

Development Process Survey

2015 Results

Introduction

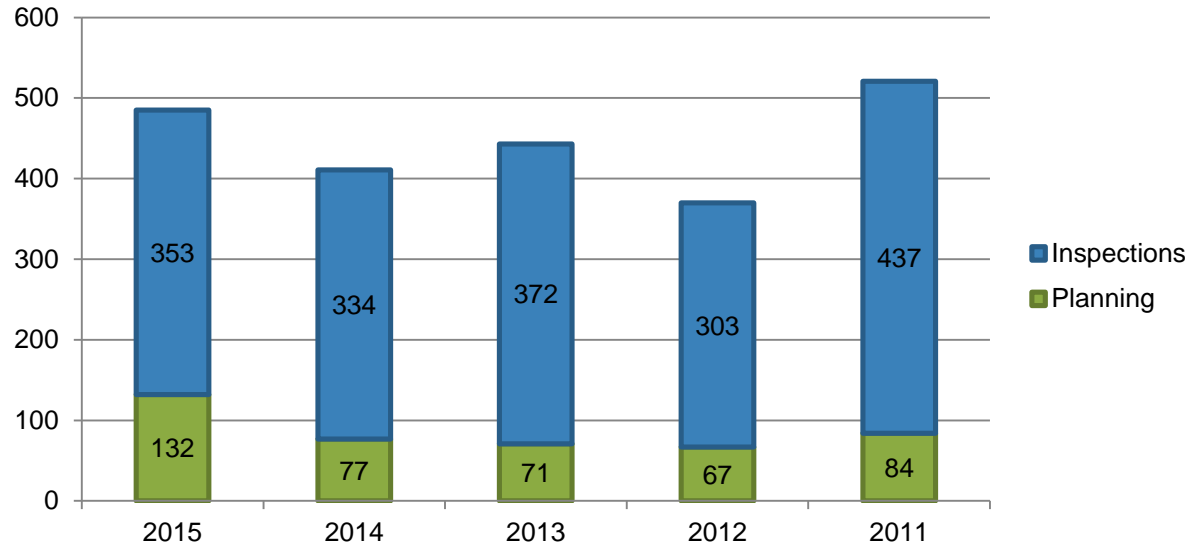


- Fifth year this survey has been conducted
- Responses are very positive
- Snapshot of Results
- Responses are anonymous
- Overview of Process

