



# CREATING A UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE

## Stakeholder Outreach: Findings and Themes

MAY 2014



City of Tacoma  
WASHINGTON  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1 What is the land use simplification process?

The City of Tacoma Planning and Development Services department is in the process of streamlining the City’s land use approval and permitting process. The land use simplification process includes several interrelated elements that are each being looked at in order to maximize efficiencies within and between City departments, and to provide a better customer experience for those seeking permits and approvals.

This report is specific to the creation of a Unified Development Code (UDC), which will consolidate existing permitting regulations into a single document.

Currently, land use and development related regulations are “housed” in several different documents, and approvals are made by a variety of departments. Sometimes the regulations are duplicative or contradictory. Often, they lead to unintended outcomes, cause delays, and do not incorporate enough flexibility for staff to make judgment calls or allow for administrative approvals.

In 2013, City of Tacoma Planning and Development Services issued 5,469 building permits, 224 land use permits, and 2,478 site development permits. The majority of these are in relation to economic development activities that support job creation, enhance and revitalize the downtown, add or rehabilitate housing, and support modernization, safety, and technology enhancements in our schools.

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### What is a Unified Development Code?

A Unified Development Code (UDC) is a single ("unified") document, containing existing zoning and subdivision regulations, along with any other development-related regulations found elsewhere in the City code of ordinances.

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## **2 Why is the City of Tacoma going through this process?**

The project is being done in order to improve predictability, consistency, efficiency, and communication. In doing so, City departments will run more efficiently, with better integration, and the external client will have a higher level of certainty regarding project approvals and construction.

## **3 What are the steps along the way?**

The Planning and Development Services department is undertaking a three-pronged approach to simplifying the land use approval and permitting process. These are:

### **People**

Provide a culture where people are given the tools, training, and leadership support that empowers staff to perform their jobs at the highest level of efficiency and customer service. This includes reviewing organizational structure, job titles and expectations, and career paths.

### **Process and Tools**

Ensure that processes and tools are in place that allow for consistency, accuracy, and efficiency. This includes permit software and other technologies that are specifically chosen to support both the end use customer and staff. Accela is planned for implementation in August 2015.

### **Policy**

Develop regulations that are easy to use, amend, and interpret. This includes consolidation of existing codes and ordinances into a single Unified Development Code (UDC). The City is budgeting to retain a consultant to compile the UDC in 2015.

The remainder of this report will focus on external stakeholder research completed as of May 2014. Prior to commencing work on preparing a UDC, the City felt it was critical to reach out to the end users of the systems, to get feedback on how things are working now, what improvements could be made, and any recommendations for how to refine the people, processes, and policies that are in place today.

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Providing a predictable, customer service oriented, efficient process allows for increased economic development and investment, while protecting the natural, built, social, and cultural assets that define a community.

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When done right, codes make it easier for a community to implement its vision. However, when they are out of date, don't line up with the vision, or are in conflict, codes can actually inhibit development.

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# Chapter 2 Findings and Themes

## 1 Who Were the External Stakeholders?

Name	Affiliation
Aaron Winston	BLRB Architects
Ben Fergriuson	BLRB Architects
Layne Alfonso	GeoEngineers
David Nason	AHBL
Sarah Singleton	AHBL
Sarah Coccia	AHBL
Christy Barrie	Tacoma Public Schools
Stuart Young	BCRA Architects
Kent McLaren	BCRA
Jim Collins	PCS Structural
Steve and Heidi Navarro	Brewery Project

## 2 How were they selected?

The external stakeholders were identified by City of Tacoma staff and consultants. The goal in selecting people for interviews was that they regularly utilize the planning, permitting, and development process in the City. The stakeholders include professionals (planners, architects, and engineers), and end users (Tacoma Public Schools). During the course of one interview, a private entity who recently went through the development process on a brewery project was suggested as a good “case study” for how the process is working for smaller projects.

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Please see Appendix A for a complete list of External Stakeholders, contact information, and interview dates.

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### 3 What were the questions?

A total of 11 questions were posed to each participant. The questions included:

1. In what capacity are you working with the City in terms of obtaining permits and approvals?
2. How often/how many projects would you typically be applying for permits from the City?
3. What are the permits primarily for (land use, entitlement, zoning, construction, other)?
4. What are the easiest aspects of the current process?
5. What are the greatest challenges?
6. In terms of knowing the relevant codes and requirements, how easy do you feel it is to find them?
7. Are there places of duplication?
8. Contradiction?
9. Have you done any work for any agency that uses a UDC? How did that work – better? Different?
10. If you could change anything with the current codes – organizationally or intent – what would it be?
11. Other thoughts or comments?

