

Colorado Springs Fire Department Construction Services Status Report

April, 2014

In January 2005, at the direction of the City manager and with the authorization of City Council, the fire department's new construction plan review and inspections process was transferred to the Development Review Enterprise. The decision to move was made following research of alternative methods of providing improved levels of service.

The redesign of the division has two main areas of focus:

- Customer Service; Fire Plans Review staff are now physically closer to the Pikes Peak Regional Building Department; this streamlines the building permit process.
- Reinvention of city services; establish a work group with a self-sustaining funding mechanism independent of the city's general fund budget. A funding source tied directly to the work performed allows the adjustment of staff as needed to respond accordingly to the development and construction industries' demands for service levels.

The Construction Services Division demonstrates support of the Colorado Springs strategic plan by transforming the plan review and inspection system to be fiscally sustainable with limited resources while delivering consistent quality core services.

The Construction Services Division goals include:

- Increase public safety by applying comprehensive plan review partnered with a thorough inspection process.
- Provide adequate financial and operational support in order to ensure that these goals can be accomplished.
- Manage a fire plan review and inspection program that has a strong customer service orientation and ensures that applications are provided in a timely and consistent manner.

Initially, 8 fire department employees transferred to Construction Services, as work load demands increased, eventually staff reached a peak 4 Fire Protection Engineers, 4 Fire Inspectors and two support staff to maintain the new focus on plan review turn around times and timely inspection scheduling, this high mark was reached spring 2008.

Challenges to maintain the high level of customer service and remaining responsive to changes in the building environment come in many forms. Soon after the redesign of the division the construction industry struggled through lean times, the Construction Services responded by becoming leaner and the remaining staff shouldered new responsibilities and became more flexible. The staff levels were eventually reduced to three Fire Inspectors, one Fire Protection Engineer and one support staff. These levels helped the division maintain fiscally sustainability through the slowest year, 2011.

During this timeframe, and in efforts to support a fresh city direction, Construction Services added programs, two of which increased the workload of staff; The rapid response program, that streamlines

the review/inspection process for projects that will greatly improve the advancement of the city in general, and the Hillside Overlay home inspection program that requires review/inspections of homes built in the Colorado Springs interface areas.

The Construction Services Division also increased efforts of reaching out to neighboring fire districts that lack the ability to have full time plan review/inspection staff and provide these professional and billable services to projects located in areas formerly not considered, creating additional revenue streams.

Review of statistics concerning levels of activities through the last seven years has shown some encouraging results. Averaged statistics would show 2011 to be the least active year for the Construction Services Division with a total of 2987 plan review activities and 1784 year to date inspections; these were down from 3582 reviews and 3598 inspections shortly after the division was established at PPRBD.

The results from 2013 are positive and very comparable to the numbers recorded prior to the construction down turn. This division performed 3640 plan review activities and 3471 inspections during the year. The only possible negative effect with this increased activity is concern with maintaining the level of customer service that has brought this department success. Increased service requests from the building community must be met with increased productivity within this office. The recent lean years have given

rise to new ideas of maintaining service levels even at reduced staff numbers. Overtime reinspect for example, presently a contractor calls for an inspection and is scheduled usually the same week, however should this party fail the inspection, the reinspection, due to full calendars, will be placed back on the calendar behind the scheduled inspections, usually a week later, the only other option is to schedule an overtime reinspection and in March 2014 this accounted for 43 hours, more inspectors would help address this need. Another creative idea shifted some inspection functions to CSFD line personnel, this idea helped in the short term but must remain limited in scope. It is our opinion that to increase our value, or at minimum, maintain our level of service to the building community, we are forced to examine the attributes of increased staff levels.

The original proposal developed during the relocation process to PPRBD included adding two staff positions in 2015. These additions would help the division maintain service and sustainability while still applying efficiencies that the last few years have demonstrated.