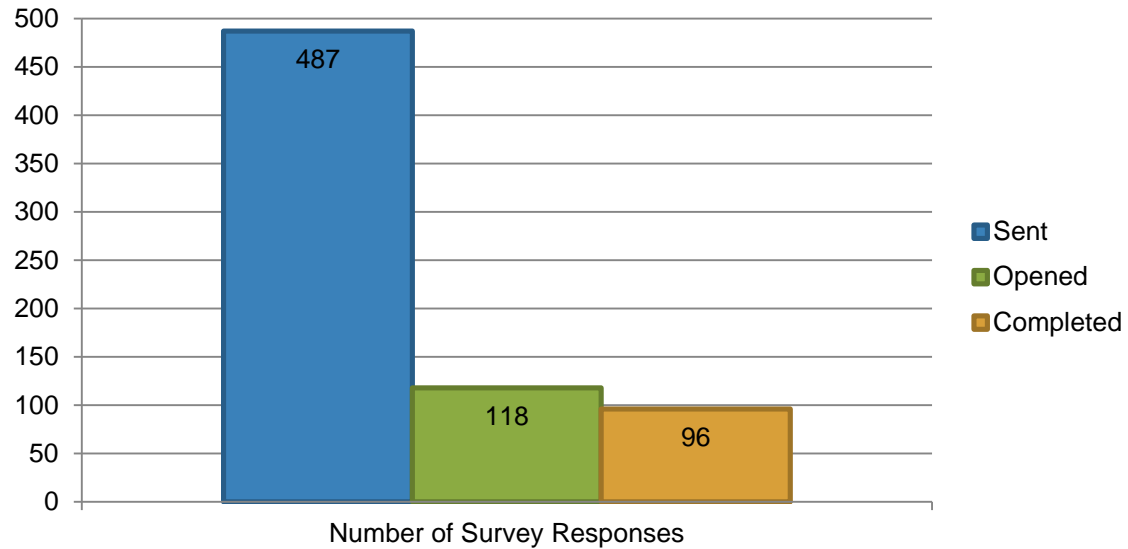
Overview



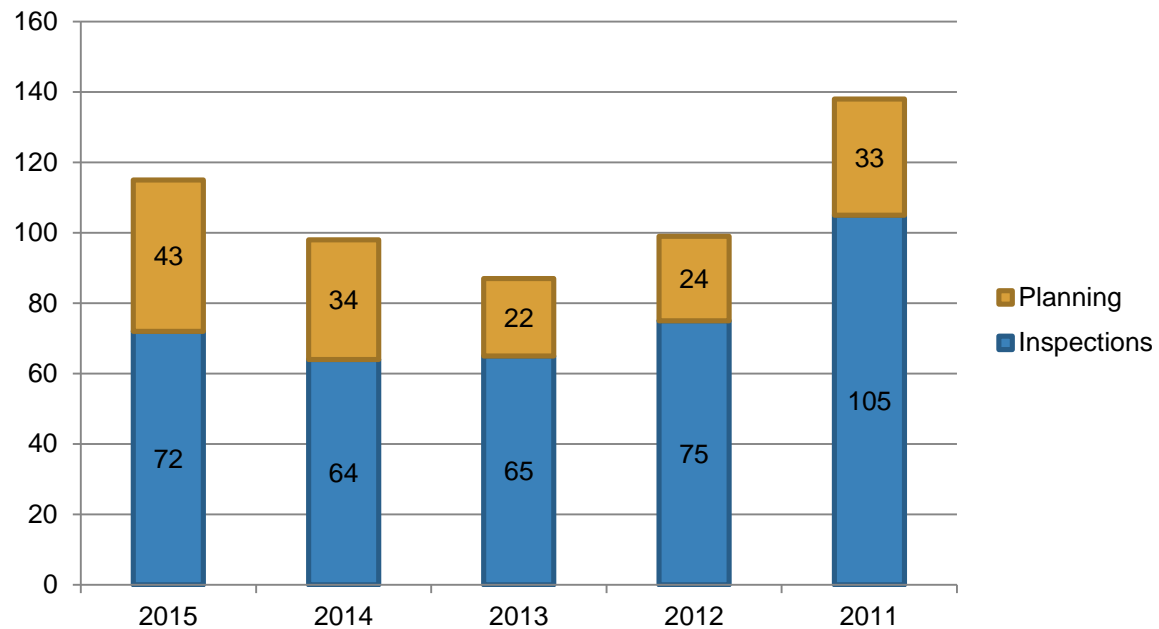
Surveys Sent Per Year



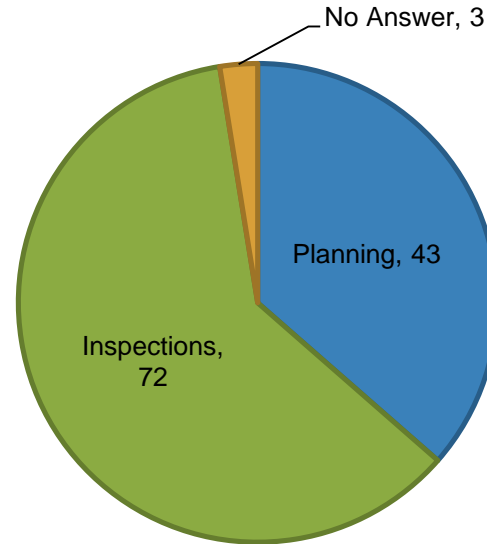
Response Summary



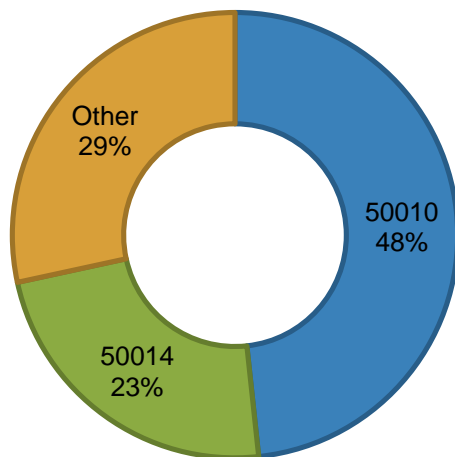
Survey Responses Per Year



Primary Department Interaction



Business Location by Zip Code



Inspection Division

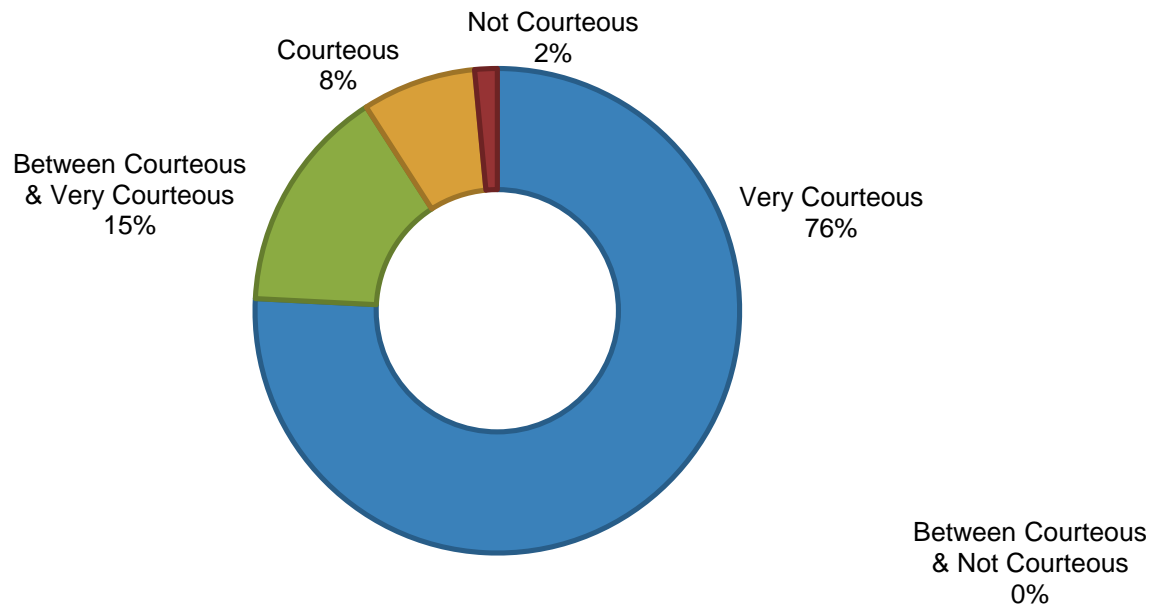


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Inspection Service Quality



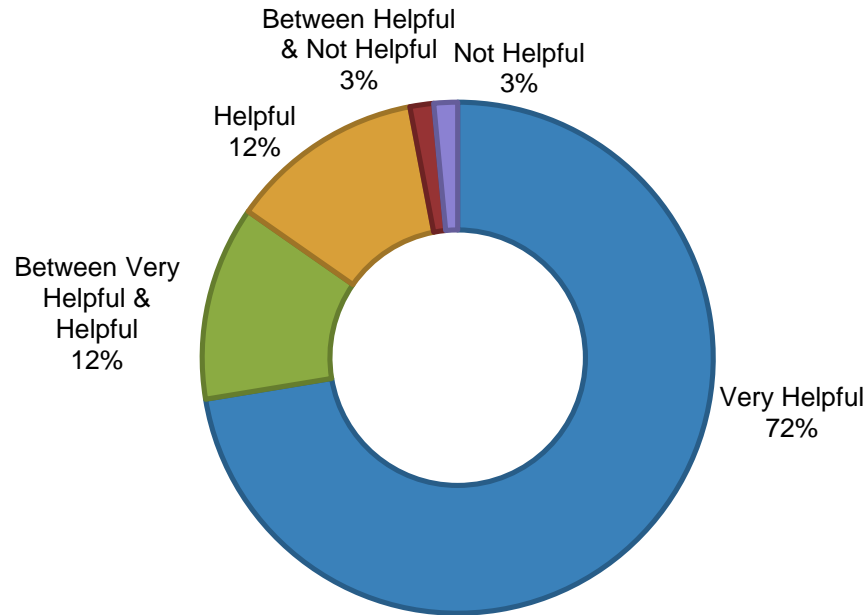
Staff Courtesy



Inspection Service Quality



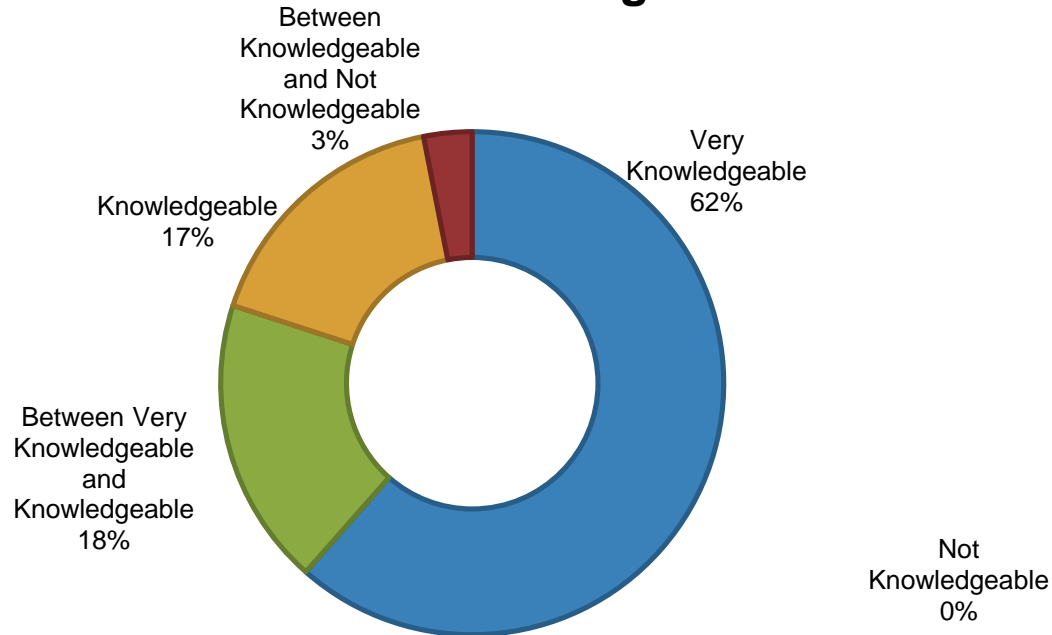
Staff Helpfulness



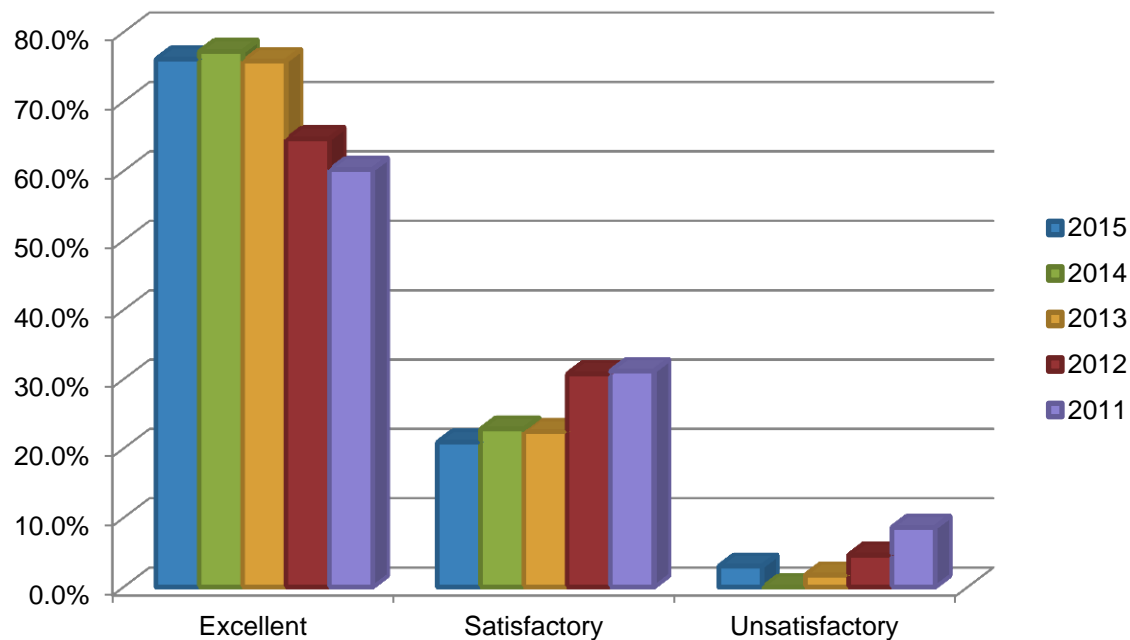
Inspection Service Quality



Staff Knowledge



Inspection Division Overall Rating



Inspection Division Customer Service Comments



- “The inspectors were professional”
- “Very, very helpful”
- “All inspection staff, starting with front counter help, to the inspectors treats me very courteously as well as very helpful and professional”
- “Always there to help with the permit process”
- “Clearly explained what needed to be done”
- “Very knowledgeable and has a high standard for work to be inspected”
- “If they don’t know an answer they find it out”