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Summaries of each of the interviews are included in Appendix B.

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#### Issues that Kill Projects

The stakeholder suggested that there are several “big things” that kill projects:

- Street grind
  - Stormwater system capacity
  - Scalability
  - Mysteries in the code
  - Energy Code
  - Siloed city departments
  - Lack of accountability
  - Lack of priorities or “must haves”
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#### 4 What were the key findings and takeaways?

Results of the Stakeholder Interviews are presented in Exhibit 2-1, organized into three areas:

- What is Working
- Areas for Improvement
- Recommendations

These are then categorized in People, Process, and Policy.

**Exhibit 2-1  
External Stakeholder Summary**

	<b>People</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Policy</b>
<b>What is Working</b>	<p>It is noticeable that there is a change happening at the City, and staff seems excited about the changes</p> <p>Staff is accessible</p> <p>At a leadership level, staff really wants it to work</p>	<p>The pre-app process is good, scoping meetings are free, and it is relatively easy to get them set up without long lead times</p>	<p>For those working on these kinds of projects all the time, the pertinent codes are easy to find because they already know where to look</p> <p>Level of detail and availability of GIS data is excellent</p>
<b>Areas for Improvement</b>	<p>Decisions are not made at the lowest level</p> <p>Sometimes staff is not prepared for pre app</p> <p>Sometimes it seems more about enforcing roadblocks than enabling projects (culture of enforcement vs culture of facilitation)</p>	<p>How the process goes is totally dependent upon who is assigned to the project – there are go-to people that they seek out to help get things done</p> <p>Reviews take a long time and often get lost between departments – can be a wild goose chase to track down status</p> <p>Doesn't appear to be priorities in how projects are assigned</p>	<p>Code is easy to find, but hard to interpret – need more charts and pictures</p> <p>Too many overlays and districts – simplify!</p> <p>Too many references to other docs or rules that are not readily available or part of code</p> <p>Nuances in between drainage and public works</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>Inspire spirit of cooperation rather than allowing “empire builders”</p>	<p>Assign a project advocate or expeditor to serve as a “conciierge” between departments</p> <p>Would like site visits with staff</p> <p>Missing website data and links should be repaired</p> <p>Develop an IM or live chat feature</p>	<p>Consolidate and organize the code</p> <p>Sign code is three times the size of the land use code – it's out of scale for what it is supposed to accomplish</p> <p>Like the separate downtown part of the code – works well</p>



## Chapter 3 Recommendations and Next Steps

### 1 What are the recommendations for next steps?

There are several areas of recommendation for the entire process, including the UDC itself. Several of these items are already in process, and will continue throughout the duration of 2014. At this time, it is estimated that a UDC would be created and adopted during 2015. Actions items to achieve this are listed in the following table.

#	Recommendation	Action Item(s)	Implementation Team	Milestone/Schedule
1.	Continue to work concurrently on all levels of the bigger land use simplification project	People – continue to refine roles, integrate departments and groups, train, and foster leadership and culture of collaboration	Huffman Johnson Huffman, PMX	On-going
		Process – Adopt and utilize Accela, continue permit expediting process	COT, PMX	On-going
		Policy - Address regulatory/code issues (UDC)	COT, PMX	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2014
2.	Create an Internal Alignment Plan	Outline communication plan and protocol, internally and between departments	Huffman PMX	February 2014
		Address expectations for the outcome		May 2014
		Establish Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Committee roles and responsibilities for UDC review and draft		May 2014
		Identify outside stakeholders that should be engaged, and when		March 2014

3-2 Recommendations and Next Steps

#	Recommendation	Action Item(s)	Implementation Team	Milestone/Schedule
3.	Assimilate the current codes into a single document	Compile existing regulations, codes, and ordinances into one document	PMX	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2014
	Conduct a "first step audit" of existing codes to highlight:	Prepare summary table that identifies issues and provides recommendations for resolution	PMX	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2014
	o Conflicts			
	o Inconsistencies			
	o Duplication			
	o Alignment issues			
	o Outdated technologies			
4.	Based on results of Internal Alignment Plan, Code consolidation, and initial audit, retain consultant services to prepare code language for the UDC	Develop draft RFP language for review, approval, and distribution	PMX COT	July 2014
		Publish RFP	COT	July 2014
		Review proposals, conduct interviews, select code consultant	COT, PMX	Sept 2014
		Negotiate code consultant scope, schedule, fee	COT	Sept 2014
5.	Develop UDC	Starting with summary table from initial audit, prepare UDC	COT PMX Code Consultant	Oct 2014- March 2015
6.	Review, Approve, and Adopt UDC		COT PMX Code Consultant	Adopt December 2015