

**CITY OF CORVALLIS – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**



**2009 CUSTOMER SERVICE SURVEY REPORT**

**Completed by:**

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**Date Completed:**

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## OVERALL SUMMARY

This memo summarizes the results from a survey of customers of the City of Corvallis Development Services conducted in October 2009. The main purpose of the survey was to measure the level of customer service provided by the department through a survey of approximately 315 customers served in the last three years. Here are some of the overall findings from the survey:

- **Overall Positive** – Throughout the survey, the majority of respondents rate overall efficiency and quality of service as good, very good, or excellent, while the minority rate it as poor.
- **Staff Knowledge and Communication** – On several questions, the respondents gave a highly positive rating to the level of staff competency and ability to communicate with customers.
- **Timing and Effort**– Throughout the survey, some respondents indicated displeasure with the amount of time and effort required to complete the permitting process. While this sentiment was often the minority, these respondents indicated a loss of profitability in their businesses and a potential avoidance of reporting building activities to avoid the time and effort of the process. Some of these respondents have concerns with the complicated nature of the regulations and requested more information to help with the permitting process
- **Coordination with other Departments and Agencies**– Several of the respondents indicated a lack of coordination between departmental functions and outside Agencies. This may imply a disconnect between customers and Staff about the level of coordination taking place “behind the scenes.” To address this issue, Staff may be able to provide more transparency to customers about the coordination taking place between other departments and agencies.

The findings listed above are just at the surface of the potential lessons to be learned from the survey. The following sections are intended to provide more detail. They are organized into these sections:

**Purpose of the Survey** – brief description of the purpose and intent of the survey

**Methods** – explanation of the methods used to develop the survey, identify respondents, and administer the survey

**Results and Analysis** – a display of the results and analysis to identify overall findings.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this survey was to analyze the level of customer service provided by the Development Services Division of the City of Corvallis Community Development Department. The Development Services Division is committed to providing a high level of customer service and seeks to understand customers' perception of the delivery of these services. Lastly, the purpose of this survey is simply to measure the implementation of permitting policies and not to analyze the efficacy of the policies themselves.

## **METHODS**

### ***Creation of the Survey***

The City of Corvallis hired an intern, Nick Kraemer, to coordinate the creation of the survey. From the start, the intern worked with Staff to clearly identify the purpose and objectives for the survey. Then, the previous survey completed for the Planning Division was reviewed along with surveys from other communities like Eugene, Medford and Oregon City. This information was then incorporated into a draft version of the survey which was distributed to City of Corvallis Staff for feedback and review. Prior to finalization, the survey was also reviewed by the Development Resources and Resolution Team (DR2) and their feedback was incorporated into the survey. From there, the survey went through several iterations and was finalized in October of 2009.

### ***Identification of Respondents and Administration of Survey***

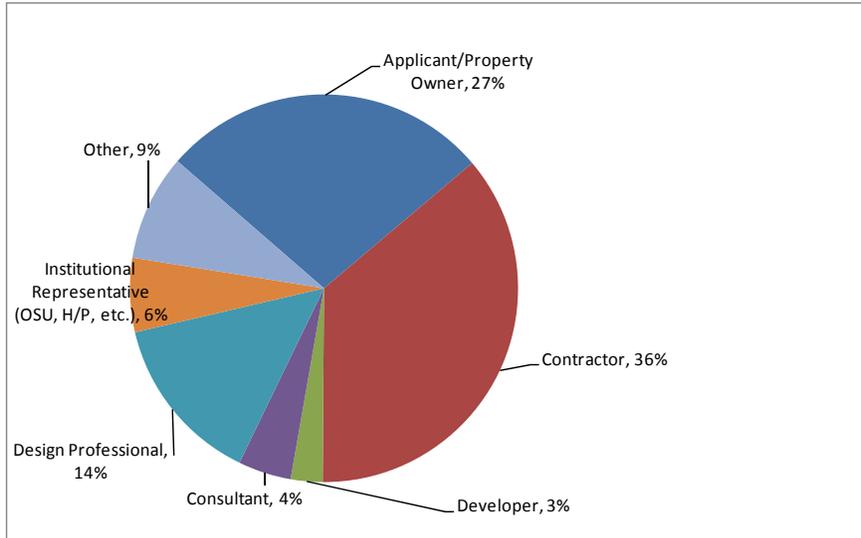
It was decided that an online survey would be the most efficient and cost effective way to administer the survey questions. A list of approximately 315 potential respondents was identified using a database of email addresses from permit applications of customers from the last three years. This list included: contractors, property owners, developers, consultants, and institutional representatives. The City of Corvallis sent email invites to the online survey to all 315 potential respondents. The respondents were allowed approximately 10 days to complete the survey, with a reminder sent out at day 5. The responses to the survey were kept anonymous to encourage honest feedback. Upon closing the survey, 105 respondents started the survey and 96 completed every question in the survey. This equates to a response rate of 27%, which is relatively good and certainly adequate for the purposes of this survey.

# RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

## Customer Background

This section was created to learn more about the customer base, the types of development services they utilized in the last three years, and ultimate outcomes of those applications.