Inspection Division Improvement Comments



- “Accept credit cards for payments”
- “Many years ago the staff gave me (or maybe I bought it) a small pamphlet called “Code Check”, that had the basic codes to follow....I wish the City has something simple like that where I could go to find answers to questions.”
- “Ability to pay for permits/fees with a credit card or online”
- “Be consistent, show more willingness to identify potential solutions...When a new policy gets implemented or something that has not been enforced previously, tell everyone more formally”
- “keep personal opinions to yourself”

Planning Division

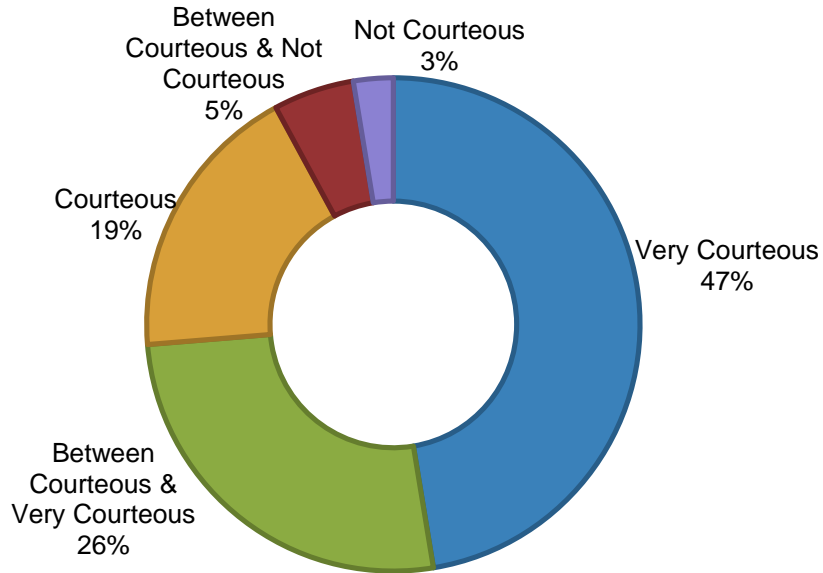


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Planning Service Quality



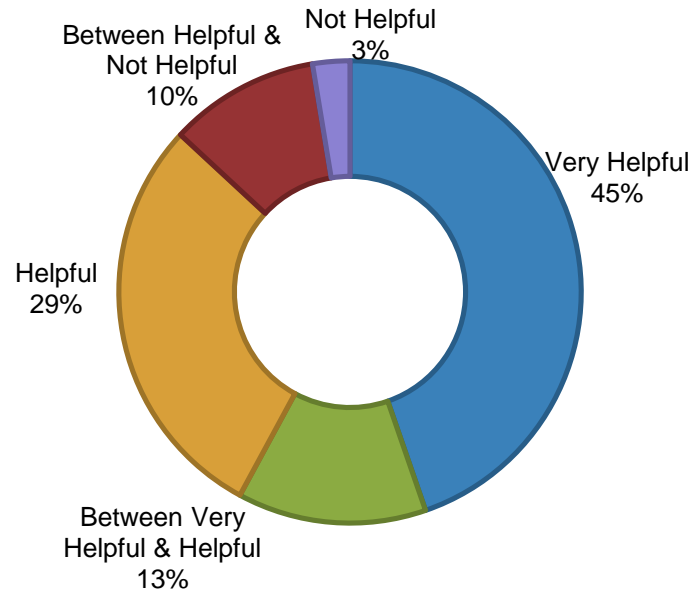
Staff Courtesy



Planning Service Quality



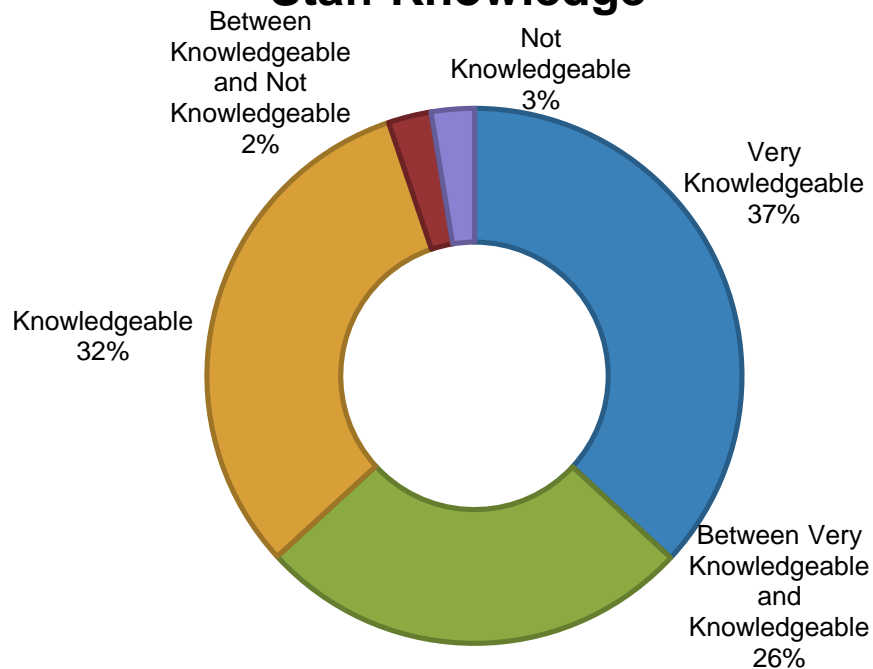
Staff Helpfulness



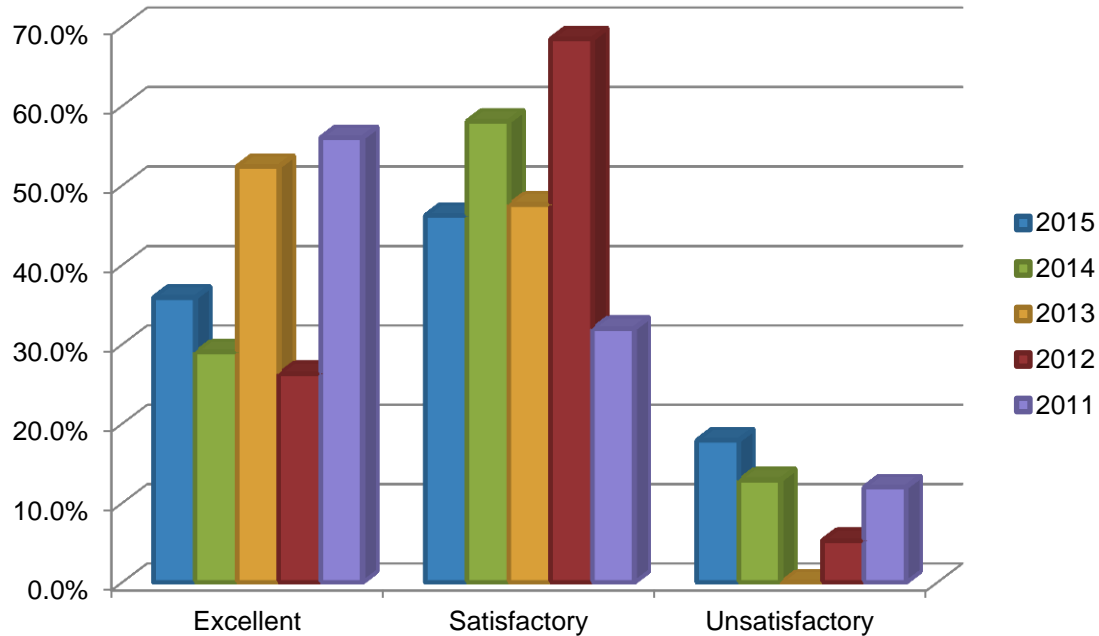
Planning Service Quality



Staff Knowledge



Planning Division Overall Rating



Planning Division Customer Service Comments



- “Very helpful and seemed glad to offer input”
- “I called about placement of solar panels and any restriction, if they didn’t know the exact answer they researched it and guided me through the code.”
- “Answered several phone calls and questions and patiently explained answers”
- “One of the best City Halls I have ever worked with, Excellent”

