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Analysis of the application/permitting procedure

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CERTIFIED PUBLIC MANAGER PROJECT

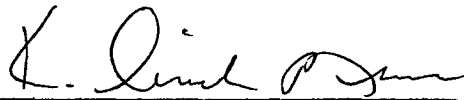
Analysis of the Application/Permitting Procedure

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PROBLEM STATEMENT AND GOAL

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) is responsible for the issuance of permits required for the installation of individual sewage treatment and disposal systems for all dwellings and businesses that are not able to connect to public sewer. The Department of Health and Environmental Control is also responsible for the enforcement of Regulation 61-56, which deals specifically with the engineering and permitting of these systems. The increase in the population of South Carolina is in direct proportion to the increase in the number of applications DHEC has received for such permits. The average standard turnaround time (the elapsed time from when an application is received to the time a permit is issued) is expected to be ten (10) to twelve (12) working days, as agreed by DHEC. Under certain conditions, the turnaround time has been as much as fifteen (15) working days, due to various influences.

South Carolina is divided into thirteen (13) DHEC health districts. Each district has from two (2) to six (6) counties contained within the border of a particular district. This project will concentrate on the Wateree District, which is composed of Kershaw, Lee, Sumter and Clarendon Counties. Each county is charged with implementing the individual sewage treatment and disposal system program and enforcing Regulation 61-56. Each district has certain finite resources allocated for the implementation of the program and the hiring of additional personnel is not an option at this time.

Due to increasing demands from the public toward government agencies, DHEC understands that customer service is very important to the continued success of the agency and included in the customer service equation is the timeliness of services delivered. The public expects a quick response time to their requests for a permit, especially since DHEC charges a fee for this service. Some of the factors that influence the turnaround time are under the control of DHEC and other factors are under the control of the applicant. Some of the most important factors under the control of the applicant include the following; 1) assure that the application is filled out completely and correctly and is legible, 2) assure that all required documents (plat, deed, etc.) are attached, 3) assure that a site plan showing the exact location of the proposed house and driveway in relation to the distances from the property lines is attached, 4) assure that the parcel of land to be evaluated is accessible (i.e. undergrowth cut so that elevations can be taken and exact distances can be measured). The liability rests with DHEC to ensure that the applicant understands exactly what is expected of him/her so that no delays will slow the permitting process.

DHEC has received a few complaints concerning the time required for the issuance of these permits and fortunately a computer tracking system is in place so that the turnaround time concerning each application received can be measured. The permitting process can be evaluated and with the help of information from the computer program and field personnel, can be streamlined so that the turnaround time can be reduced.

The goal is to increase the efficiency of the application/permitting process and reduce the turnaround time required for the issuance of a permit. If, after investigation of this situation and the collection and evaluation of data, it is determined that the average turnaround time is greater than twelve (12) working days, our goal will be to reduce the wait time by fifteen percent (15%). This reduction can be attempted by enacting certain modifications in the application process as it relates to the information and guidance the applicant receives from the local county DHEC office. If it is determined that the average turnaround time is twelve (12) working days or less, no action will be required due to the fact this is within acceptable DHEC parameters that have been established regarding customer service for this particular program. If modifications in the application process are needed and therefore enacted, the resulting changes can be measured by comparing the average time required for the issuance of a permit in 1999, with the average time required in 2000. From this data, it can be determined if any additional measures should be introduced in order to achieve the twelve (12) working day turnaround time threshold.

We must remember that customer service is a top priority for DHEC. Therefore, potential modifications that could help the permitting process become more efficient must be explored, even if the data reveals that the turnaround time is within DHEC standards.