### What was your role in the Permitting Process?

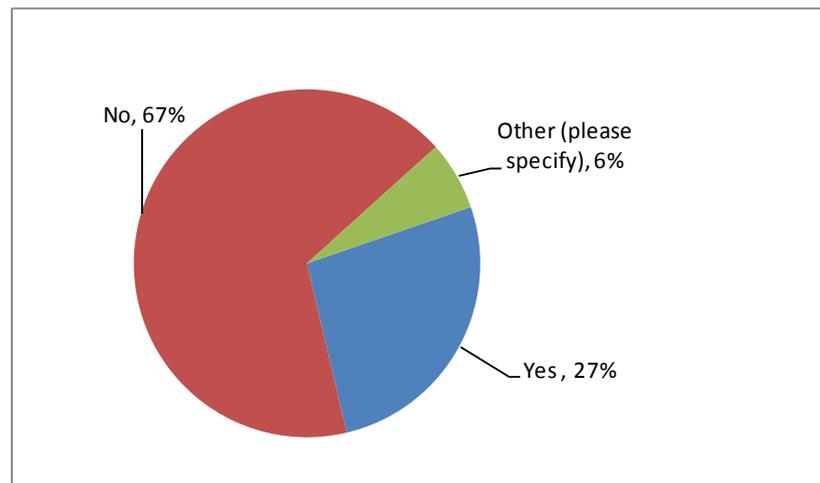


The results of this question display the relatively broad range of customers that utilize development services. It is interesting to note that the highest portion of respondents identified themselves as Contractors (36%) followed closely by Applicant/Property Owners (27%). Most of respondents to the Other (please specify) Category indicated in the comment

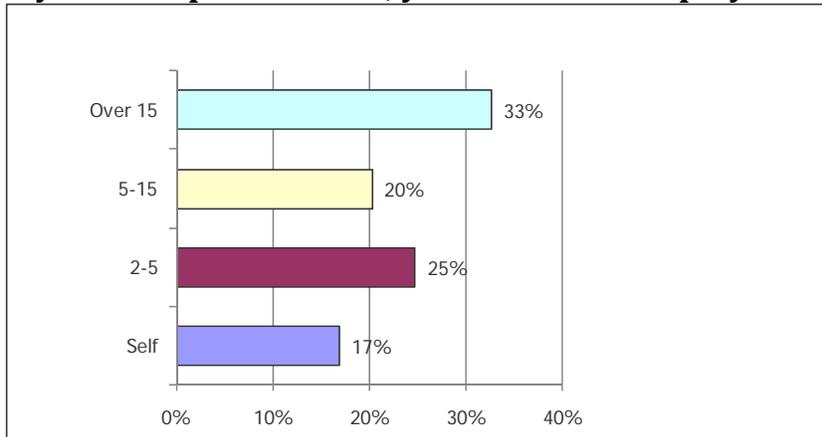
section that they have acted in several different roles in the permitting process.

### Did you hire a Professional to complete the permitting process?

According to the respondents of this question, nearly 27% of the customers hired a Professional to complete the permitting process, while 67% did not. Those (6%) that chose Other (please specify) indicated that they often hire a professional consultant, but not 100% of the time. In addition, some of those respondents were the Professionals themselves hired to complete the permitting process. When cross tabulated with the role of customer, the data shows that 43% Applicant/Property Owners and 14% of Contractors hired professionals to complete the permitting process.



### If you are a professional, your business employs how many workers?



Of the 89 respondents to this question, a large number of respondents (33%) indicated that they work for larger businesses with over 15 employees. Beyond the largest category, survey respondents indicated a relative spread across the other sizes of businesses. Another respondent commented about the seasonal nature of

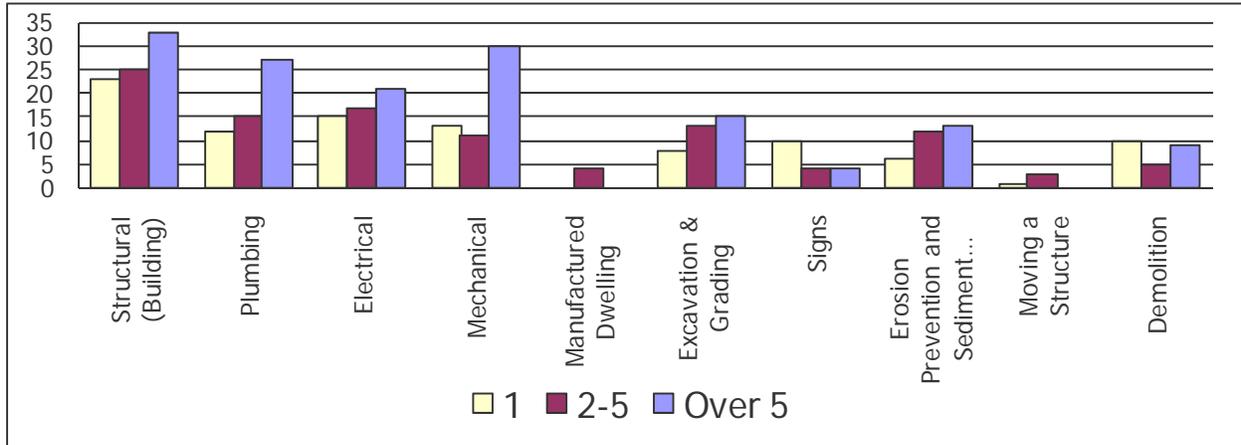
their business and fluctuations in numbers of employees.