Planning Division Improvement Comments



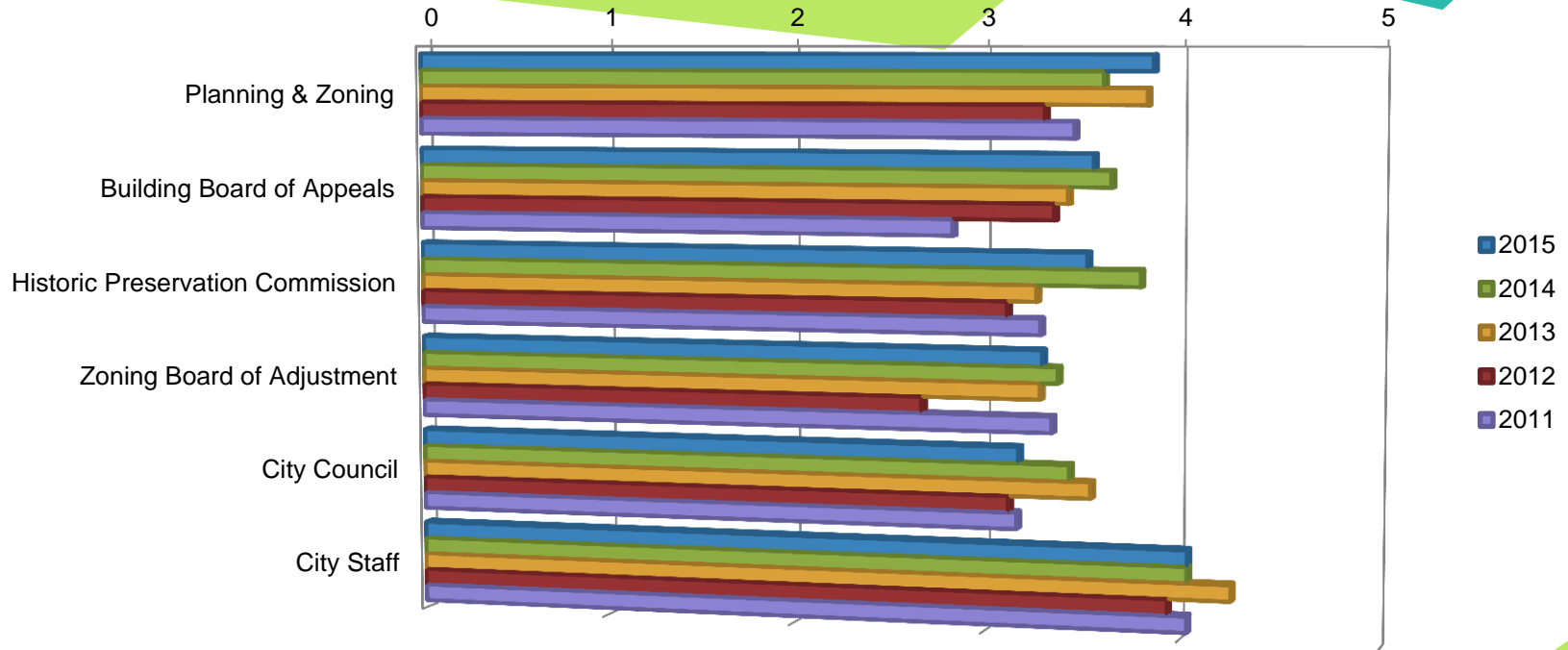
- “Have clear answers to questions and answer questions with real answers not more questions”
- “Work to improve timing of responses to days instead of weeks”
- “Improve communication among departments. Determine correct applications earlier in the process”
- “There may be rules regarding sending plan review comments via email, but we did have a slight delay due to never receiving a mailed hard copy of comments....if they were automatically emailed to begin with that might streamline things a bit.”
- “Planning needs to work on timelines of responses. Emailed responses prior to sending out letters by mail would be helpful....being reasonable with the application of ordinances would help development.”
- “There are also burdensome landscaping requirements, as well as instances of sidewalk requirements that are not warranted in certain areas.”

Overall Rating of City



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How Well did we accomplish a "can-do" attitude and promote Ames as a welcoming place to do business? (Rating Scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being a high or good rating.)



Closing



- We continue to see a similar number of responses year after year.
- The majority of comments submitted were very positive
- Good feedback on some areas where improvements are being and can be made.
- Overall, very positive response with a limited number of below average ratings.

Thank You Questions

CITY OF AMES



2015 Development Survey
Planning Department and Inspection Division

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Purpose

The following report presents selected findings from an online survey of Planning Department and Inspection Division customers (n=118). The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the economic development process within the Planning Department and Inspection Division.

The results of the survey will be used to better understand the economic development process from the perspective of the inspection and planning customers based upon their most recent experience. The information will provide valuable insights that will help the Inspection Division and Planning Department implement process improvements to enhance the economic development experience for customers.

Methods

The electronic survey was developed by the City of Ames. The survey was developed using Survey Monkey and was fielded from November 20, 2015 to December 4, 2015.

The survey instrument was designed to evaluate customer satisfaction for both the Planning Department and Inspection Division related to the economic development process. Planning and Inspection customers within the last year (November 2014 – October 2015) were invited to complete the survey. A survey link and an email introducing the survey were distributed by the Mayor of the City of Ames to planning and inspection customers as identified in Table 1. The email introducing the survey identified the customer as either a Planning Department or Inspection Division customer within the last year (see Appendix A). The two customers identified as both planning and inspection customers were instructed to provide their overall impressions to the survey questions. A reminder email message was sent to all 487 customers two weeks after the initial email message to encourage those who have not yet responded to do so.

Table 1. Customer distribution of survey

Type of Customer	Number of Customers Contacted
Inspection Division Customer	353
Planning Department Customers	132
Combined Inspection and Planning Customers	2
TOTAL	487

Results

I. Respondent characteristics

Zip Code of business

Respondents were asked to identify the zip code where their business is located. A total of 116 respondents answered this question and two respondents skipped this question. Nearly half (48.3%) of the respondents reported that their business was located within the 50010 zip code.

Table 2. Zip Code distribution

Zip Code	Response Percentage	Response Number
50010	48.3%	56
50014	23.3%	27
Other	28.4%	33
Answered Question	116	
Skipped Question	2	

Respondents who answered other were asked to identify the zip code where their business is located.

The responses are given below:

50124	66214	50236	50317
50156	50208	50266	48065
50111	50201	50134	50211
50056	50313	50021	50613
52404	75013	50201	63017
50248	50322	50321	50023
50322	50111	50327	
46375	50248	50322	
68801	50158	50310	

Department/Division primarily working with on proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to identify which department or division they were primarily working with on their most recent proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 115 responses to this question; 43 respondents identified the Planning Department, 72 respondents identified the Inspections Division and 3 respondents skipped this question.

Table 3. Primary department/division

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Planning	37.4%	43
Inspections	62.6%	72
Answered Question	115	
Skipped Question	3	

II. Inspection Division Results

Inspector's Courteousness, Helpfulness and Professional Knowledge

Assisted with proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to identify which inspection staff member(s) assisted them with their most recent proposal(s) and/or project(s). A total of 66 respondents answered this question; many respondents identified multiple staff members who assisted them with their proposal(s)/project(s). There were a total of 52 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 4. Inspection staff member(s) who assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choices	Responses Percentage	Response Count
Seana Perkins (Building Official)	3.0%	2
Bruce Kinkade (Plumbing/Mechanical)	40.9%	27
Craig Hageman (Building)	22.7%	15
Adam Ostert (Plans)	21.2%	14
Travis VerSteegt (Building)	12.1%	8
Nick Patterson (Electrical)	34.9%	23
Scott Ripperger (Asst. Building Official)	10.6%	7
Tom Henriksen (Fire)	10.6%	7
Unknown	10.6%	7
Other (please type name below)	7.6%	5
Answered Question	66	
Skipped Question	52	

Respondents who selected "other" were asked to identify the name of the inspection staff member(s) who assisted with their most recent proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Sarah Elia

Holly & Natalie w/Rental Inspections

Sara, Holly and Natalie

Sara Van Meeteren

Water Department

Courteousness of inspection staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the Inspection staff's courteousness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 66 responses to this question. The majority of respondents felt the inspection staff was very courteous (75.8%) and one person felt they were not courteous. There were a total of 52 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 5. Inspection staff member(s) courteousness while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Courteous	(no label)	Courteous	(no label)	Not Courteous	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	75.8%	15.1%	7.6%	0.00%	1.5%	100%	4.64%
Response Count	50	10	5	0	1	66	
Answered Question				66			
Skipped Question				52			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the inspection staff's courteousness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Very professional in interactions of inspection process

Seemed to help through the process

Very helpful and knowledgeable, he returned my phone call and answered every question I had.

