2020 Building Budget - Discussion Document

**The purpose of the Building Department is to ensure a safe built environment to protect the citizens and visitors of Alexandria and the surrounding code administration area.**

***Building Department Primary Functions (Mike and Lynn)***

* Consultation 25% of time 2 employees x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .25 = 1,000 hrs./yr.
* Plan Review 25% of time 2 employees x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .25 = 1,000 hrs./yr.
* Site Inspection 25% of time 2 employees x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .25 = 1,000 hrs./yr.
* Administrative Duties 5% of time 1 employee x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .10 = 200 hrs./yr.
* Public Nuisance 10% of time 2 employees x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .10 = 400 hrs./yr.
* Construction Stormwater 5% of time 1 employee x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .10 = 200 hrs./yr.
* Contractor Education 5% of time 2 employees x 2,000 hrs./yr. x .05 = 200 hrs./yr.

**100% 4,000 hrs./yr.**

**Other City Hall Staff Involved**

* Brenda 45% of time 2,000 hrs./yr. x .45 = 900 hrs./yr.
* Julie 20% of time 2,000 hrs./yr. x .20 = 400 hrs./yr.
* Mike Weber 20% of time 2,000 hrs./yr. x .20 = 400 hrs./yr.
* Amy 5% of time 2,000 hrs./yr. x .05 = 100 hrs./yr.

**1,800 hrs./yr.**

The Building Department is an extremely small department with a large, technically complex workload. When you consider the hours contributed to Building Department functions by other City Hall staff, it’s nearly that of another full time person. Additional staff will be needed if the City wishes to maintain the high level of service that Building Department staff currently provide. Enhanced technology is great and has added to convenience and efficiency, however the nature of construction and inspection still require people to be on the ground. From 1999 until Bruce Jaspersen’s retirement in 2012, the Building Department had three inspectors. Since 2012, the Building Department has been down one inspector. Construction remains strong.

The City was fortunate to receive a 2-year grant from the State, totaling $130,000, to hire a “building official trainee”. Only seven municipalities in the State were awarded this grant. The purpose of this program is to encourage, educate and mentor individuals interested in becoming code officials, as over 60% of current code officials will be retiring within the next 5-10 years. As is common in the trades, new people are not coming up through the ranks to replace those individuals leaving. This is a great opportunity for the City, and will definitely help with Department workload. It also gives us the ability to custom build a valuable employee for the future. We hope to get this person on board in early January.

COVID Update: The Building Department has continued to provide nearly the same high level of service as pre-COVID, throughout 2020. This has been a challenge, especially when one considers the near record level of construction activity occurring. Building Department staff have remained true to public service, being available at City Hall, as well in the field throughout the continuing pandemic; with all risks associated. Some new efficiencies have emerged, as a result of the challenges faced. With the exception of face coverings, Building Department staff have not required any expenditure of funds for additional equipment, gear, tools, etc. as a result of COVID. The Building Department remains committed to cost effective efficiency.

**Recommendations:**

*Specialty Mechanical/Plumbing Inspector:*

With the amount of industry we have in Alexandria, the mechanical installations we must inspect are very complex, often times beyond our expertise. It is for this reason that I recommend hiring a specialty mechanical/plumbing inspector in the near future. This individual needs to have several years of field experience in the installation and/or inspection of commercial/industrial HVAC. In talking with some colleagues, they felt that this type of position may be attractive to a late 40’s-mid-50’s contractor whose body is wearing out from years in the field. They also thought we may be able to attract an inspector from the metro area who is looking to work their last 10-years in Alexandria and retire up here. With the shortage of tradespeople, and the wages paid them due to that shortage, we will have to investigate what a reasonable salary range may be. One individual suggested $65,000 as a starting point. It would be nice to have this person in place within the next two (2) years. During our advertising process for the building official trainee position, an extremely qualified local individual expressed interest in working for the City in this type of position; possibly on a part time basis. It’s possible that now is the time to act on this opportunity to enhance our service to the public.

*Nuisance Complaints:*

The problem with the Building Department handling nuisance complaints is timing. Nuisance complaints are at their peak during peak construction season; spring/summer. It can be difficult to manage them both in a timely manner. A part time individual who would be comfortable and competent in dealing with these situations would be beneficial. Finding the right person for this position may be difficult, as it is can be confrontational and sometimes a bit unnerving. A part-time position was included in the 2020 budget, but not filled due to COVID-19. The position has been included in the 2021 budget.

**Other Expenses:**

Stormwater Inspection –

This is always an unknown as it is dependent upon how much construction we have, how long the project takes, how much rain we have and how many problems occur. Our past history shows that we can plan on approximately $1,500 per single-family residence and between $2,000 and $3,000 for commercial projects, with some exceptional situations running over $5,000. Although it is difficult to put a budget number to, the costs of this inspection work is covered by the cost of the building permit/plan review fees, which totaled over $504,000 last year.

LOGIS Permit and Inspection Management System –

LOGIS has a new Executive Director. This individual has made some changes to establish greater financial independence and sustainability for all applications. What this really means is that the price for our PIMS application has increased. For 2021 we are looking at a $5,108 increase. Although this is substantial, the efficiencies and conveniences associated with this program have been integral to the Building Department being able to maintain the high level of service that we have been able to provide, with the limited staff that we have. All cost increases are significant as we budget, however the cost of this program is covered by the revenue generated by the building permit/plan review fees, which totaled over $504,000 last year.

*On the Horizon……*

With most designers creating construction documents electronically, there is an increasing demand and efficiencies associated with electronic plan review. This is something we may want to consider moving to within the next five years. This may be an opportunity to store all of the plans submitted electronically and be readily available to City Hall staff, ALP and the Fire Department, and others.

*Just for Discussion…..*

At some point, the workload for shared staff (Brenda, Julie and Amy) may reach a level where additional administrative support staff becomes necessary. If and when this should occur, it might make sense to consider a full time permit technician for the Building Department.