### What is the focus of your business?

This question gives a further detailed picture of the customers for Development Services over the last three years. Most of the customers' businesses are focused on Commercial (41%) and Residential (37%) work. With a smaller amount focused on Industrial (17%). Interestingly, this business is spread relatively evenly across New Construction (48%) and Remodel (52%). Several other categories were listed in the comment section including: public, wireless services, and road construction.

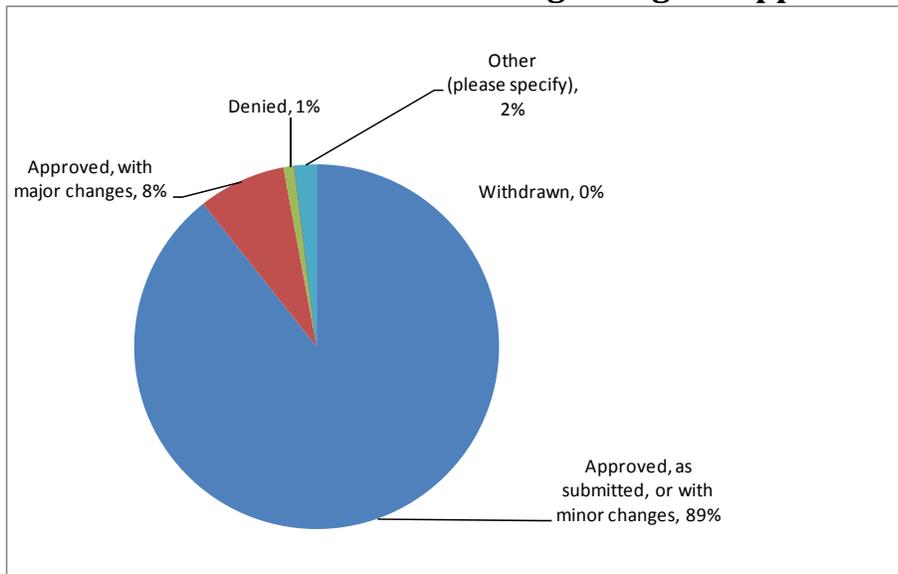
What is the focus of your business? (check all that apply)				
Answer Options	New Construction	Remodel	Response Count	% of Total
Commercial	44	46	90	41%
Residential	39	42	81	37%
Industrial	22	16	38	17%
Other	0	12	12	5%
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>52%</b>		
	<i>answered question</i>		<b>221</b>	
	<i>skipped question</i>		<b>24</b>	

**How many of each of the following types of permits did you obtain from the City of Corvallis over the last three years (1, 2-5, Over 5)?**



Most of the respondents obtained a combination of structural, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical permits. Within these categories, most respondents obtained over 5 permits within in the last three years.

**What was the ultimate outcome regarding the application?**



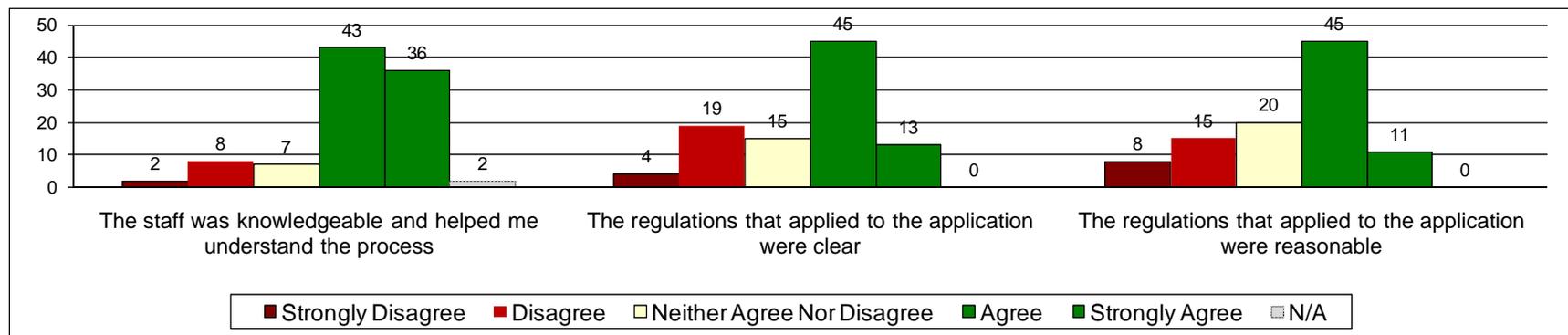
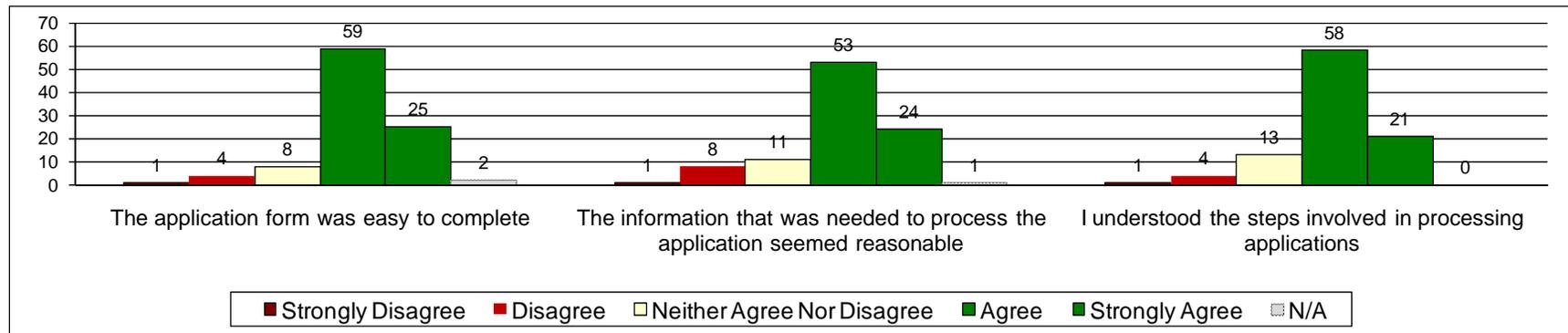
The vast majority of respondents (89%) indicated that their permit applications were approved as submitted, or with minor changes. A much smaller amount of respondents (8%), were required to make major changes to receive approval. Of those denied (1%), none of the respondents chose to explain the nature of the denial.