Both were more than happy to answer any questions to help in any way possible.

The inspectors were professional

We spoke on the phone

Very, very helpful

Professional, on time when making appointments

Inspectors were excellent to work with and very helpful

They have been great to work with!

All inspection staff, starting with front counter help, to the inspectors treats me very courteously as well as very helpful and professional.

I have found them very professional in their attitudes.

Everyone gets further with courtesy, but nobody wants a courteous bomb

Helpfulness of inspection staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the inspection staff's helpfulness while assisting them with their proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 65 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (47) felt the inspection staff was "very helpful" (72.4%) and one person felt they were "not helpful". There were a total of 53 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 6. Inspection staff member(s) helpfulness while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Helpful	(no label)	Helpful	(no label)	Not Helpful	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	72.4%	12.3%	12.3%	1.5%0	1.5%1	100%	4.52%
Response Count	47	8	8	1	1	65	
Answered Question				65			
Skipped Question				53			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the inspection staff's helpfulness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Very professional in interactions of inspection process

Always there to help with the permit process

I didn't need help. They performed the inspection professionally

Clearly explained what needed to be done

Helped me take my garage project from plan stage to issuing permits in a very timely and professional manner

I have found electrical and building guys real helpful, not expecting you to know it all

Seem reluctant to answer questions before installed. Seem to have requests that are not consistent

Did not return emails

Took time to understand the project and talk about new requirements

Professional knowledge of inspection staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the inspection staff's professional knowledge while assisting them with their proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 65 responses to this question. The majority of respondents felt the inspection staff was very knowledgeable (61.5%) or knowledgeable (18.5%) whereas no one felt the inspection staffs was not knowledgeable (0%). There were a total of 53 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 7. Inspection staff member(s) professional knowledge while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Knowledgeable	(no label)	Knowledgeable	(no label)	Not Knowledgeable	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	61.5%	18.5%	16.9%	3.1%	0%	100%	4.38%
Response Count	40	12	11	2	0	65	
Answered Question				65			
Skipped Question				53			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the inspection staff's professional knowledge while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Very professional in interactions of inspection process

Very knowledgeable and has a high standard for work to be inspected

They were professional and appeared to know the codes

He had us included in fire stops

If they don't know an answer they find it out

Very professional and knowledgeable

In our field (Fireplaces) inspectors are not up on most items

Could not make decisions before hand, had to see whole installation, and then made us correct issues instead of talking through it first

Very knowledgeable and always helpful to solve difficult issues that are subject to interpretation

These guys know stuff

Front Counter Staff's interaction/welcoming attitude and helpfulness

Interaction with front counter staff at City Hall

Respondents were asked if they had interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall. There were a total of 67 responses to this question. Over half of the respondents (55.2%) reported “yes” to having interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall. There were a total of 51 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 8. Interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	55.2%	37
No	44.8%	30
Answered Question	67	
Skipped Question	51	

Welcoming attitude by front counter staff

Respondents were asked if they were met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff. There were a total of 35 responses to this question. The overwhelming response was “yes” (97.1%) and one respondent responded “no” that they were not met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff. There were a total of 83 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 9. Met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	97.1%	34
No	2.9%	1
Answered Question	35	
Skipped Question	83	

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting if they were met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff. The responses are given below:

Very professional

Very polite and courteous

All of the front counter staff, both over the phone and in person treat me very courteously and professional with a welcoming attitude

Always ready to help

They were quick to greet me when I arrived

Helpfulness of front counter staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the helpfulness of the front counter staff. There were a total of 35 responses to this question. The majority (23) rated the front counter staff as “very helpful” (65.7%) whereas one respondent rated the front counter staff as “not helpful” (2.9%). There were a total of 83 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 10. Front counter staff’s helpfulness

Answer Choice	Very Helpful	(no label)	Helpful	(no label)	Not Helpful	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	65.7%	17.1%	8.6%	5.7%	2.9%	100%	4.37%
Response Count	23	6	3	2	1	35	
Answered Question				35			
Skipped Question				83			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the front counter staff’s helpfulness. The responses are given below:

Very professional

Helped me understand the permit process and who to contact

The front desk staff who you have to call for an inspection cannot schedule a time for the inspection. Everyone at the city has a calendar to schedule things, other city’s can schedule when I call the front desk.

It would be better if they could answer some basic questions, rather than have to give you the inspector’s voice mail

They always do a quick scan for errors on the papers I provide

Outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Final outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to describe the final outcome of their proposal(s)/project(s). A total of 64 respondents answered this question; several respondents selected more than one answer for this question. The majority of the respondents indicated that their proposal(s)/project(s) were approved by City Staff (96.9%). There were a total of 54 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 11. Outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Approved by City staff	96.9%	62
Approved by Building Board of Appeals	0.00%	0
Approved by City Council	0.00%	0
Denied by City staff	1.6%	1
Denied by Building Board of Appeals	1.6%	1
Denied by City Council	0.00%	0
Other (please specify below)	3.1%	2
Answered Question	64	
Skipped Question	54	

Respondents who selected “other” were asked to specify the final outcome of their proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Approved by inspector

We have not completed yet

Experience with the Inspection Division

Overall experience

Respondents were asked to describe their overall experience with the Inspection Division. There were a total of 67 responses to this question. The majority of the respondents described their overall experience with the Inspection Division as “excellent” (76.1%), a small number described their experience with the Inspection Division as “satisfactory” (20.9%) and only two described their overall experience with the Inspection Division as “unsatisfactory” (3.0%). There were a total of 51 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 12. Overall experience with Inspection Division

Answer Choices	Responses Percentage	Response Count
Excellent	76.1%	51
Satisfactory	20.9%	14
Unsatisfactory	3.0%	2
Answered Question	67	
Skipped Question	51	

Satisfaction level with Inspection Division

Respondents were asked to select (all that apply) from a list which contributed to their satisfaction level with the Inspection Division. A total of 48 respondents answered this question; many respondents selected multiple items for this question. The responses to this question are provided below in Table 13. There were a total of 70 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 13. Contributions to satisfaction with Inspection Division

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Clearly written local ordinances	20.8%	10
City staff's helpful attitude	77.1%	37
Reasonable cost of permit(s)	41.7%	20
Timeliness of response	79.2%	38
Clear policies and/or procedures	43.8%	21
Accurate billing process	43.8%	21
Early communication of expectations	45.8%	22
City staff's willingness to help identify solutions to help facilitate your project	62.5%	30
Other (please specify below)	4.2%	2
Answered Question	48	
Skipped Question	70	

Respondents who selected "other" were asked to specify what contributed to their satisfaction level with the City of Ames Inspection Division. The responses are given below:

Myself and others would appreciate having the meetings of the Building Board of Appeals and Property Maintenance Appeals Board televised on Channel 12. We are often busy during the meeting times, but would still like to take in the meetings and the decisions that are made at them.

Always cooperates with on site activities

Comments or Suggestions for Improvements of Inspection Division

Comments or Suggestion to improve next overall experience with Inspection Division

Respondents were asked to share their comments or suggestions to help the Inspection Division improve their next overall experience. There were a total of 7 responses to this question and 110 respondents skipped this question. The responses are given below:

Accept credit cards for payments

Very pleasant experience, I don't see any need for improvements

I probably should have a better grasp on how to find codes that I am unsure of. Many years ago, the staff gave me (or maybe I bought it) a small pamphlet called "Code Check", that had the basic codes to follow. I know that it is now out of date. I wish the City had something simple like that where I could go to find answers to questions. But always, if I am unsure I call Craig Hageman and he is always very helpful.

