

MEMORANDUM

September 16, 2011

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee
Public Safety Committee

FROM: Essie McGuire, Legislative Analyst *EMG*
Jeff Zyontz, Legislative Attorney
Charles H. Sherer, Legislative Analyst *CHL*

SUBJECT: Briefing regarding efforts by DPS and DFRS to streamline the permitting process for fire inspections

The following individuals will attend, to brief the Committees and to discuss their efforts to streamline the permitting process for fire inspections.

Chief Richard Bowers (Fire and Rescue Services)
Chief David Steckel (Fire and Rescue Services)
Jennifer Hughes (Director of OMB and former Acting Director of DPS)
Thomas Laycock (IT Manager from DPS)
Hadi Mansouri (Acting Director, DPS)
Phil Waclawski (System Manager from DPS)

Background The Executive's Recommended FY12 Operating Budget for the Department of Permitting Services included the following statement of one of the Department's initiatives: "In conjunction with the Department of Economic Development and the Fire Marshall, DPS is implementing several changes to streamline the permitting process."

On April 27, 2011, the PHED Committee discussed this initiative in its review of the FY12 operating budget for DPS. The Committee is concerned about dual permit inspections from DPS and from the Fire Marshall, and directed Council staff to schedule a briefing from DPS, the Fire Marshall, and DED regarding this effort which these three departments are working on together to streamline the permitting process. The Committee also noted the confusion resulting from having so many

departments issuing permits and making inspections, including DPS, DEP, the Fire Marshall, DHCA, DHHS, and the Planning Board of M-NCPPC. The Committee wondered whether DPS could or should do all inspections.

Council member Reimer asked that DPS to explain the extent to which business with the Department can be done online. Mr. Thomas Laycock, IT Manager from DPS, will respond to this issue.

The Committee chairs agreed that this discussion will be about fire inspections only, involving the Fire Marshall and DPS. The Fire Protection Systems Inspection Plan is attached. The plan is for DPS “to assume the responsibility of providing fire protection systems inspections for new construction and renovation projects”, starting in January 2012. However, “DFRS would retain the inspection functions of existing buildings.”

Councilmembers expressed interest in further discussion on the following two issues:

- What hiring qualifications, training, or certification will be necessary to ensure that the new inspectors are qualified to address fire code compliance issues?
- What changes in revenue and expenditures are anticipated for FY13? Are any budget or appropriation changes necessary for the FY12 transition?

Other streamlining efforts involving DPS, DEP, DHCA, DHHS, and the Planning Board of M-NCPPC will be scheduled in the future.

Contents:

©	Item
1	Fire Protection Systems Inspection Plan



DEPARTMENT OF PERMITTING SERVICES

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Hadi Mansouri
Acting Director

MEMORANDUM

September 14, 2011

TO: Nancy Floreen
PHED Committee Chair

Phil Andrews
Public Safety Committee Chair

FROM: Hadi Mansouri, Acting Director
Department of Permitting Services

SUBJECT: Decision Memorandum - Fire Protection Systems Inspection

Objective:

The objective is to further enhance the "one stop shop" concept and streamline the permitting and inspection process by transferring the responsibility for conducting inspections for all newly constructed (including renovations) fire protection systems to the Department of Permitting Services (DPS).

Background:

When DPS was created in 1996, all plan review and inspections, with the exception of inspections of fire protection systems, was assigned to DPS. The responsibility for inspecting fire protection systems remained with Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) contrary to the concept of a "one-stop shop." The bifurcated two-department approach to plan review and inspection of new fire protection systems has created inefficiencies and confusion for customers. Consolidation of these services has been urged by the building industry, businesses, and residents for some time.

Recommendation

The Fire Chief and the Acting Department Director of DPS recommend that in order to better serve the building community, businesses and residents of Montgomery County, DPS should assume responsibility for the inspection of all newly constructed (including renovations) fire protection systems. MCFRS will retain the responsibility for inspecting and ensuring fire safety code compliance in existing buildings, but will no longer be responsible for the inspection of any new construction or renovations (i.e. work and activity requiring a permit).