CAUSE ANALYSIS

In order to establish the current average turnaround time for the issuance of permits in the Wateree District, data was collected from each county. The data includes the number of applications received each month, the total number of permits issued and the average time to issue any permit. Keeping in mind that the standard turnaround time should be ten (10) to twelve (12) working days, the following data has been adjusted to reflect working days, not calendar days. In other words, the computer program is set for calendar days, therefore, for every seven (7) days shown on the printout, two (2) days were subtracted to reflect a five (5) day work week. The data was taken from January 1999 through October 1999.

| | Kershaw | Lee | Sumter | Clarendon |
|---|---------|-----|--------|-----------|
| January (# of apps. received) | 47 | 19 | 65 | 49 |
| Total # of permits issued | 56 | 16 | 60 | 34 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 9 | 10 | 15 | 10 |
| February (# of apps. received) | 67 | 23 | 57 | 72 |
| Total # of permits issued | 48 | 21 | 43 | 45 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 8 | 9 | 24 | 10 |
| March (# of apps. received) | 90 | 23 | 62 | 68 |
| Total # of permits issued | 80 | 18 | 58 | 62 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 12 | 10 | 16 | 14 |

| | Kershaw | Lee | Sumter | Clarendon |
|---|---------|-----|--------|-----------|
| April (# of apps. received) | 66 | 21 | 62 | 48 |
| Total # of permits issued | 81 | 20 | 47 | 55 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 15 | 10 | 8 | 15 |
| May (# of apps. received) | 56 | 15 | 70 | 44 |
| Total # of permits issued | 51 | 14 | 53 | 42 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 12 | 10 | 6 | 10 |
| June (# of apps. received) | 80 | 15 | 63 | 40 |
| Total # of permits issued | 64 | 19 | 55 | 39 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 12 | 20 | 10 | 9 |
| July (# of apps. received) | 56 | 21 | 61 | 39 |
| Total # of permits issued | 74 | 10 | 60 | 32 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 14 | 7 | 9 | 11 |
| August (# of apps. received) | 62 | 26 | 70 | 43 |
| Total # of permits issued | 60 | 16 | 47 | 46 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 4 | 13 | 4 | 11 |

| | Kershaw | Lee | Sumter | Clarendon |
|---|---------|-----|--------|-----------|
| September (# of apps. received) | 58 | 18 | 46 | 31 |
| Total # of permits issued | 57 | 17 | 40 | 20 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 11 | 11 | 15 | 11 |
| October (# of apps. received) | 39 | 16 | 59 | 28 |
| Total # of permits issued | 42 | 22 | 30 | 27 |
| Avg. time to issue permit (days) | 4 | 11 | 10 | 16 |

After the data was evaluated, cumulative totals from the first day of January 1999, to the last day of October 1999, for each county were measured. The following chart reflects these totals:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Kershaw County | | Lee County | |
| # of apps. received | 621 | # of apps. received | 197 |
| # of permits issued | 613 | # of permits issued | 173 |
| Avg. time to issue permit | 10 Days | Avg. time to issue permit | 11 days |
| Sumter County | | Clarendon County | |
| # of apps. received | 613 | # of apps. received | 462 |
| # of permits issued | 490 | # of permits issued | 403 |
| Avg. time to issue permit | 11 days | Avg. time to issue permit | 10 days |

The data shows that overall, the average turnaround time for the issuance of a permit is within the acceptable time frame; however, certain months did reflect an abnormal amount of time. After further investigation it was determined that the three (3) longest timeframes occurred when an employee of a particular county was out for an extended period of time. These three (3) instances being February in Sumter County requiring twenty four (24) days; March in Sumter County requiring sixteen (16) days; and June in Lee County requiring twenty (20) days. The data shows other times when the turnaround time is somewhat longer than normal, which could be attributed to bad weather or months when field personnel were receiving additional training and/or instruction. Even though the overall turnaround time is well with DHEC standards, improvements to the process can be achieved.

After an inquiry was made to determine the cause for the obvious expanded timeframes as mentioned above, two (2) applications/permits were pulled from each county for each month surveyed. Each application/permit that was chosen for review had a turnaround time of more than twelve (12) working days. A total of eighty (80) applications were examined in an attempt to find a pattern or a repetition of causes that may have lead to a delay in the permitting process. If a pattern can be established, DHEC can focus on the cause for the delay and take steps to change and/or modify the application process. The review of these applications revealed that almost seventy percent (70%) of the "sites" (site – the location the applicant applies for and the area or place DHEC must visit in order to determine the feasibility for the issuance of a permit)

required more than one trip to be made by DHEC personnel. In a best-case scenario, field personnel would only need to make one (1) site visit per application in order to issue a permit. The reason these particular sites required more than one visit was due to the following three (3) major factors:

- 1) site not properly flagged (no property irons located, no proposed house site located, no proposed well location, no proposed driveway location, etc.)
- 2) site must to be cleared in order for a proper evaluation to be performed (too much undergrowth on the property, trees must be removed, clearing by bulldozer required, etc.)
- 3) DHEC field personnel unable to locate site (directions to the site are unclear, official DHEC SITE CARD not posted near the road, etc.)