I do not feel the furnace installers should have to line a chimney when only the water heater goes into it. I do not mind lining it but when there is an existing high efficiency furnace and the water heater was already the only appliance connected to the chimney, the water heater installer should have to install the line instead of getting a pass.

They do a great job!

Ability to pay for permits/fees with a credit card or online

It is difficult to reach any inspection people from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m.

Improve Satisfaction with Inspection Division

Next respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of options that could help improve their satisfaction level with the Inspection Division. A total of 10 respondents answered this question; many respondents selected multiple answers for this question and 108 respondents skipped this question (See Table 14).

Table 14. Item that could help improve satisfaction with Inspection Division

Answer Choices	Responses Percentage	Response Count
Change the local ordinances	20.0%	2
Display a more helpful attitude	30.0%	3
Reduce the cost of permit(s)	40.0%	4
Improve the timeliness of response	30.0%	3
Add clarity to the policies or procedures	50.0%	5
Increase accuracy in the billing process	0.0%	0
Show more willingness to identify potential solutions	40.0%	4
Early communications of expectations	50.0%	5
Other (please specify below)	10.0%	1
Answered Question	10	
Skipped Question	108	

Respondents who selected “other” were asked to specify what could help improve their satisfaction level with the Inspection Division. The response is given below:

None really

Suggestions for improvements of Inspection Division

Respondents were asked to share their comments as to how the Inspection Division can improve their next overall experience. There were a total of 4 responses to this question and 113 respondents skipped this question. The responses are given below:

None, I am satisfied with the staff

It was good

Be consistent, show more willingness to identify potential solutions, find rough-in inspection issues at rough-in not at the final inspection. When a new policy gets implemented or something that has not been enforced previously, tell everyone more formally, rather than just decide one day to start enforcing things.

Give respect to everyone and keep personal opinions to yourself. Don't share them with others.

III. Planning Department Results

Planner's Courteousness, Helpfulness and Professional Knowledge

Assisted with proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to identify which planning staff member(s) assisted them with their most recent proposal(s) and/or project(s). A total of 38 respondents answered this question; many respondents identified multiple staff members who assisted them with their proposal(s)/project(s). There were a total of 80 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 15. Planning staff member(s) who assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choices	Responses Percentage	Response Count
Ray Anderson	36.8%	14
Jeff Benson	26.3%	10
Charlie Kuester	55.3%	21
Kelly Diekmann	36.8%	14
Justin Moore	18.4%	7
Karen Marren	29.0%	11
Unknown	5.3%	2
Other (please type name below)	7.9%	3
Answered Question	38	
Skipped Question	80	

Respondents who selected "other" were asked to identify the name of the planning staff member(s) who assisted with their most recent proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Various

Sara Kramer

Kris Evans, Lyle Hanes, Neil Weiss

Courteousness of planning staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the planning staff's courteousness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 38 responses to this question. The majority of respondents felt the planning staff was very courteous (47.4%). There were a total of 80 respondents who skipped this question.

Table16. Planning staff member(s) courteousness while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Courteous	(no label)	Courteous	(no label)	Not Courteous	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	47.4%	26.3%	18.4%	5.3%0	2.6%	100%	4.11%
Response Count	18	10	7	2	1	38	
Answered Question				38			
Skipped Question				80			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the planning staff's courteousness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

Did not respond to our request and kept putting our questions off

Charlie is very professional

Very helpful and seemed glad to offer input

They try to smile

Helpfulness of planning staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the planning staff's helpfulness while assisting them with their proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 38 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (17) felt the planning staff was "very helpful" (44.7%) and one person felt they were "not helpful". There were a total of 80 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 17. Planning staff member(s) helpfulness while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Helpful	(no label)	Helpful-	(no label)	Not Helpful	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	44.7%	13.2%	29.0%	10.5%	2.6%	100%	3.87%
Response Count	17	5	11	4	1	38	
Answered Question				38			
Skipped Question				80			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the planning staff's helpfulness while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

We had talked to Planning before starting the project and were told one thing and then were told something else later. The "rules" change and depend on who you are

He's knowledgeable about city requirements and is able to explain them well. What he is not completely clear on he will investigate and promptly get back to me

Answered several phone calls and questions and patiently explained answers

The Planning Department has been taking more and more time to help with answers intermediate points of a project

Once an issue was settled, staff had to think really hard to come up with another issue to stop all progress. Time and time again

The submittal process for site plans and plats continued to be drawn out and has an overabundance of paperwork and approvals. Staff is also pressing their personal preference on projects that are outside of the required code.

See above

Emails were not answered or even acknowledged

Professional knowledge of planning staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the planning staff's professional knowledge while assisting them with their proposal(s) and/or project(s). There were 38 responses to this question. The majority of respondents felt the planning staff was very knowledgeable (36.9%), or knowledgeable (31.6%) and one person felt the planning staff was not knowledgeable (2.6%). There were a total of 80 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 18. Planning staff member(s) professional knowledge while assisted with proposal(s) and/or project(s)

Answer Choice	Very Know-ledgeable	(no label)	Know-ledgeable	(no label)	Not Know-ledgeable	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	36.9%	26.3%	31.6%	2.6%	2.6%	100%	3.92%
Response Count	14	10	12	1	1	38	
Answered Question				38			
Skipped Question				80			

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the planning staff's professional knowledge while assisting them with the proposal(s) and/or project(s). The responses are given below:

While staff was very knowledgeable on process the issues we ran into was their knowledge of what the City's existing infrastructure was at the site. As a result of this the project experienced significant cost increases due to field conditions that varied from the direction/information proved by staff. The City's inspectors knew exactly what was in the field but planning never consulted with them and as a result the info they provided us and what they approved on our plans was incorrect. Recommendation moving forward would be planning involve the inspections during site plan review so these issues don't happen again.

Talking to other homeowners and based on what planning told them and told us, each group is told something different. Ames is known in outside of the City of Ames for making up interpretations. Some contractors outside the area do not want to do work in Ames and talking with our cities about their zoning ordinances and asking questions, they asked what city the dispute is in and when told Ames they say they are not surprised with what they have heard.

The staff does not always know the code which then takes extra time to get an answer

Occasionally the correct process is not known and causes wasted time and money

Too many regulations to be fully knowledgeable about all of them

What he didn't know he found the answer right away

Front Counter Staff's interaction/welcoming attitude and helpfulness

Interaction with front counter staff at City Hall

Respondents were asked if they had interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall. There were a total of 40 responses to this question. Over half of the respondents (55%) reported "yes" to having interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall. There were a total of 78 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 19. Interaction with the front counter staff at City Hall

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	55.0%	22
No	45.0%	18
Answered Question	40	
Skipped Question	78	

Welcoming attitude of front counter staff

Respondents were asked if they were met with a "welcoming" attitude by the front counter staff. There were a total of 20 responses to this question. The overwhelming response was "yes" (100%). There were a total of 98 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 20. Met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	100%	20
No	0%	0
Answered Question	20	
Skipped Question	98	

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting if they were met with a “welcoming” attitude by the front counter staff. The responses are given below:

Always, I've not been in town long and they call me by name every time I'm in

Helpfulness of front counter staff

Respondents were asked how they would describe the helpfulness of the front counter staff. There were a total of 20 responses to this question. The majority (12) rated the front counter staff as “very helpful” (60%). There were a total of 98 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 21. Front counter staff’s helpfulness

Answer Choice	Very Helpful	(no label)	Helpful	(no label)	Not Helpful	Total	Weighted Average
Response Percentage	60.0%	10.0%	30.0%	0.00%	0.00%	100%	4.30%
Response Count	12	2	6	0	0	20	
Answered Question	20						
Skipped Question	98						

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting the front counter staff’s helpfulness. The responses are given below:

They are knowledgeable about the workings of the city and always point me in the right direction

One of the best City Halls I have ever worked with, Excellent

Type of proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to select the type of application they submitted. A total of 36 respondents answered this question; many respondents selected multiple types of applications. The responses are provided below in Table 22. There were a total of 82 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 22. Type of application submitted

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Certificate of Appropriateness (historic preservation)	5.6%	2
Major Site Plan or Planned Residential Development	33.3%	12
Special Use Permit	11.1%	4
Minor Site Plan	52.8	19
Preliminary or Final Plat	36.1%	13
Flood Plain Development Permit	16.7%	6
Rezoning	25.0%	9
Land Use Policy Plan Change	16.7%	6
Other (please specify below)	13.9%	5
Answered Question	36	
Skipped Question	82	