## Permitting Application Process

This section focuses on the permitting application process and utilizes a Likert Scale that ranges from “strongly disagree” (red) to “strongly agree” (green) with “neither agree nor disagree” (tan) in between, to gather customer perspectives. The graphical representations of these results are intended to display the overall range of responses, rather than focus on outliers and averages. In addition, a comment section allowed for detailed descriptions from respondents.

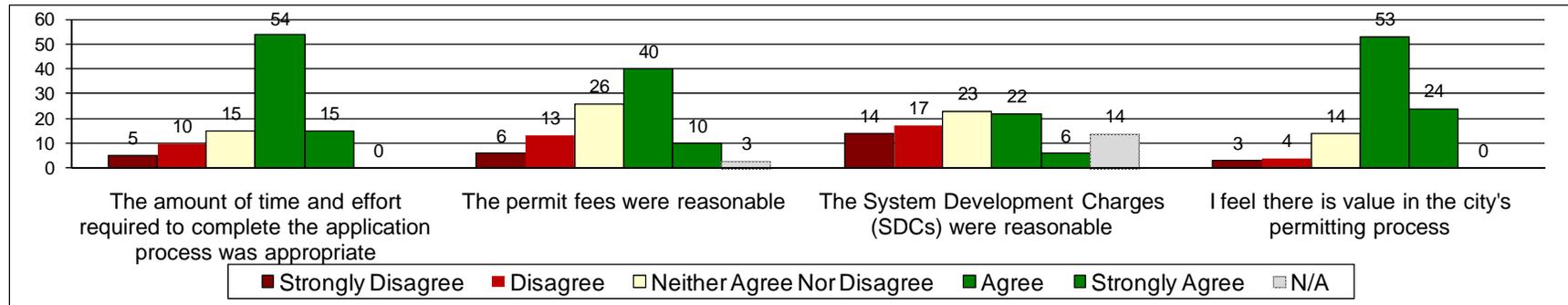
### Rate the Following Statements about the Permitting Application Process

Overall, respondents rated the permitting application process positively. Around 75% of respondents rated the process highly, but some (25%) had a negative response to clarity and reasonableness of the regulations applied to the permit.



## Permitting Application Process (continued)

The majority of respondents (70%) gave a positive response regarding the amount of time and effort required to complete the process, while the minority (19%) gave a negative response. Respondents gave mixed results about permit fees and system development charges: half (51%) of respondents agree that permit fees are reasonable, but a relatively large amount (32%) indicated that they feel system development charges were not reasonable. Lastly, the large majority of respondents (79%) feel there is value in the city's permitting process.



## Comments about the Application Process

The comments in this section are equally mixed between highly positive comments regarding staff with negative comments about the clarity of regulations, amount of time required to complete the process, and the scalability of code for smaller projects. Please see below for representative comments:

*The staff was very helpful in working through a complicated process.*

*The staff at the counter was friendly and helpful .*

*I believe that the review for small items or corrections take way too long. Seems like some of those could be processed with an appointment /over the counter.*

