they take in projects at DBI
- Building is a very technically oriented dept and the staff are very knowledgeable and offer alternatives in solving the problems

### Negatives
- Highly profitable (a negative as well as a positive)
- People retiring at SFDBI are knowledgeable – and they’re difficult to replace
- Time – lots required
- Lengthy process
- You can always be blindsided by a discretionary review; once you get your project approved, someone, anyone – a neighbor, or even someone outside SF – can throw in a discretionary review and stop the project dead cold; so a $175 discretionary review fee can stop a multi-million dollar project
- San Francisco has a lot of codes that are specific that can make allowances for alternative methods; if you’re not familiar with it, though, you won't know how to go about solving it
- Inconsistent interpretation – a lot from lack of leadership and having
- Having interim director for so long
- Disconnect between plan check and inspectors
Role of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

- Like the other two groups, Influentials said that SF DBI was to inspect buildings, ensure they were built and renovated safely, and issue permits for appropriate usage.
- Influentials agreed with Homeowners in that they felt SF DBI also had a responsibility to assist people going through the permit and inspection process, and that SF DBI should educate those who deal with the agency infrequently and/or are going through the processes for the first time. One participant commented, SFDBI put out a how to get a permit book several years ago – something like that, loaded up on the web site and take John Q Public through the process, would be huge.

Role of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (SF DBI)

- Provide information to public on how to get permit
- Help Harry Homeowner or commercial property owner get through process and get permits
- Ensure health and safety of people using/living in the building
- Enhance the process by educating the public about the code
- Code can be read and interpreted differently – need to spend time with each individual regarding conflicting interpretations
- SFDBI put out a how to get a permit book several years ago – something like that, loaded up on the web site and take John Q Public through the process, would be huge
- Online tutorials would be huge
- Inspections is just to inspect the actual building

Familiarity with San Francisco Department of Building Inspection
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- All of the Influentials were very or somewhat familiar with SF DBI.

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

1. How familiar are you with the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat Familiar</th>
<th>Not Too Familiar</th>
<th>Not At All Familiar</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influentials</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Role of the San Francisco Planning Department/Crossover Issues
(Group 3-Influentials Only)

- Influentials clearly felt that the Planning Department should also be reorganized and/or improved, and overall felt the Planning Department was not in as good a shape as SF DBI. *DBI commissioners are accessible and open, planning commissioners aren’t*, one Influential noted. Another said, *You get your money’s worth at DBI, but not at Planning.*

- However, Influentials also said Planning and Building Inspection need to work together more and not allow projects or steps to fall through the cracks between the two agencies. One participant summed it up by saying, *After getting planning approvals, often, even under construction, if changes are made there’s confusion as to whether the change is adjudicated by planning, DBI, both, neither.*

### Role of the San Francisco Planning Department

- They're not doing what they're supposed to do
- Plan for the future of the city and make sure people have housing, transportation, etc. – but not design a project for people (3 verbally agree with original person's statement)
- Should be enforcing the general plan that’s been adopted, but instead make it conditional on 100 different things
- Determine the adequacy of the design in all planning permutations
- When a project is likely to be appealed to the board of supervisors it is very political and they don't use the objective criteria as much as they used to
- DBI commissioners are accessible and open, planning commissioners aren’t

### Are responsibilities of Planning and DBI clearly defined? Is there crossover?

- Defined, but lots of crossover
- Yes, they are relatively well defined on paper
- There is crossover
- After getting planning approvals, often, even under construction, if changes are made there’s confusion as to whether the change is adjudicated by planning, DBI, both, neither
- At the end of a project, especially one with a few RFIs on it, trying to get it finalized by both planning and DBI is difficult
- On smaller projects I split them up; I do the outside stuff on one and the inside stuff on the other, because it will go through faster; and that shouldn't have to happen

### Customers’ perspective of working relationship between Planning and Dept of Building Inspection

- You get your money's worth at DBI but not at planning
- Planning assessment is totally unreasonable
- Changing the window might be routed through planning and you’re paying an extra $1,000 for no reason
- Planning department seems to favor larger projects and provides better service to them than smaller projects
- Hope planning and DBI will bring in public and meet and talk things over
- Sometimes something falls through the crack and no agency wants to touch it – e.g. a glitch on a building; planning had it one way, DBI had it the other way, and no one wanted to address the issue
- We were having a problem for awhile with disabled access stuff, a lot of additional scrutiny (lawsuits, not enforcing ADA as well), but I think it’s been ironed out for the most part
General Positive/Negative Reaction to San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (Self-Administered Questionnaire #1)