Respondents who selected “other” were asked to identify the type of application they submitted. The responses are given below:

Interpretation/enforcement

Permitted Home Occupation

Sign Permit

Preparing to submit building and electrical permit request

Demo permit

Outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Final outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Respondents were asked to describe the final outcome of their proposal(s)/project(s). There were a total of 32 responses to this question. The majority of the respondents indicated that their proposal(s)/project(s) were approved by City Staff (50%). There were a total of 86 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 23. Outcome of proposal(s)/project(s)

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Approved by City staff	50.0%	16
Approved by Zoning Board of Adjustments	15.7%	5
Approved by the Historic Preservation Commission	0.00%	0
Approved by City Council	25.0%	8
Denied by City staff	3.1%	1
Denied by Zoning Board of Adjustments	0.00%	0
Denied by Historic Preservation Commission	3.1%	1
Denied by City Council	3.1%	1
Answered Question	32	
Skipped Question	86	

Experience with the Planning Department

Respondents were asked to describe their experience with the Planning Department. There were a total of 39 responses to this question. Almost half (46.2%) of the responses rated their experience with the Planning Department as “satisfactory” and 35.9% rated their experience with the Planning Department as “excellent” and 17.9% rated their experience with the Planning Department as “unsatisfactory”. The responses are provided below in Table 24. There were a total of 79 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 24. Overall experience with Planning Department

Answer Choices	Responses Percentage	Response Count
Excellent	35.9%	14
Satisfactory	46.2%	18
Unsatisfactory	17.9%	7
Answered Question	39	
Skipped Question	79	

Contributed to satisfaction with Planning Department

Respondents were asked to select from a list which contributed to their satisfaction level with the Planning Department. A total of 29 respondents answered this question; many respondents selected multiple answers for this question. The responses to this question are provided below in Table 25. There were a total of 89 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 25. Contributions to satisfaction with Planning Department

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Well written local ordinances	10.3%	3
City staff's helpful "can do" attitude	41.4%	12
Timeliness of response	55.2%	16
Clear policies and/or procedures	27.6%	8
Early communication of expectations	41.4%	12
City staff's willingness to help identify solutions to help facilitate your project	41.4%	12
Other (please specify below)	17.2%	5
Answered Question	29	
Skipped Question	89	

Respondents who selected "other" were asked to specify what contributed to their satisfaction level with the Planning Department. The responses are given below:

I think city staff is poor at all the above items. They are helpful and nice but cannot get things done. They are not willing to find solutions but rather want to find ways to stop development from occurring.

I received paperwork I needed

Many requirements for submittals seemed very unclear

The outcome was satisfied, eventually

*Acceptance of document sheets larger than 24x36 or that is just reduced to 24x36 for records was great!
Reworking sheet layouts for City submittals is a huge time commitment*

Comments or Suggestions for Improvements of Planning Department

Improve next overall experience with Planning Department

Respondents were asked to share their comments as to how the Planning Department can improve their next overall experience. There were a total of 7 responses to this question and 111 respondents skipped this question. The responses are given below:

Have clear answers to questions and answer questions with real answers not more questions

Work to improve timing of responses to days instead of weeks

Keep doing what you're doing

Improve communication among departments. Determine correct applications earlier in the process

There may be rules regarding sending plan review comments via email, but we did have a slight delay due to never receiving a mailed hard copy of comments. We ended up speaking with staff and got the comments scanned and emailed, but if they were automatically emailed to begin with that might streamline things a bit.

You are doing a good job, if you don't know the answer you research it and call me back.

Planning needs to work on timelines of responses. Emailing responses prior to sending out letters by mail would be helpful. Also in some instances, being reasonable with the application of ordinances would help development. The City of Ames often claims they are pro development, yet they have THE most restrictive and costly storm water ordinance in the metro. There are also burdensome landscaping requirements, as well as instances of sidewalk requirements that are not warranted in certain areas. All of these requirements add 10s of thousands, if not 100s of thousands of dollars to projects. This adversely affects affordable housing and development in the Ames community. If Ames truly wants to be pro development and pro growth some of these policies should be reviewed.

Improve Satisfaction with Planning Department

Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of options that could help improve their satisfaction level with the Planning Department. A total of 5 respondents answered this question; many respondents selected multiple answers for this question. The responses to this question are provided below in Table 26. There were a total of 113 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 26. Contributions to satisfaction with Planning Department

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Response Count
Change the local ordinances	20.0%	1
Display a more helpful, “can-do” attitude	40.0%	2
Improve the timeliness of response	100.00%	5
Add clarity to the policies or procedures	40.0%	2
Show more willingness to identify potential solutions	80.0%	4
Early communication of expectations	40.0%	2
Other (please specify below)	60.0%	3
Answered Question	5	
Skipped Question	113	

Respondents who selected “other” were asked to specify what could help improve their satisfaction level with the Planning Department. The responses are given below:

Follow the law, not play games, don't lie, and yeah, follow state law

Still not resolved; have heard nothing from the city for over a month

We moved to Ames and bought a home in the historic district but never informed of the restrictions on changes to our house. Better education of new residents would have saved us many thousands of dollars in wasted expenditure.

Comments or Suggestions for improvements of Planning Department

Respondents were asked to share their comments or suggestions as to how the Planning Department can improve their next overall experience. There were a total of 3 responses to this question and 115 respondents skipped this question. The responses are given below:

Change the staff because the current staff has a way of doing things and they won't change. Sometimes people have been doing a job for too long that they will do anything to protect their prior work and opinions. Fresh people that don't have the taint of the prior closed minded ways.

Time of response must be improved

Don't tell people that issues will be resolved soon when you really expect they will take months or perhaps years

Application Packet

Respondents were asked if the application packet was useful, clear, and understandable. There were a total of 35 responses to this question. The majority (71.4%) responded "yes" the application packet was useful, clear, and understandable. There were a total of 83 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 27. Application packet useful, clear, and understandable

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	71.4%	25
No	8.6%	3
N/A	20.0%	7
Answered Question	35	
Skipped Question	83	

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting if they found the application packet useful, clear, and understandable. The responses are given below:

Not needed for this type of project

There are instances where completing the application is only the first round of questions-save us all time and revise the application to reflect everything needed rather than the back and forth. Comment pertains to Public Works more than Planning.

Project follow the processing schedule

Respondents were asked if the project followed the processing schedule that was included in the Planning Application packet. There were a total of 30 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (73.3%) responded "yes" their project followed the processing schedule that was included in the Planning Application. There were a total 88 respondents who skipped this question.

Table 28. Project followed the processing schedule that was included in the Planning Application

Answer Choice	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	73.3%	22
No	26.7%	8
Answered Question		30
Skipped Question		88

Respondents were asked to explain their choice for selecting if their project followed the processing schedule that was included in the Planning Application. The responses are given below:

No application required for project

Not even close. Months delays and no one seems to care. Staff is always “too busy” with “other things”.

The schedule for each submittal was timely; the coordination of multiple applications for the same project added a significant amount of coordination to keep the project moving forward.

It has not been resolved yet. I am still waiting on information from the City.

Most of the time straight forward projects follow the schedule.