Several factors have influenced this recommendation. First, it takes MCFRS one to two weeks to schedule an inspection after a request has been received because of staffing and other obligations. Because DPS is primarily focused on this activity, it has provided next working day inspections despite reductions in staffing. Moreover, economies of scale and the ability to more efficiently deploy inspectors will continue to allow DPS to meet the current inspection schedule. Second, the building community has often indicated a preference for fire protection system inspection and plan review to be conducted in one department in order to ensure greater consistency, coordination and timeliness. Finally, given the strong relationship between review and inspection of electrical and mechanical plans (done by DPS) and review and inspection of fire protection systems, consolidation is logical

DPS Staffing Proposal and Costs:

New Staffing for Fire Alarm

- Total number of fire alarm plans reviewed from 2006 through 2010 = 3816
- Average number of fire alarm plans reviewed per year = 764
- Average number of inspections per year 764 (382 sites will require 2 inspections). Total = 1146.
- Average number of days 1 employee works per year on direct inspections = 170 or 1360 hours. This number excludes time for inspection related travel, meetings and phone calls.
- Average inspection time = 2 hours.
- 1146 inspections x 2 hours/inspection = 2292 hours
- $2292/1360 = 1.69$. There is a requirement for 2 fire alarm inspectors to staff this function.

New Staffing for Fire Protection Systems

- Total number of fire protection systems plans reviewed from 2006 through 2010 = 6267.
- Average number of fire protection plans reviewed per year = 1254
- Average number of fire protection systems plans reviewed per year = 1254 (940 sites will require 2 inspections. Total 2193

- Average number of days 1 employee works per year on direct inspections = 170 or 1360 hours. This number excludes time for inspection related travel, meetings and phone calls.
- Average inspection time = 2 hours.
- 2194 inspections x 2 hours/inspection = 4388 hours.
- $4388/1360 = 3.23$. There is a requirement for 3 fire protection systems inspectors to staff this function.

Transition Plan

- MCFRS will temporarily continue to provide fire protection systems inspections for new construction until DPS hires new inspectors.
- DPS will hire staff in November for training and begin performing inspections after January 1, 2012.
- DFRS will continue to receive the Revenue for Permit Fees in FY12. They will transfer to DPS the amount budgeted for new construction inspection expenses, which was based on using contract services for such inspections. The amount of the transfer is \$270,000.
- DPS estimates the cost of staffing these new positions for eight months will be \$290,000. This is based on temporarily promoting existing staff for the Manager position.
- In FY13 revenue for permit fees will be received by DPS with an estimated total of \$1,075,000.
- Expenses in FY13 are estimated to be \$543,000 for DPS.

Advantages of Having DPS Inspect All Fire Protection and Fire Alarm Systems

- Streamlines the new construction inspection process.
- Customers will be working with one department.
- DPS inspectors will be cross-trained in mechanical, electrical, and fire protection systems inspections, providing greater efficiencies for both Montgomery County and customers. This will also reduce costs for Montgomery County.
- All inspections will be scheduled for the next business day using the DPS IVR (Interactive Voice Response system). This has been DPS' policy since its inception and has been a huge success.
- All re-inspections can be scheduled for the next business day. Customers will not have to pay overtime for a next day re-inspection.
- All inspection results will be recorded in the DPS Hanson computer system instantly and in real time.
- There will be no charge for re-inspections until the third inspection for the same violation.
- DPS' inspection program will be funded by using current inspection fees charged. DPS will not raise fees. This will ultimately reduce cost for customers.
- All inspection fees will be collected by one department in one location; however, all revenue from fire protection systems inspections will continue to be associated with the MCFRS budget until changes are made in the budget for both departments that reflect the changes recommended herein.
- MCFRS will be able to focus on existing buildings which have not been sufficiently addressed because of reduced staffing in the Fire Code Compliance Section.
- The Fire Chief will delegate authority to DPS for reviewing plans and providing fire safety code inspections for new construction and renovations.