- Influentials praised SF DBI’s recent changes, as well as its knowledge base, training, and thoroughness. As one Influential noted, *Much more so now – there’s an attitude of we’re here to help you, NOT ‘we’re here to prevent you.’*

- However, Influentials cited the length of time involved and inconsistency in code interpretation as negative aspects of dealing with SF DBI. *[There’s an] Inconsistency of people we deal with during permit process said one participant. . . [There’s] lots of time involved for a small business owner to sign a lease and get permits for their space is an issue, said another.*

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

2. Overall, how would you rate your experience with the S.F. Department of Building Inspection in the past year? Would you say...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Mean (4 pt. scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influentials</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Information is easy to access – in my role it’s my job to find information and present it to readers through monthly publication; they’re always very responsive and senior staff is available to do interviews, provide information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gearing up for changes is done in a positive way, they way they get people trained and prepare for changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We can talk – easy to call people up and talk to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Technical person is available on the phone and will return phone calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A lot of people don’t seem to know that a technical person is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The building services division trains a lot of people and thus encourages consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Also have a public advisory committee – wish other departments did this – so you can go in and talk about a process or a problem, etc. The director attends so it has weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sense of optimism, change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recognize the needs of adding staff to the team – they know they’re backlogged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Much more so now – there’s an attitude of we’re here to help you, NOT ‘we’re here to prevent you’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SFDBI is always willing to work with someone who gets a notice of violation, even if owner has trouble getting access immediately; more willing to work with owner to get the work done rather than litigate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negatives

- Parallel plan check is worse, supposed to be better; different players mean different interpretations and just results in starting over, going backwards
- Hear complaints about having to replace a kitchen sink or cabinets, and you need a permit for that
- Time – lots of time involved for a small business owner to sign a lease and get permits for their space is an issue
- Lots of stumbling blocks
- It would be helpful if you could schedule inspections online, ahead of time
- Inconsistency of people we deal with during permit process
- Inconsistency of interpretation
- Hard to figure out which department and which floor to go to in order to get the permits, and do you need 10 permits or how many, etc.
- There should be a better way to track the process once your plans are turned in so you know where they are – sometimes plans sit while someone goes on vacation for one or two weeks; someone needs to step in so they don’t sit anywhere for 2 weeks
- Had a client who was ready to pick up the permit set and SFDBI couldn’t find the plans, even though we’d gotten approval and had just submitted them – tracking system needed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Verbatim Comments – SF DBI; Group 3: Influentials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>Inconsistent code interpretation&lt;br&gt;Length of time required to obtain permits (without permit expediter)&lt;br&gt;Inspectors differing in their interpretation of codes, requiring field changes over already approved plans and specs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>On our several projects, there has been inconsistent and contradictory communication, disruption of flow through the process, change of personnel causing backtracking, resubmissions.&lt;br&gt;Pre-application process is not fully effective.&lt;br&gt;Inspectors can often become the “new” plan checkers in the field, changing requirements, causing delays and problems.&lt;br&gt;“Final permitting”/certificates of occupancy are cumbersome and lengthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margie</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Recent improvements in permitting have received rave reviews – however, the Department is hampered by decades of “bad experiences”&lt;br&gt;For homeowners, the process borders on incomprehensible, and even for experienced customers (architects and contractors), the length of time to get a permit and what permits are needed (i.e. what’s the process?) are very unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>I have had, and seen, better process in other cities. Staff were “customer friendly,” whereas in SF, you might find some poor service from the civil servants. I have done projects through regular plan check and parallel plan check. The parallel plan check is worse than regular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Communication! We have excellent communication with DBI personnel, who have taken the time to meet with me and my association members frequently on building department processes, code interpretations, and problems we need to address.&lt;br&gt;Product! We have had an excellent relationship with DBI that has allowed us to create administrative bulletins together that help define how state codes are going to be interpreted and enforced locally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>They (inspectors) understand the permit process is not streamlined, which creates a delay ultimately costing everyone money. They know the situation is harmful and they help you out accordingly so long as their job or reputation will not be damaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janan</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Responsive to request for information and access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>Culture of the employer&lt;br&gt;Some very good – solutions&lt;br&gt;Some not great – create obstacles, obstructionist&lt;br&gt;Those who tried to be a part of the solution were cast with accusations of favoritism, which ultimately just encourages a “safe decision” atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Only Fair</td>
<td>Recently, we ran into disputes during a pre-application meeting of code interpretation and means and methods of alternatives. The Fire Department recommended a solution and it took it and developed it further. We resubmitted the revised plans, and then found out DBI and the Fire Department disagreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Verbatim Comments – SF DBI; Group 3: Influentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>I get permits online. They are almost always available for questions regarding code and standard practices. They are reasonable when we differ in opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SF DBI Service Attributes - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