The other thirty percent (30%) of the applications revealed a wide range of reasons for a delay in the process. Examples are listed below:

- 1) applicant submitted wrong plat with the application
- 2) applicant decided to put a "hold" on the application (unable to obtain financing, etc.)
- 3) applicant flagged the wrong lot/parcel of land
- 4) excessive rainfall/extreme wetness (a proper evaluation cannot be performed during times of excessive rainfall, etc.)

- 5) applicant wanted to make a last minute change in the house or driveway location, number of bedrooms (the location of the dwelling or driveway, the number of bedrooms in the home, and various other items can dramatically affect what type of permit must be issued)

After examining the reasons for delays, it seems obvious that if improvements to the application and information process can be made, an improvement in the turnaround time could be accomplished.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Communication between the applicant and DHEC is one of the most important aspects relating to the proper instructions regarding the application process. It is incumbent upon DHEC to make certain the applicant understands exactly what is expected of him/her so that delays in the permitting process can be reduced. Therefore, a checklist similar to Attachment A (page 12) will be developed and given to the applicant when the permitting process is first enacted. This attachment will be included with the application packet each client receives. Even though each applicant is verbally informed of these requirements, the checklist will be a reminder of the site conditions that must be met before a proper evaluation can be performed. This will also reinforce the notion that if one or more of the items on the list has not been accomplished, a delay will most likely occur.

Also, during routine personnel meetings the idea of good communication between DHEC and the client will be reinforced to all personnel who deal directly with the public. Every effort must be made to ensure that each client completely understands what must be done in order to process the application in a timely manner.

Even though these modifications in the application process appear to be small, if properly implemented they could improve customer satisfaction by reducing the turnaround time for the issuance of a permit.

EVALUATION METHOD

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the additions/modifications made to the application process, regular inquiries into the application tracking system for the year 2000 will be made each month. Each county supervisor will be instructed to review the data on the first day of each month for the preceding month. Using the computer report generated by this inquiry, the data will be reviewed and sent to the District Director with comments attached explaining any noticeable trends in the turnaround time. In addition, five (5) applications can be pulled at random each month to determine the number of site visits required by DHEC personnel before a permit could be issued.

Also, a customer satisfaction random telephone survey will be conducted every eight (8) to ten (10) months in an attempt to find out if customers were thoroughly informed of all the requirements regarding the application/permitting process at the time the application was filled out.

Even though the overall data shows that the application/permitting process in the Wateree District is within DHEC standards, improvements like those outlined could certainly have a positive effect on the turnaround time and will ultimately impact customer satisfaction in a manner that all employees can be proud of.

TENTATIVE
ATTACHMENT A

The following is a checklist to remind you, the applicant, of all DHEC requirements concerning the site evaluation process. This will enable us to serve you faster and more efficiently.

_____ Place flags (provided by DHEC) at the following locations

1. each house corner
2. stub-out location
3. well location (if applicable)
4. driveway location

_____ Ensure that each flag is easily recognized. If the lot is overgrown, it must be cleared so that exact measurements and elevations can be taken.

_____ Ensure that each lot corner (iron) is staked and easily recognized. Field personnel must be able to discern exact property lines.

_____ Ensure the SITE CARD is posted in a conspicuous place near the front property line, easily visible from the road.

_____ Ensure that an accurate, legible plat or deed is attached to the completed application.

_____ Ensure that the "site plan" given to DHEC coincides with the flags and stakes on the lot. This sketch must show all proposed and existing structures, including wells on adjoining property, proposed pool, outbuilding(s), driveway, distances from house location to property lines (etc).

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE REQUESTS ARE NOT COMPLETED, A SIGNIFICANT DELAY IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS WILL RESULT!

If you have any questions concerning the evaluation process, please call the _____ County DHEC Environmental Health Office at (803) _____.