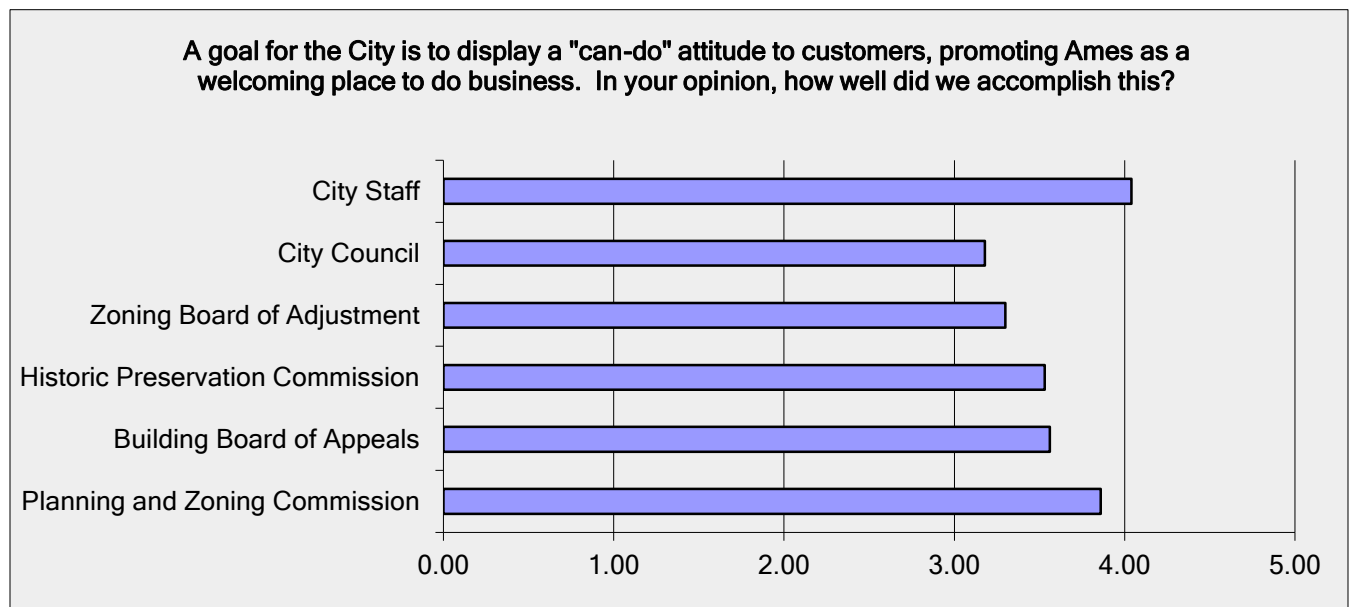
With all of the hoops and processes of the City, it is challenging to bring a new project in and have it completed in the same year. The process needs to be streamlined and noticing times need to be shortened to allow projects to happen timely.

City displayed a “can-do” attitude

Respondents were given a list of six items (See Table 29) and asked to rate (Excellent to Unsatisfactory) their opinion to the following question: *A goal of the City is to display a “can-do” attitude to customers, promoting Ames as a welcoming place to do business. In your opinion, how well did we accomplish this goal?* There were a total of 91 responses to this question and 27 respondents skipped this question.

Table 29. Accomplishment of “can-do” attitude to customers, promoting Ames as a welcoming place to do business

Answer Choices	Excellent	(no label)	Satisfactory	(no label)	Unsatisfactory	N/A	Total	Weighted Average
Planning and Zoning	24.4%/19	21.8%/17	9.0%/7	6.4%/5	3.8%/3	34.6%/27	78	3.86%
Building Board of Appeals	6.1%/4	6.1%/4	7.6%/5	4.5%/3	0.00%/0	75.7%/50	66	3.56%
Historic Preservation Commission	6.0%/4	10.4%/7	3.0%/2	3.0%/2	3.0%/2	74.6%/50	67	3.53%
Zoning Board of Adjustment	7.4%/5	13.4%/9	3.0%/2	3.0%/2	7.5%/5	65.7%/44	67	3.30%
City Council	5.9%/4	17.6%/12	11.8%/8	8.8%/6	5.9%/4	50.0%/34	68	3.18%%
City Staff	47.1%/41	25.3%/22	10.3%/9	8.1%/7	5.7%/5	3.5%/3	87	4.04%
Answered Question				91				
Skipped Question				27				



Respondents were asked to provide suggestions for how the City of Ames can better display a “can-do” attitude. The responses are given below:

Respond to letters, not play games, follow state and federal laws, etc.

Work toward how to get the project done, not how to not get work done

None keep up the good work

Just keep what you guys have been doing. My experience has been very good

The Planning staff and the DRC process I found to be unsatisfactory as far as the “can-do” process. The DRC I imagine as a vehicle to expedite and coordinate the process of building in the City. That was not the case. The process took approximately 4 months and several items surfaced during construction that I felt were covered at these meetings. City workers in the field seemed not to be aware of the information that was covered.

I feel the City only wants high tech industries in Ames and makes it very hard on anyone else.

This past year, it has appeared to us in the local construction community how a particular Ames contractor can leverage his influence on City management to put unnecessary pressure on City inspection staff in their efforts to fairly carry out their duties. To many of us, this has really deteriorated our trust in upper City management.

For inspections: Keep your personal feelings on people and contractors to yourself

Planning and Zoning is an appointed committee that does not reflect the views of the entire community, it is a step that adds unnecessary time to the process as everything is repeated again at the Council level.

Understand the project and have solutions that are acceptable to the department. Be willing to consider different than normal solutions.

I was working on getting a permit for a cell tower. These are generally very difficult and they draw a lot of local and vocal opposition. Karen, the Planning Department and the ZBA were all very professional and the process followed the requirements as outlined in your code. I was very pleased by the way this was handled in Ames.

Process Improvements

Inspection Division

The Inspection Division customers provided a number of suggestions for improvements. Some possible process improvements suggested were:

- Televise the Building Board of Appeals meetings on Channel 12
- Improve customer discussions by keeping personal opinions to yourself
- Improve communication with customers by returning/answering telephone calls between 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. and returning email messages promptly
- Provide a “Code Check” pamphlet of basic codes
- Accept credit card payments and on-line payments
- Improve communication with building and trade professionals to provide consistent messaging

Planning Department

The Planning Department customers provided a number of suggestions for improvements. Some possible process improvements suggested were:

- Improve response time to customers by returning/answering telephone calls and email messages promptly
- Improve efficiency for processing applications (i.e. email comments instead of US mail)
- Provide consistent answers to customers
- Improve the clarity of the requirements for submittals
- Improve communication among departments (Public Works, Inspection, Planning)
- Communicate information from DRC to inspectors in the field

APPENDIX A: EMAIL MESSAGES SENT TO INSPECTION/PLANNING CUSTOMERS

THE FOLLOWING EMAIL IS USED FOR THE INSPECTION DIVISION CUSTOMERS [Total email 353]:

Dear Customer,

The City of Ames thanks you for your business! To support the City Council's goal of promoting economic development to create a stable and vibrant community, we need your feedback. Candid comments about the process can help us continue to maintain our high standards and progress in areas that need improvement.

As a customer of our Inspection Division in the last year, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time in answering an anonymous survey. If you have been involved in more than one project in the last year, please provide your overall impressions. The survey will allow space where you can provide more specific examples.

Please click on the link below (or type the address into your browser), fill in your answers to the questions, and submit them electronically by December 4, 2015.

We appreciate your participation.

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2015_Development_Process_Survey

THE FOLLOWING EMAIL IS USED FOR THE PLANNING AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT CUSTOMERS [Total email 132]:

Dear Customer,

The City of Ames thanks you for your business! To support the City Council's goal of promoting economic development to create a stable and vibrant community, we need your feedback. Candid comments about the process can help us continue to maintain our high standards and progress in areas that need improvement.

As a customer of our Planning & Housing Department in the last year, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time in answering an anonymous survey. If you have been involved in more than one project in the last year, please provide your overall impressions. The survey will allow space where you can provide more specific examples.

Please click on the link below (or type the address into your browser), fill in your answers to the questions, and submit them electronically by December 4, 2015.

We appreciate your participation.

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2015_Development_Process_Survey

THE FOLLOWING EMAIL IS USED FOR THE COMBINED PLANNING & HOUSING AND INSPECTION DIVISION CUSTOMERS [Total email 2]:

Dear Customer,

The City of Ames thanks you for your business! To support the City Council's goal of promoting economic development to create a stable and vibrant community, we need your feedback. Candid comments about the process can help us continue to maintain our high standards and progress in areas that need improvement.

As a customer of our Planning & Housing Department and our Inspection Division in the last year, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time in answering an anonymous survey. If you have been involved in more than one project in the last year, please provide your overall impressions. The survey will allow space where you can provide more specific examples.

Please click on the link below (or type the address into your browser), fill in your answers to the questions, and submit them electronically by December 4, 2015.

We appreciate your participation.

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2015_Development_Process_Survey

THE FOLLOWING REMINDER EMAIL MESSAGE WILL BE SENT TO ALL CUSTOMERS THAT RECEIVED THE ORIGINAL EMAIL MESSAGE [Total 487]

We value your feedback!

On November 20, 2015, you should have received an email inviting you to participate in the City of Ames Planning & Housing Department/Inspection Division Survey.

If you have not already done so, please click the link below (or type the address into your browser) to complete the survey by December 4, 2015.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2015_Development_Process_Survey

If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation and please disregard this email.

Your views and insights are critical to helping us provide better service to the citizens of Ames.

Thank you for completing the survey!

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor