



Columbus Consolidated Government

Georgia's First Consolidated Government

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Final Audit Report Inspections and Codes Department July 10, 2012

AUDIT AUTHORIZATION

Internal Audit has performed a transitional audit of the Inspections and Codes Department. City Council Resolution # 108-12 on April 24, 2012, authorized this audit. The fieldwork began on May 24, 2012 and concluded on June 29, 2012.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

A transitional audit is performed when a Department Head, Executive, or Elected Official leaves their position through retirement, resignation, termination or end of term. In March, 2012, long-time Department Director, William Duck retired. Subsequently, Assistant Director, Collis D. (Danny) Cargill also left the department. A transition audit is used to assess the state of the department in administrative and operational areas, providing recommendations for improvement, and accounting for all capital assets and personnel assigned to the department. The Inspections and Codes Department is responsible for issuing building permits consistent with zoning regulations, performing inspections at various stages of construction, issuing certifications of completion and occupancy and serving as a liaison the Board of Zoning Appeals. The inspections are performed to ensure that construction work is compliant with applicable jurisdictional, state and federal codes and laws.

A. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

COMPLAINTS/ ISSUES

The Inspections and Codes Department has a Policies and Procedures Manual that was developed several years ago and has periodically been updated, most recently in January 2012. Does the Policies and Procedures Manual provide adequate instruction and direction to its employees?

AUDIT PROCESS

A copy of the Policies and Procedures Manual was obtained and reviewed for completeness and currency.

FINDINGS

1. The Manual includes a City Vehicle policy, however, that policy does not require that daily vehicle inspection logs be completed.
2. The policy requiring refresher driver training does not mandate a time frame in which the courses should be performed.
3. The policy regarding 'moonlighting' does not outline acceptable second occupations or outline potential conflict that could arise if one became employed with a contractor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The policy governing City Vehicles needs to be amended to include the requirement for daily inspection of assigned city vehicles. The inspections are to be recorded on a monthly sheet and submitted for management approval and filing at month-end. While the monthly record includes the beginning vehicle mileage, the inclusion of other data such as ending mileage, gallons of fuel consumed, repair cost, etc. could be beneficial for monitoring the operational efficiency of the vehicle.
2. The policy governing Driver Education and license verification should be modified to state that refresher training is required annually. The Driver Training Coordinator at Public Services independently verifies the license at each refresher class.
3. The policy governing "moonlighting" should delineate acceptable occupations, and prohibit employees from working for developers and contractors for which they issue permits or conduct building inspections, which could be viewed as a conflict of interest.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

Recommendations 1 & 2 -The Department will comply fully with the City's Vehicle Fleet Safety Policy to include daily vehicle inspections, driver refresher training and drivers license checks.

Recommendation 3- The Department's policy on "moonlighting", which mirrors the City Work Rules, will be amended to more clearly outline acceptable second occupations for department personnel.

B. POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Does each position description provide a guideline for the responsibilities held and requirements necessary for the various positions within the department?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors obtained copies of the position descriptions for each position in the Department. Each employee was interviewed to determine the accuracy and currency of the position descriptions.

FINDINGS

Inspections and Codes Department position descriptions were evaluated to establish whether the positions duties have changed since the last time the job descriptions were updated. Most position descriptions were found to be accurate in the listing of responsibilities with the exception of the title "Permit Technician". Three employees are blanketed under one position title, which is broadly described with various responsibilities that are not interchangeable between the three employees. Two employees work the front desk, spending most of their day issuing permits and speaking face to face with customers while the other is separated from them answering phone calls, scheduling inspections, and organizing the inspectors daily workload.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the 'Permit Technician' position title be separated into two position titles with descriptions that better fit their day-to-day responsibilities. The new descriptions should then be evaluated for requirements and pay grade.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department will coordinate with the Human Resources Department on the 'Permit Technician' job description as written by the University of Georgia to determine if two separate positions are necessary based on the day-to-day responsibilities of personnel.

C. PERSONNEL FILES

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Personnel files are key to maintaining employee records for each person on staff at the Inspection and Codes Department. Are personnel files organized and do they contain adequate documentation of necessary materials?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors obtained the departmental personnel file of each employee and reviewed the contents to verify that each employee meets the requirement for their position and that their credentials were properly documented. Files were reviewed for consistency of format and completeness.