- Like the other two constituent groups, Influentials gave high marks to SF DBI’s ability to solve problems or answer questions.
- Influentials gave the lowest marks to the attribute, “Staff is consistent, regardless who you see.”
- Influentials again mentioned the length of time involved in the permitting and inspection process. One Influential cited the intake process as an example, saying, *Intake is a joke – when you go to 6 intake meetings, no one is taking anything in.*
- In discussion, Influentials cited the tendency of DBI staff to avoid or put off making decisions as a key reason permit and inspection processes are so time-consuming. As one Influential stated, *One department looks at the other and no one wants to sign off.*

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Applies Strongly</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Mean 5-pt. Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who rated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to solve problems/answer questions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear communication of fees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courteous and professional staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate signs/directions inside facility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straightforward communication of steps needed to obtain your permit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient Service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-run City department</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely permit process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely scheduling of inspections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff is consistent, regardless who you see</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key disciplines – building, plumbing, electrical – are clearly defined and do not overlap each other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plan Check: NOT ASKED
San Francisco DBI Service Attributes - Discussion
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #2)

**Comments on Various DBI Service Attributes**

- Glad you mentioned the signs and directions – between that and the noise and the amount of people milling around I’m amazed anyone can work there or find anything there
- There needs to be more overlap and cross-training (last sentence is TOO true); there’s some balkanization sometimes, probably because of the employee unions that don’t allow for cross-training
- Opposite – electrical, fire, and plumbing will all inspect caulking, for example, and all with different interpretations (2 people)
- Timely permit process is comical; if you analyze how many man-hours goes into checking these things and how long it takes, there’s a huge discrepancy
- For a high-rise building, it took us 18 months to get to the point where we could call for inspections; there’s probably 100 hours for someone to review, but it took 18 months to get it done
- Tenant improvements in office buildings it’s been a pretty fast turnaround; TI process has been fast
- The pre-app meeting can take as long as 6 months, from the time you have the first meeting until all open issues are resolved – it’s advisable to have it but it takes so long to
- Intake is a joke – when you go to 6 intake meetings, no one is taking anything in
- People seem afraid to make decisions, even when there’s a supervisor or director in the room
- One department looks at the other and no one wants to sign off
- Anyone who gets there trying to do their job is seen as favoritism; people are coerced into making the safe decision, not the right decision
Public Perception of the Department of Building Inspection (Unaided)
(Exhibit A)

- Like Professionals, Influentials felt that much of the public perception of SF DBI had been unfairly tainted by constant stories in the media which emphasized negative events.
- Influentials cited that the effects of this negative influence caused many homeowners/clients to fear SF DBI’s permitting and inspection processes, causing some people to avoid getting permits they should have sought. One group member explained, *Many of my customers say, “I just don't want them in here.” They perceive inspectors as being tyrants, they're afraid of them.*
- While Influentials did not like the idea of Expediters, most had used one, believing that it was a necessary evil on some projects, particularly those which were complicated or simply could get easily bogged down.
- All members of the Influentials group had heard of recent changes at DBI, and these changes were viewed positively. One Influential explained, *[Isam] spoke to several groups I’ve been involved in – he seems very competent, great credentials, seems like he wants to do the right thing for the customer and doesn’t come with a political agenda, unlike other dept. heads in the city*
- Influentials did express concern about the political backlash SF DBI, and its Director, might experience due to the changes being made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public’s perception of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The Chronicle has built the general perception that you have to know somebody or have political connections to get your project approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The corruption scandal has really tarnished the department, will take time to heal the perception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Even employees within the department perceived influence more than was there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Many of my customers say, “I just don’t want them in here.” They perceive inspectors as being tyrants, they’re afraid of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- From small biz standpoint follows that – they’re afraid to go through the process; they’re afraid of what it’s going to take; it’s correct perception in terms of timing; how am I going to get through this process and still have money to open my business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With small biz/small property owners, you trigger a lot of code requirements; e.g. a seismic retrofit also requires ADA upgrades, electrical upgrades, etc. you have to bring everything up to code turning $100k into $500k project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I stand at the counter and I hear a husband/wife come in and they’re completely frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This leads to a lot of people doing the work and not getting permits because the perception is that SFDBI is an obstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A lot of people still believe that what SFDBI is trying to do is uphold safe, quality building in SF – and some people are afraid because they have illegal building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of any major issues/problems facing the Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expediters – perceived need for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Computer system doesn’t work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Automation needs across the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Culture of not being motivated to be part of the solution, question, why they’re there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employees playing solitaire on their computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Favoritism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of experience, some plan checkers/inspectors not up to par</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **USE EXPEDITER: 7 out of 10 do (1 “don’t know” left before question was asked)**
- **Why?**
  - Process is so complicated, and don’t have time to go down there
  - You can’t pay me enough
  - More predictable for getting something out
  - Expediter has a more comfortable relationship with those at DBI
  - Inspectors can let their hair down more with expediter
  - I might do 1-2 projects/year; the expediter does 25/year; he’s got a much better learning curve than I do, I want to take advantage of his experience
  - They are our permit team – we’re asking for assigned caseworker; our expediter are our caseworker now
  - Problem with expediter – pulled off someone’s desk, etc., adds to favoritism perception

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**Awareness of current changes in the Department; General (unaided) awareness**

- New director
- Overturn with staffing – a lot of people leaving and new people coming in
- Some old timers coming back
- A lot of discussion of improved processes, but can’t describe fully what those are
- Openness of a sustainability agenda, willing to talk about that and make more energy-efficient homes

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**How many aware that new SF DBI Director was appointed in February of this year? Reaction**

**All (11 out of 11)**

- Great
- We’re happy
- Someone that is coming in and make a positive change for the city of SF, but not a lot of people are open to change
- I ran into Isam, and the first thing he said was, how are we treating you, and if you have any issues, give him a call and schedule meeting with him
- Gone through new process, think it’s positive
- New director spoke to group I’m at and seemed very up
- Background, experience, willingness to make changes all good – wait and see
- Spoke to several groups I’ve been involved in – he seems very competent, great credentials, seems like he wants to do the right thing for the customer and doesn’t come with a political agenda, unlike other dept. heads in the city
- He’s very political, that’s why he’s doing outreach – worried about getting his knees chopped off by commission; worried if he won’t have support he’ll be gone
- He’s making changes and ruffling very powerful feathers

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**EXHIBIT A**

**San Francisco Department of Building Inspection**

**AT-A-GLANCE**

**Mission**
Under the direction and management of the seven-member citizen Building Inspection Commission, to oversee the effective, efficient, fair and safe enforcement of the City and County of San Francisco’s Building, Housing, Plumbing, Electrical, Mechanical, and Disability Access Codes.

**Background**
The Department of Building inspection (DBI) was created by voter referendum under Proposition G in 1994. The charter amendment established the body known as the Building Inspection Commission (BIC) which was designed to provide representation for the various communities which interact with the Building Department.

**Permit and Inspection Activity for 2005-2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>288</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Permits issued</td>
<td>60,971 (25,726 Building; 14,201 Electrical; 16,492 Plumbing; and 4,552 Miscellaneous Permits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Valuation</td>
<td>Over $2.5 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Inspections</td>
<td>131,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Construction Permits Approved in One-day or less</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Editorial

The Department of Building Inspection has long been one of San Francisco’s most troubled agencies. It was investigated by the FBI and blasted by the grand jury and City Controller’s Office as unresponsive, inconsistent, susceptible to cronyism and political pressure, and in general a hotbed of improper favoritism.

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING INSPECTION │ AUGUST 2007

The San Francisco Examiner Newspaper, The Examiner
2007-06-19 10:00:00.0

EXHIBIT B

AUGUST 2007

Building Inspection’s new broom

The Department of Building Inspection has long been one of San Francisco’s most troubled agencies. It was investigated by the FBI and blasted by the grand jury and City Controller’s Office as unresponsive, inconsistent, susceptible to cronyism and political pressure, and in general a hotbed of improper favoritism.

Mayor Gavin Newsom made a 2003 campaign promise to reform the department. He named Amy Lee as acting director; but it was not until March 2007 that The City finally found a permanent director with a track record of implementing meaningful restructuring.

Isam Hasenin, 48, arrived from San Diego, where he was credited with streamlining a cumbersome permit process during his five years as chief building officer. In 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him vice chairman of the California Building Standards Commission, which oversees building code changes statewide.

During his confirmation hearing, Hasenin pledged that the Department of Building Inspection would become fair, transparent, straightforward and ethical for all clients. He said he would spend his first months “aggressively examining the nuts and bolts” of the department and return to the Building Inspection Commission with specific “action steps” for “a new day at DBI.”

Last week, Hasenin fulfilled that timetable, bringing the commission more than 50 recommendations comprising a viable approach for fixing the department. Most striking about the new director’s program is that many of his action steps are so fundamental it becomes almost startling to realize they haven’t already been done here.

Only a deeply flawed bureaucracy with pervasive mistrust of change could for so long have avoided instituting customer services as basic as these: service-by-appointment reservations; staff commitments to specific deadlines that eliminate unpredictable delays; guaranteed second opinion service offering rapid hearings with senior officials on request; comprehensive universal permit application form to end duplication and overlapping.

In addition, Hasenin presented plans for a greatly expanded one-stop customer service center and an enhanced over-the-counter service where rotating teams could approve permits on smaller projects within one hour. There will also be a “Customers’ Bill of Rights” giving the public clear, realistic and predictable expectations about their permit-application process.

The Examiner applauds these long-needed initiatives finally being launched under the impressive new leadership of Isam Hasenin. It is crucial to the future of San Francisco that the Department of Building Inspection functions with efficiency and fairness for city residents trying to remodel their homes, and for contractors and builders trying to construct projects adding to The City’s livability.

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Reaction to News Article and Proposed Changes ( Exhibit B )

- While the reaction to the article from Influentials was largely positive, they had several concerns.
- Several group members, as with the other two groups, cited the lack of a timeline and questioned how the changes would be implemented.
- Influentials were also concerned that political forces would conspire against positive changes at SFDBI. One participant noted, ... I think there’s a subculture in city government that is very much anti-growth, and part of the reason this is so cumbersome is that if you can’t figure it out, nothing gets done ...
Visions for the Department’s Future - Ratings
(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

- Influentials were overall more positive about all of the programs than the other two groups, both with existing and proposed programs.
- While there was some concern about a two-tiered system among Influentials, they were less concerned than either Homeowners or Professionals. One participant summed it up by saying, *Time is money, this reflects that.*
- Influentials’ primary concerns about new programs was the cost involved, the logistics (in terms of sending items electronically), and whether fees collected would cover any additional labor costs. As one Influential stated, *Data transfer and getting drawings online that are useful, manipulating large files, may not work well at first.*
- Influentials also felt that customers needed to be held accountable as well, and not try to turn in incomplete plans or use political influence to push through otherwise unacceptable construction. They felt that this should go hand-in-hand with any customer service guarantee. One explained, *Sometimes customers bring things in that just aren’t approvable and they think their political clout will get a bad plan approved.*
- Influentials were also concerned about making guarantees. As one said, *I’m a skeptic whenever I hear the word ‘guarantee’ – I can see a client saying, the department guaranteed the permit, you didn’t get it, etc. you’re creating a situation where it can be problematic; failure to meet a guarantee = damage.*

*It should be kept in mind that this type of qualitative inquiry permits directional rather than statistical analysis.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program (# of times circled in parentheses)</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand over-the-counter review process (1)</td>
<td>4 5 2 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan review re-checks by appointment (3)</td>
<td>5 5 1 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Initiative (1)</td>
<td>4 5 1 1 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of Electronic/Automated Services (7)</td>
<td>6 4 1 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express Plan Premium Services (4)</td>
<td>5 0 5 0 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-hours and weekend inspections (1)</td>
<td>5 3 2 1 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service by appointment (4)</td>
<td>6 3 2 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Two participants in Group 3 (Influentials) circled only one option, while one participant circled three. Participants were asked to circle up to two options.*
Visions for the Department’s Future – Discussion (Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)

Programs Currently Implemented

Expanded over-the-counter review process
- If I’m in the line, it wouldn’t be as efficient; I’d have to sit there to wait for an hour to be the next person, I’d rather make an appointment
- A lot of homeowners and small biz owners would love the opportunity to just sit down and get this done
- If you take the time off work and can get it done, great; but if there’s 3 people in front of you, it’s 3 hours of waiting
- It’s good; if the structure remains as it is, you have to adjust; I wouldn’t go at certain time of day/day of week because I’d spend more time waiting
- Vast majority are small contractors and homeowners, and get them out, lead them through, be done with it
- Concerned about how it can be paid for, if they actually did take that long the fees on these jobs are small
- Haven’t seen it change, so I’m skeptical
- Great reaction if it does result in the decision being made; if they take an hour and still don’t make a decision, it doesn’t help

Plan review re-checks by appointment
- Good
- Efficient
- Works for everybody
- As long as they keep appointments
- Be sure doesn’t happen like the doctor’s office
- Finally moving into the 21st century – make an appointment like the rest of us do
- More efficient way of doing business
- Also gives plan checkers chance to prepare for a meeting so they are knowledgeable about what the meeting will be about
- Does this imply more of a caseload, where one person is in charge of certain things?