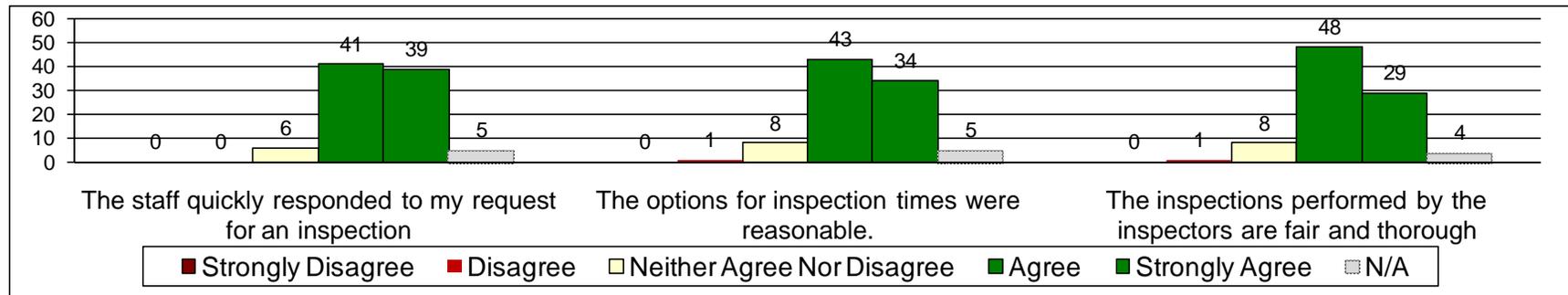
*Additionally, it seems that city staff sometimes does not understand that time is money in the private sector and this only adds to the frustration level. I think it prevents some folks from either making improvements or from pulling permits.*

## Inspections Process

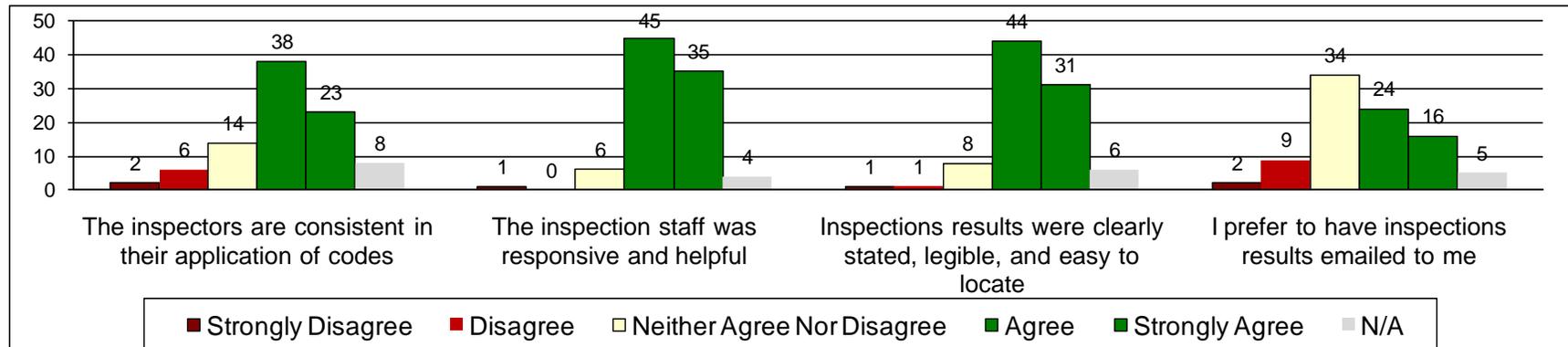
This section focuses on the Inspections Process and utilizes the same approach as the previous section.

### Rate the Following Statements about the Inspections Process

Nearly all of the respondents (96%) were required to undergo an inspections process as part of the permitting process. The majority of respondents rated the inspections process very positively.



Again, the vast majority of responses were positive, but a small minority of respondents disagrees with the inspectors' consistent application of codes. Lastly, the results are mixed regarding the communication of inspections results via email.



## ***Inspections Process (continued)***

### **Comments about the Inspections Process**

The comments in this section are mostly positive comments regarding the inspections staff with a few negative comments about the consistency among different inspectors in the application of regulations. Please see below for representative comments:

*I think the inspection staff does an excellent job, especially in the communications end of it.*

*All inspectors were reasonable and provided great customer service.*

*In my experience peoples frustration often arises not from the issues raised, but the consistency of issues raised between different inspectors.*

*Some of the inspectors appear to care less about the fire, life, and safety issues they are supposed to be inspecting and more about policing a project.*