FINDINGS

All personnel files were reviewed for both Inspection and Codes Department and the Print Shop. Most files were found unorganized, which caused difficulty in finding documents within the file in a timely manner. The official file on each employee is retained in Human Resources, but a running file is maintained in each department. Print Shop employees' personnel files were not found in the Print Shop or with Inspections and Codes personnel files.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that a running copy of all personnel files should be maintained within the department, including the Print Shop employee files.

It is recommended that due to the nature of Inspections and Codes positions that the departmental personnel files contain the most complete and up to date information possible. All inspectors drive city vehicles and are required to maintain a valid Drivers License and complete Driver Safety Training. A copy of their Drivers License and Driver Training should remain in their file. Likewise, each inspector is required to hold inspection certifications, which should also be retained in each file. Personnel files should have a uniform appearance and order of contents to limit filing mistakes and holes in the information retained.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department employee records for certifications, training, and driver's license verification are maintained in separate files, which may make it difficult for outside personnel to find documents in a timely manner. The files will be consolidated and organized in a uniform manner. The employee's official personnel file will continue to be maintained in Human Resources.

D. MANAGEMENT CONTINUITY PLAN

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Is there a formal Management Continuity Plan for Inspections and Codes Department?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors interviewed DCM Arrington to determine whether or not a Management Continuity Plan exists for the department and determined one did not exist.

FINDINGS

Upon the retirement of Department Director William Duck and the departure of Assistant Director Collis D. Cargill, Plans Examiner Gregory Coates was named as Interim Assistant Director. In order to fill the Director position, a search was conducted to identify qualified candidates for the position. Mr. Coates has been nominated for the position but has not yet been confirmed by City Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that a Management Continuity Plan be developed for the department such that qualified candidates are available for immediate consideration when a management or coordinator position is vacated. Such a plan would enable consideration and advancement opportunities for internal candidates, while also considering qualified external candidates. The plan also can serve as a morale booster for existing employees who wish to advance in their field of work.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Inspections and Codes Department is a relatively small department with 30 employees. Management continuity has been maintained through the years with qualified field inspectors filling vacant Coordinator positions and Plan Review positions. The Department does have a career ladder in place to encourage and provide an incentive for department personnel to pursue additional certifications to prepare for advancement. The Department maintains a Director and Assistant Director's position to ensure continuity in upper level management. The departure of both management employees within two months was untimely but doesn't reflect a lack of planning for management continuity.

E. BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

COMPLAINT/ISSUE

Does a Business Continuity Plan exist for the Inspections and Codes Department in the event of a natural or man-made disaster that interrupts the operation of the department?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors interviewed Interim Assistant Director Gregory Coates to determine whether or not a Business Continuity Plan exists for the department and determined one did not exist.

FINDINGS

Approximately one year ago, a storm moved through the community that peeled back a section of the roof on the Administrative Annex Building resulting in water and other damage to the contents of the building and the disruption of the operation of several departments necessitating the relocation of some personnel. While prompt action salvaged much of the critical records and equipment, operations were disrupted and co-located for a period of time. We recognize that disasters will occur from time to time, however, it is desirable to have an alternative site plan and a storage vault to house critical records.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that a Business Continuity Plan be developed to include a secure record storage area and an alternative site plan.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges the need for a practical business continuity plan throughout the Government for critical services to the citizens. The Department will actively participate in the development of such a plan when initiated.

F. CONNECTIVITY

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Are any employees connected to any developers or contractors operating within the jurisdiction served by the Inspections and Codes Department?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors reviewed the personnel files of the employees and compared last names with those of area contractors. No obvious matches were found to exist. In the absence of a permanent Director it was difficult to discern whether any connections existed.

FINDINGS

Through interviews and research, no information or activity was found that would relate an employee with a contractor or developer. Also, no information was found that would monitor, disclose, or limit any such relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that it be required of all current and prospective employees having relationships with area contractors or developers be disclosed including the nature of the relationship. Management should periodically poll departmental employees as to whether any new relationships have come to exist.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges the need for a policy requiring employees to disclose personal and business relationships with individuals or businesses routinely conducting business with the Department. The Department will move forward with development and implementation of this policy.

G. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Is the Inspections and Codes Department meeting its stated goals and objectives?

AUDIT PROCESS

The Strategic Action Plan of Inspections and Codes Department was reviewed to determine whether or not strategic goals have been accomplished or changed.

FINDINGS

The Strategic Action Plan for 2007 and 2011 revision were reviewed and found to be fundamentally the same.

In 2007, the Impact for Citizens listed under Strategic Goal 'Provide Training/ Education to Maintain Professional Staff' was to maintain the Insurance Service Organization

Rating (ISO) for the Inspection and Codes Department. ISO was reviewed in 2010 and the department received a score higher than their previous review.

In 2007 and 2011, Strategic Goal titled 'Provide Quality Customer Service' was listed. Under that goal, Customer Service Training was listed as an Action Plan. A new employee receives customer service training during their orientation, but no such ongoing program exists on a departmental level as of June 2012. A plan for a Customer Satisfaction Survey was also included as a measure of success for the Strategic Goal. A Customer Satisfaction Survey was not found to exist at this time.

The department has received complaints in the past regarding the customer service of one or more of its employees for the use of inappropriate language and actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that due to the nature of business and involvement with customers at the Inspection and Codes Department that both a Customer Satisfaction Survey and an ongoing Customer Service Training Program be created and implemented.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department will implement a Customer Satisfaction Survey as a tool to enhance our customer's experience. The Department will work with Human Resources in developing an ongoing Customer Service Training program for department personnel.

H. VARIANCE APPROVAL

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Are variances ever granted for zoning or building codes?

AUDIT PROCESS

The auditors reviewed a sample of permits and related inspection files for each of the past three years to determine whether procedures were being followed and codes were being enforced. Additionally, inspector comments were reviewed to determine whether documentation existed for any code variances granted by management.

FINDINGS

Variance requests require an application and must be filed with all the applicable forms, by the 10th of each month to be placed on the agenda for the following month's Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting. The Board can approve or deny the request for appeal. If denied, the petitioner can appeal to the City Council, which can then deny or approve the variance. If then denied by City Council, the petitioner can litigate in Superior Court.

Occasionally, the Director receives a request from a builder to approve a variance to an existing section of a jurisdictional or state code. According to Management, the Director may approve minor code infractions that are not structural or life safety issues. In the case of a request for a structural code modification, such will only be approved with the consent of a licensed professional engineer or architect. Life safety code sections are not subject to variance approval.

A review of permit applications and related inspections for the past several years revealed that code variances were granted by the Director infrequently. Variances have occurred during each of the years reviewed and likely has occurred for many years past. Each Director has approved such variances. The files did not contain explicit written approvals for the code variances granted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that any code variances approved by management be documented in writing in the case file and communicated to the inspector responsible for the inspection.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges there are aspects of the regulations that require professional judgment or interpretation. This may include the approval of alternative means or methods in construction or the practical interpretation of regulations. The Department will pursue a mechanism to document when the Building Official or designee makes these determinations.

I. CAPITAL ASSETS

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Are all capital assets assigned to the Inspections and Codes Department accounted for and in service?

AUDIT PROCESS

The Capital Assets Listing for the Inspections and Codes Department was obtained from the City's Finance Department and individual items were located and inspected.

FINDINGS

All items included in the Capital Asset Listing were identified and found to be in active service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

Department concurs.

J. PAYROLL

COMPLAINTS/ISSUES

Are all employees being paid by the Inspections and Codes Department accounted for and currently working in the department?

AUDIT PROCESS

The payroll checks and remittance advices for all employees paid by the Inspections and Codes Department were obtained from the City's Finance Department, rostered and distributed to each employee upon presentation of a valid City Identification Badge.

FINDINGS

All employees were accounted for within the Inspections and Codes Department and were present for duty. No phantom employees were found to exist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

AUDITEE RESPONSE

Department concurs.

John D. Redmond

John D. Redmond, Internal Auditor & Compliance Officer

7/10/12

Date