Programs Being Considered – Customer Service Initiative, Expansion of Electronic/Automated Services
- People want to do the right thing and this is saying, we recognize there are obstacles to getting permits and doing the right thing; come down here, this is what you’re going to get and we’ll try to live up to it
- This is saying, this is what you’re going to get and we’ll try to live up to it
- I didn’t think it was that great, if everybody was doing their job you don’t need a 2nd opinion
- They’re not accountable, so what’s the point of having another opinion
- Predict amount of time to get your permits – can they really do that?
- A guarantee would be even better
- Anybody who knows something about plans can look at criteria and they should know whether it’s 100 hours, 40 hours, 2 hours, etc.; when you hear 100 hours of work taking 18 months – nobody wins in that situation
- On larger, more complex projects, they say you’ll get your permit in x time, as long as your drawings are perfect – but often it takes time because they have questions about the plans
- How long it’s going to take is valuable for anyone unfamiliar with the process and might help people decide to go forward with something or not
- You would be making someone more accountable with something like this, and change the perception from the first onset
- Customer bill of rights – I think it’s good because a lot of my clients are just afraid and this gives them their rights
- CBR – coupled with responsibilities; small-time guys are big offenders, where they just put crap out there; if you have rights there’s also responsibilities (for the customers as well)
- Sometimes customers bring things in that just aren’t approvable and they think their political clout will get a bad plan approved
- Customer has to be expected to do the following things as well – rights and responsibilities; no incomplete plans
- CBR – has to also be backed up by enforcement mechanism – what happens when bill of rights isn’t followed??
- Electronic – huge
- Great
to be able to check on information right away, turn drawings in = great!
- Already done in many cities
- Don’t have to bring whole set in – more time to actually get drawings in because you don’t have to print them out, produce them
- Los Angeles is doing the electronic, so is Portland
- There’s also places that don’t review plans very carefully – implementation is not always there; being a first adapter is often expensive and fraught with peril, so need to be careful
- Data transfer and getting drawings online that are useful, manipulating large files, may not work well at first
- The architects, etc. are ready to go, but recipients aren’t always ready to review plans that way
- Should apply this on recheck, start with the recheck process going electronic, that’s a little part, easier to implement, workout the bugs there
- Smaller projects would do well electronically too
- Can get a plumbing permit right now online; it’s great; can pay online, etc.
- The work in plumbing is the inspection, not the permitting process

**Premium Services Being Considered:** Express Plan, After-hours/Weekend Inspections, Service by appointment

- A lot of my clients would pay that – some clients would pay 200% more
- A premium – sounds reasonable; if the guy has an option and it makes sense for him, then go forward
- It’s revenue for DBI, too, which is good
- It’s a great idea in concept, if there’s the staff available, if they’re actually working overtime to accomplish that, but otherwise, it will slow down all the other work
- Can reinforce the idea of the expediter
- Pushes everyone else back in the queue – could be a problem
- Outsourcing would be great; there may not be people at SFDBI willing to put in the overtime
- Can be up to SFDBI to figure out how to make it work – although might impact other people’s work
- I’m a skeptic whenever I hear the word ‘guarantee’ – I can see a client saying, the department guaranteed the permit, you didn’t get it, etc. you’re creating a situation where it can be problematic; failure to meet a guarantee = damage
- If I’ve got a project, I’ll get my first set of plan checks in 1-2 weeks; I don’t want to get too excited about it, because I think it would be great
- We’ve had horror stories of people just trying to get as-builts done and they hold up the file;
- Worried it will hold someone else back
- Either you have the money to pay and move your things forward or you don’t; the small person who tries to get something done will have to wait longer
- Two-tiered system (oh, so the rich can fork it out and move ahead but I’m at the end of the line); 4-5 nods/agreement
- (What if you) Use a private inspection firm and do 100% premium; so you’re not using SFDBI employees, it’s not a burden on the dept, it’s more money for SF, you’re getting through faster
- After hours and weekends – have it now
- Great, especially for smaller clients
- Great to be able to fast track, and do it now, to some extent
- Service by appt – why should you pay an additional fee for setting an appointment. It seems more efficient and saves the department money anyway
- We often have very specific building inspection issues on a one on one basis and most clients would be willing to pay the fee to solve a particular problem
- Sends a message that you’re important, it’s a little bit of a respect thing
- Time is money, this reflects that
# Visions for the Department’s Future – Written Comments  
*(Self-Administered Questionnaire #3)*