## Corvallispermits.com Website

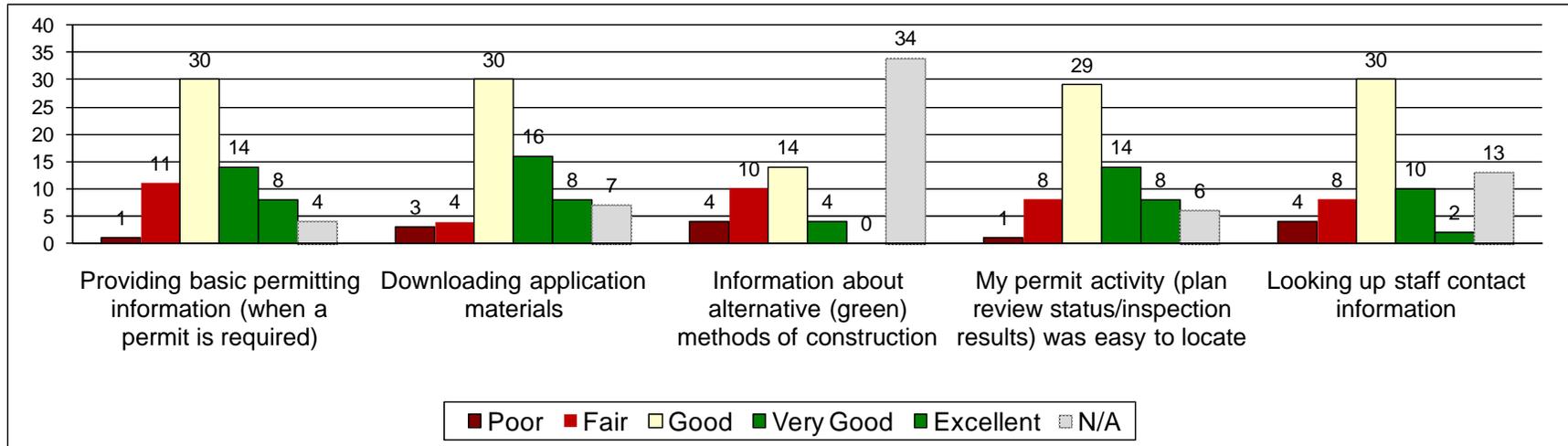
This section focuses on the Corvallispermits.com Website and utilizes the same approach as previous sections.

### Rate the Following Statements about the Corvallispermits.com Website

The majority of respondents (68%) used the corvallispermits.com website, the other respondents skipped to the next section.

Did you use the corvallispermits.com website?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, I used the website.	68%	67
No, I did not use the website.	32%	31
<i>answered question</i>		<b>98</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>7</b>

Overall, the customers provided mixed responses about the usefulness of the website. From these responses, it appears that there is some room for improvement on the website in some areas including: providing basic permitting information, green alternatives, and looking up staff contact information.



## ***Corvallispermits.com Website (continued)***

### **Comments about the Corvallispermits.com Website**

Most of the comments reflect the responses above. In particular, the comments section contained several references to trouble in finding relevant maps, discussion about the usefulness of providing more information about “green” building practices, and some requests for easier to find contact information:

*Flood plain maps or red flag addresses in FEMA so that we could address them from the beginning.*

*Not sure the City should be in the business of promoting "green" unless they are willing to offer incentives to encourage "green" building...I do wonder if the City's effort in this area are a duplication of efforts or really do create a "value add" for the citizens.*

*Link to building codes (including pdfs) that can be downloaded and instructions about which codes are applicable to private owners*

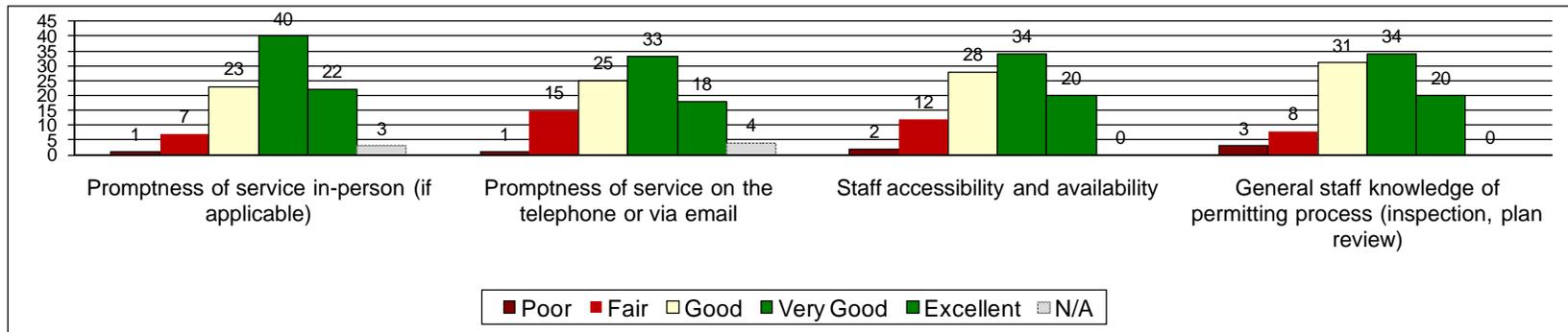
*City Staff doesn't really have staff contacts directly listed on the website, which made it more difficult to track down the information I needed.*

## Overall Customer Service

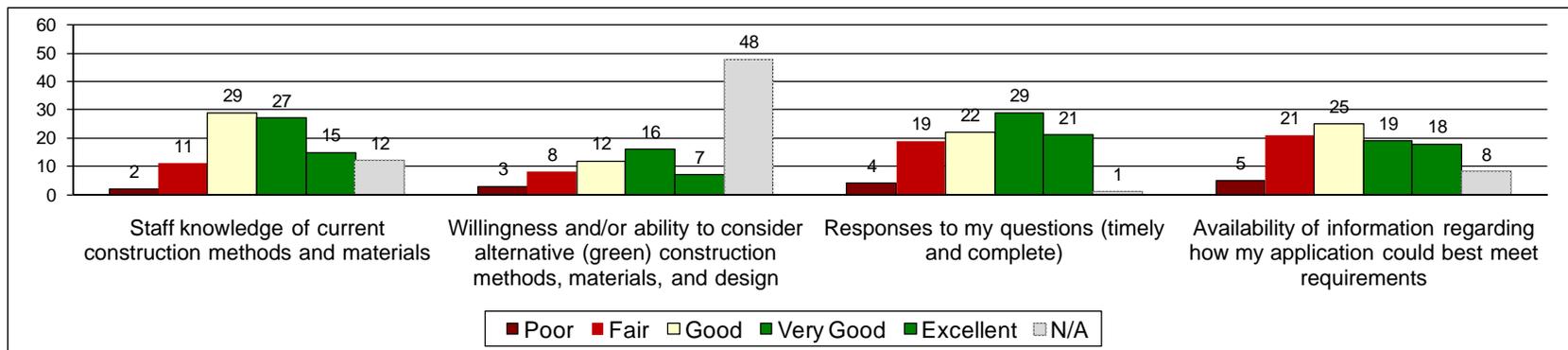
This section focuses on the Overall Customer Service and utilizes a Likert Scale that ranges from poor (red) to excellent (green) to gather customer perspectives.

### Rate the Following Statements about the Overall Customer Service

Overall, the customers provided positive responses about promptness of service and accessibility of Staff; however some respondents (~15%) rated remote service (email and phone) and staff accessibility poor or fair.

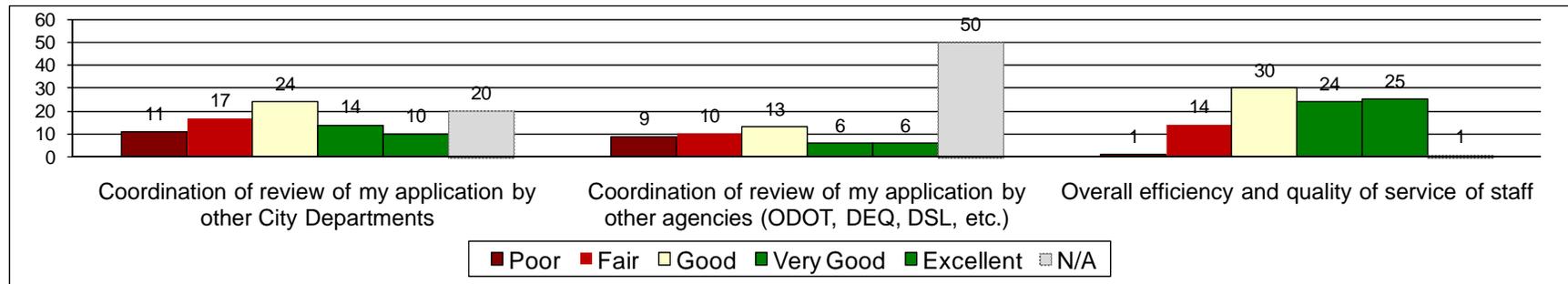


While promptness of service was relatively highly rated, there were mixed results about the quality of the response. A relatively large number of respondents gave lower ratings to the Staff's timely and complete responses to questions as well as the availability of information regarding how to best meet requirements.



### Overall Customer Service (continued)

The large majority (83%) of respondents rate overall efficiency and quality of service as good, very good, or excellent, while the minority (16%) rate it as poor. Many of the respondents (~25%) rank the coordination of review by other City Departments and agencies poor to fair. The large number of N/A responses to this question may imply a disconnect between customers and staff about the level of coordination taking place “behind the scenes.” Aside from the issues with coordination, the answers to the final question in this section show a positive response regarding the overall efficiency and quality of staff.



### Comments about Overall Customer Service

Most of the comments reflect the responses above and provide further insight to the reasoning of the some of the respondents. Overall, the comments indicate some frustration with the level of coordination between City Departments and other agencies. Lastly, the comment section contained several positive responses about staff. Please see below for comments:

*Permit staff is excellent. It broke down in upper levels of management, coordination between city and city attorney, and between departments.*

*Better coordination with other agencies is an excellent place to focus; our experience is that this is usually left to the contractor, even for coordination with other divisions in the City.*

*I just wish the process didn't take so long. Other counties do it much quicker.*

