



# Information Item

**Date: August 8, 2016**

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: David Martin, Director, Planning and Community Development  
Subject: Closure of Permit Center on Alternate Fridays

## **Introduction**

City Hall has a traditional 9/80 work schedule with closures on alternating Fridays. However, the Permit Center is also currently open on “light” Fridays when other City services are closed. Remaining open on “light” Fridays has caused difficulties in staffing operations and the ability to provide consistent counter hours, has required additional security and building maintenance staff, and has caused customer frustration due to the lack of availability of other City services.

As a result, the Permit Center will be closing on alternate Fridays starting on September 6, 2016. This closure is intended to better serve customers by providing consistent counter hours of 8:00am to 5:00pm daily with all City services available during these hours. Counter hours are currently different for all divisions, which causes confusion for customers. The closure of City Hall on alternate Fridays would have benefits in having consistent staff present at the Permit Center counter and provide better customer service because the full range of services would be available to customers at predictable hours during normal work schedules. Inspection and Code Enforcement operations will remain unchanged.

## **Background**

The Divisions that staff the Permits Center require various hours away from the public counter to meet their differing workload demands largely due to the need to split staff to

accommodate both Fridays. Although this results in staff being available five-days-a-week, it greatly impacts operations and service to the public. Multiple divisions with varying counter hours and some related services being completely unavailable have led to a confused and frustrated public. While the Fire Department is not located in the Permit Center, the Fire Marshal has expressed concern about the ability to provide full public staffing coverage and accomplish Fire inspections. The Fire Marshal often has to balance providing “light” Friday counter service and perform inspections, significantly impacting customer service response times.

On “light” Fridays, customer volumes are generally 40% lower for all Divisions compared to Monday through Thursday. A customer survey to collect feedback from users of the Permit Center regarding the level of services provided was distributed to all customers and garnered 94 respondents. Overall, 74% of respondents indicated that they would prefer consistent hours throughout City Hall operations rather than being open on light Fridays with limited City service.

## **Discussion**

The complete closing of City Hall on alternate Fridays would have several advantages to staff operations, functional operations, and customer service benefits.

### Staff Operations

Alternate Friday closure would allow operations to be fully staffed and supervised on each of the 9/80 days. Currently, Divisions staffing the counter must split staff into two schedules leading to challenges in coordinating work product and counter coverage. This change in the counter schedule would create a myriad of benefits, including: more flexible meeting scheduling, greater staff coverage on the working Friday, improved staff communication by working the same schedules, and an overall reduction of stress and anxiety. The Department and Division managers would have access to supervisors and senior staff would no longer have to cover the alternate Fridays.

### Functional Operations

Closing the alternate Friday would allow the complete closure of the building twice a month. This would eliminate two days of electricity, natural gas, and custodial maintenance costs every month. The complete closure of City Hall on alternate Fridays would contribute to the reduction of environmental emissions due to the non-operation of equipment. The alternate Friday closure would also eliminate the need for staff at the City Hall lobby informational booth that presently is compensated on an overtime basis. In FY2015/16, \$8,910 in overtime costs were associated with staff assigned to the informational booth on “light” Fridays. Further, the need for the Police Department Public Services Officer (PSO), who provides security throughout the alternate Friday, could be eliminated as well.

### Customer Benefits

Currently, not all City services are available on the “light” Friday, leaving customers unable to complete key elements of their business. Most significant is the unavailability of Business License operations, which is not located within City Hall, but which often makes it impossible to issue a building permit. This issue inevitably occurs on every “light” Friday and is particularly frustrating to customers who have made a special trip to City Hall or traveled a far distance, only to leave empty handed. Other impacts include customers not knowing of other unavailable or limited services on “light” Fridays (e.g. City Clerk passport service, seeking information from other non-counter departments, reduced RRR staff for processing waste management plans, etc.) or customers who are expecting to meet with specific staff members only to be disappointed.

Having a consistent and predictable staff presence throughout the regular 9/80 work schedule would allow customers to establish meetings and communications without being surprised by alternating schedules. Customers will receive improved service as all staff involved with specific project issues will be more readily available.

### Outreach to Customers

In order to inform customers of the change in the counter schedule, flyers have been posted in the Permit Center beginning August 1. An announcement has been added to the Planning and Community Development Department website and the portion of the website that lists the public counter hours. An announcement will also be added to the City website's main landing page for greater visibility. The public may view public counter hours at the following link: <http://www.smgov.net/Departments/PCD/About-Us/Public-Counter-Services-and-Hours/>.

In addition, the announcement will be e-mailed to neighborhood groups, business improvement districts, Chamber of Commerce, and regular Permit Center customers such as local architects, contractors, attorneys, and known land use entitlement consultants. The voicemail message on outgoing main phone lines will also include an announcement regarding the change in counter hours.

**Prepared By:** Jing Yeo, AICP, Planning Manager