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Verbatim Comments – SF DBI; Group 3: Influentials</th>
<th>Self-Administered Questionnaire #3 Comments</th>
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<td>Jim</td>
<td>“Case worker”</td>
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| John  | Assign a “go to” person at DBI for each significant project who has electronic access to the whole permit picture.  
Figure out a way to streamline addendum process: i.e. concentrated plan check “appointments” for each addendum package (managed by the above “go to” person). |
| Doug  | Concerned that Express Plan services would occur at expense of normal projects in queue. |
| Margie| “How to get a permit” sessions offered for homeowners/others. |
| Sam   | Better web access to City database or records.  
I am not in favor to go with a Premium plan. It’s not fair for people without money. |
| Ken   | (re: Service by appointment): Why do you need to pay more? Only if you have a third/fourth, need to work on same problem or project.  
Allow for private engineering and/or architectural firms to do inspections and/or plan reviews when the Department is overloaded. Have Director make decision and/or other responsible party when DBI needs to “go outside.” |
| Andy  | Understand permit process and effectively communicate to the general public. This change will create a positive perception of DBI, which they will generate more revenue. Win/win  
1. Automation  
2. Demo building  
3. Changes – improve customer service (how to communicate) |
| Janan | Revamp and upgrade internal computer system. |
| Sean  | Improve employee morale – make employees feel like they are part of the housing solution. The service they provide is important. Perhaps offer incentives to employees to improve production and service. |
| Jason | Be accountable on what they have approved and signed. |
| Bright| Map or ‘how to’ brochure. Helpers to explain to the uninitiated what they can expect. Customer Bill of Rights. |
Improving the Relationship Between SF DBI and . . .
(Group 3 – Influentials Only)

- Influentials suggested a combination of outreach/information campaigns and introductory brochures (e.g. a brochure for homeowners, for those new to SF DBI) in order to improve relationships between SF DBI and various constituencies. One Influential explained, *Too much time now spent just getting information – for a city like SF in heart of technology area, we should be able to provide the public with information they should be able to get.*

**Between SF DBI and Neighborhood Groups**

- Inspectors, 2-3 items/year talk to us, have dinner, maybe need to do that too
- Code of conduct – when I talk to people in NH groups there’s a perception that there’s favoritism, political connections, expediters; need a code of conduct which would state that if there’s wrongdoing, there’s a structure to address it
- Grand jury was full of things, but no specifics, cast a dark cloud over SFDBI, but no real specifics that would help; it's time to get rid of the half-truths, rumors, etc.
- There's ample opportunity for people to be informed
- Online information too
- Have a web site that has a lot of information on upcoming events and walk through the process, and where to go if you need more info, where to go next, links from association web sites to department, AIA should have a link, BOMA, etc. should have a link to SFDBI from their own sites

**Between SF DBI and Professionals, Including Engineers, Architects, Developers, Contractors, and Others**

- More information accessible online
- Too much time now spent just getting information – for a city like SF in heart of technology area, we should be able to provide the public with information they should be able to get
- Incentivize employees to be more inclined to be part of the solution; very easy to have a set of drawings and find problems, but harder to find solutions; you get into situations the codes don’t always address; employees should help find solutions
- DBI has really partnered with educating members re: codes, building code and green issues, etc. have seen a real change in that regards
- Professional newsletter would be great; we have one inspector who writes a column; he picks one where there’s a lot of failures that month, and why, etc., very educational; would be great to do the same for other professions
- What about a DBI blog? You could ask a question and get an answer, informally
- Interpretations tend to change
Usage of the SF DBI Website

- Most Influentials had used the SF DBI website.
- Influentials wanted to see the website used more, particularly for informational and outreach goals they mentioned earlier (such as a section for homeowners/newcomers).

How many have used the SF DBI website?