*Office staff was very helpful and courteous!*

## Comparison with Other Jurisdictions

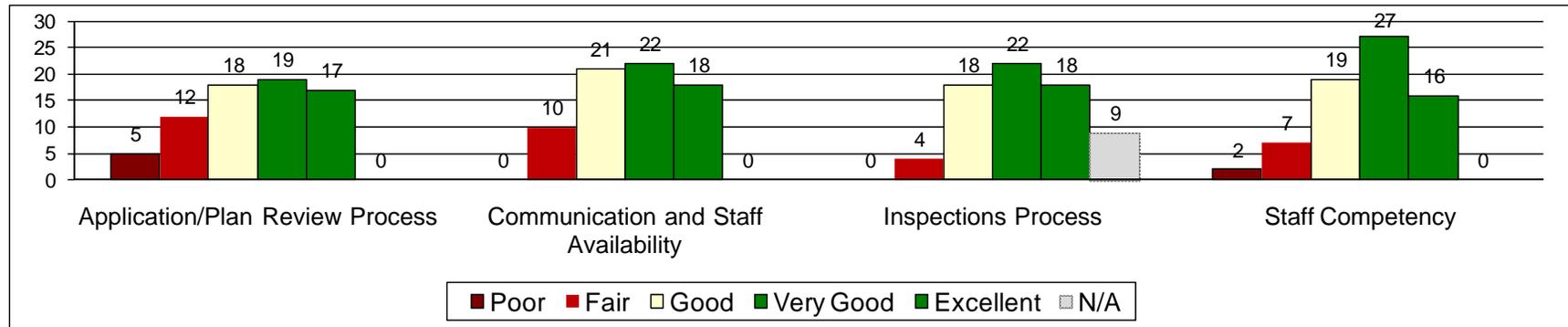
This section focuses on comparisons with other jurisdictions and utilizes a Likert Scale that ranges from poor (red) to excellent (green) to gather customer perspectives.

### Rate the Following Statements about the Comparisons with Other Jurisdictions

The majority of respondents (74%) have taken part in the permitting process in other jurisdictions, the other respondents skipped to the next section.

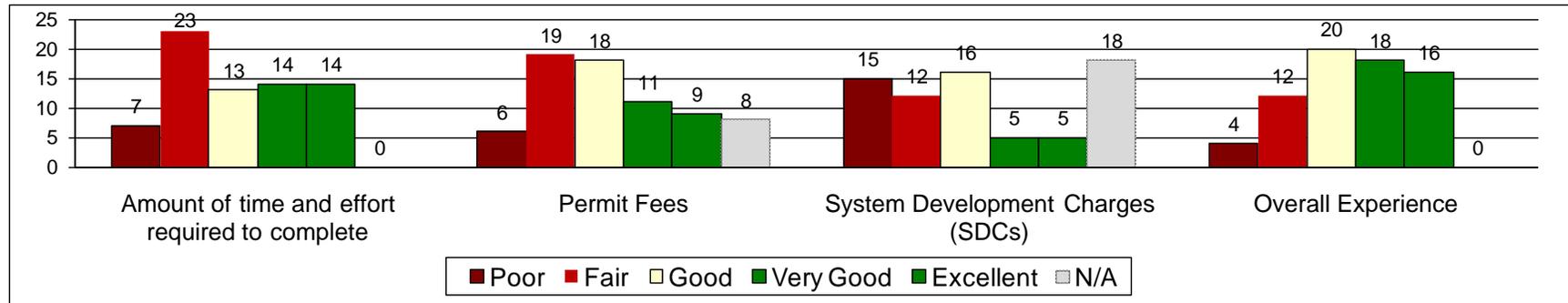
Have you taken part in the building permitting process for other jurisdictions?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	74%	71
No	26%	25
<i>answered question</i>		<b>96</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>9</b>

Overall, the customers provided relatively positive responses about the comparison with other jurisdictions. Respondents varied greatly on their opinion of the application/plan review process (24% poor or fair), but a large majority of respondents (~75 to 80%) ranked the other categories below from good to excellent.



### Comparison with Other Jurisdictions (continued)

Overall, respondents gave a largely positive response (77%) of good to excellent, for their overall experience in comparison to other jurisdictions. In accordance with previous responses, lower ratings (42% poor or fair) were given to the amount of time and effort to complete process compared to other jurisdictions. In addition, a relatively low score of was also given to the category of permit fees and SDCs.



## **Customer Suggestions for Improvement**

This section summarizes the comments made in the open-ended question #20.

### **Please share any other specific processes, techniques, or services that you feel would make the City of Corvallis permitting process better.**

A relatively small number of respondents (17) chose to answer this question. The comments in this section contain both ends of the spectrum from very positive about how the Corvallis compares with other jurisdiction to very negative about the amount of time and effort required by the City of Corvallis. Due to the focus of the question being on specific suggestions to improve, those representative comments have been collected below:

*For larger projects more communication on progress and timelines would help client relations. The submittal goes into an "unknown" after application until we see a response letter, sometimes a month or more later so some updates would be nice. Not needed for small jobs only big work.*

*I think there needs to be some effort, especially in remodels, to exhibit some flexibility in the rules as well as an overall trust that we, as builders, are trying to do things right.*

*I have worked in many jurisdictions. Corvallis is far and away the best; and this was always my reply when I heard another builder or designer complain!*

*Other jurisdictions may be somewhat easier to obtain permits, but I actually appreciate the more extensive process Corvallis has because it helps prevent sloppy development and building..*

## Enhanced Services

This section summarizes the respondents' use of enhanced services offered by the Development Services Division. Respondents were able to answer "yes" or "no".

### Which of the following enhanced services have you used?

The chart below displays the number of respondents that marked "yes" to each particular enhanced service.