7 (out of 11) have used it

Most important/useful features of site (whether have or have not used it)

- List of people to contact
- Navigating the system
- Status and tracking of permits
- Need improved status and tracking of permits
- Online permits
- Ability to print permits from your own computer
- Understanding the processes
- Tracking, paying fees, printing out forms, submitting forms
- Appointment calendar
- Specific section for small biz and homeowners, so they just deal with issues they need to deal with, instead of going through a lot of things that don’t apply, e.g. homeowners’ corner
- A lot of people go once in their life for a permit – small biz owner, homeowner – have that information step by step, since they aren’t likely to have to go through process again
- SFDBI should be able to take you to link to fire dept for inspection, etc. so you keep those in mind too
Comparisons/Emerging Practices

- Influentials acknowledged that SF DBI is among the largest and most complex building inspection department they deal with locally.
- Influentials praised the knowledge base of both plan checkers and inspectors.
- Influentials were most likely to suggest that SF DBI consider moving to a physical space that could more readily accommodate the agency, so that staff was less cramped and had a more efficient, more pleasant environment to work in.

Comparison of San Francisco DBI with building inspection departments in other Bay Area Counties

- It’s the biggest
- Most complicated
- When I go down to Hillsboro to take a permit there’s a sweet lady and they give you a pen and you fill out the application

Positives of San Francisco DBI vs. elsewhere

- Different inspectors – one for plumbing, knows plumbing inside and out, the electrical guys know electrical, etc.
- Knowledgeable plan checkers

Negatives of San Francisco DBI vs. elsewhere

- Oakland will call you looking for the information; hey are you going to do this or not? San Francisco doesn’t do that
- Parking
- The process is convoluted
- Labyrinthine
- Should assign an individual to track from day one – other communities do that, a caseworker kind of system
- One person can call you and tracks your plans through the system
- SF has used same building application form for 20 years – and things have changed but they haven’t kept up, it doesn’t ask right questions

Specific emerging practices that DBI should consider based on experience dealing with other Building Inspection Departments

- Oakland has an incentive program where their re employees get a bonus at year’s end when they provide best service, etc. very motivated to get your permits out
- Oakland doesn’t plan check – they just glass things through (contrasting view); so the incentive may not be the key
- Customer service, etc. – can anyone tell me where to provide customer service feedback to DBI??? This person was great, this one wasn’t, etc. there’s never been any accountability.
- Is there some part of DBI's performance reviews that show accolades/criticism from the public?
- Where do you go to resolve a problem? That isn’t clear either. Creates a bit of fear in clients

Things other SF City Departments are doing that should be considered or replicated by DBI (in dealing with the public and key professionals like yourselves)

- The department is overseen by a commission; not sure how well educated, knowledgeable the commissioner is
- The director should help commissioners understand what the department wants/needs to do
- Some commissioners are very suspect of change – that’s a problem
- Overall organization – even office layout, better environment for the employees, make it friendlier to walk in
- Current DBI office is pretty dated
- Don’t just think about other SF departments – but also private sector and nonprofit sector
- Facility DBI is in doesn’t function well; they need to have better facilities
- More staff needed
- Other departments in Bay Area have huge facilities; you don’t see the cramped crowded quarters like you do at SFDBI
- It reminds me of walking into a hospital (SFDBI) and not a good one
Mock Building Inspection Committee

- Influentials mentioned better signage and a revamped office space as necessary steps in improving SF DBI’s service.
- Influentials also mentioned separate or additional services for homeowners and/or those who are using SF DBI for the first time.
- Accountability was also a key issue for Influentials, and they saw this as part of an overall internal reorganization that may already be under way.
- Final recommendations also included making sure the SF DBI director has the authority to make vital, but major, changes.

Group #3 - Influentials

- Automation – web-based
  - Information tracking (how-to)
  - Tracking applications
  - Appointments
  - Permits
- Physical environment – reprogrammed
- Permit Team accountability (as part of overall Employee Performance tracking)

Wrap-Up (Final Comments)

- Use the 3 listed in mock
- Clarify process so it’s clear what to do without using an expediter
- Use 3 listed; also look at contracting out services
- Use 3 listed; but also premium services being considered
- He needs the power to do what he wants to do
- Adopt the notion of having a permit manager for each major project
- Employee performance tracking; if motivated all employees to work it would eliminate a lot of the backlog, not just finding problems
- Seek some endorsements from groups, industry; make a presentation and we can have a meeting to endorse it, his job is easier; buy-in
- Needs to be clearer communication who is to do what, who has jurisdiction; often they don’t know who can make that decision
- The director should be given extreme authority and cut the little bureaucrats; we want to know who to shoot (humor)
- #3 on mock trial/internal reorganization