

Minutes

Monday, April 13, 2009



Public Service Committee

4:14 p.m.
Carnegie Town Hall
235 West Tenth Street

Members Present: Kenny Anderson Jr., Vernon Brown, and Kermit Staggers

Members Absent: De Knudson

Staff Present: Assistant City Clerk Tamara Jorgensen

Guests: Council Members Greg Jamison, Bob Litz, and J. Pat Costello; Planning and Building Services Director Mike Cooper; Chief Building Official Ron Bell; Code Enforcement Officer Brad Hartmann; Public Health Director Judy Buseman (4:50 p.m.); Assistant Public Health Director Jill Franken; Argus Leader Reporter Jonathan Ellis; and citizen Mark Weber.

1. Call To Order

Committee Chair Anderson Jr. called the meeting to order at 4:14 p.m.

2. Review and approval of Minutes dated March 9, 2009

A motion was made by Brown and seconded by Staggers to approve said minutes. A voice vote was taken and all members present voted yes. **Motion Passed.**

3. Code Enforcement

Cooper distributed the following documents: Recap of Code Enforcement communication activities since the March Public Services Committee Meeting; Customer Services Standards for receiving a Code Enforcement complaint; A 'Who To Contact' Brochure – the updated version including the 367-8000 phone number; the Statistical Information for the Code Enforcement Reporting Standards (Existing Statistical Information and new reporting standards); Code Enforcement Website Revisions (Goal is to have an active website by May 7, 2009); Code Enforcement Teamsite; 2008 ComTRAK Statistics for Complaints; Senate Bill No. 99; Copies of Agendas for March and April for the Code Enforcement Coordination meetings.

Brown provided an update from the last Public Services Committee Meeting on Monday, March 9th which requested the following information from Directors Cooper and Buseman:

1. How can we redirect the 367-8000 number to a 311 number instead?
2. When can we implement the enhanced call handling done by the HELP!Line operators?
3. What ideas can be implemented to empower employees to improve the code enforcement process?
4. A request to keep the process 'customer focuses' – think of the end user, their experience, and how to make it easier for them.

Cooper introduced Jill Franken, Brad Hartmann and Ron Bell and then distributed documents from all of their areas. The documents were reviewed and discussed with the following main points being made:

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Recap of Code Enforcement communication activities since the March Public Services Committee Meeting:

- We believe our shared goal is to provide the highest level of customer service possible. We believe that high level is achieved by having citizens communicate directly with the department responsible for their question/complaint.
- We have recently updated our "Who to Call flier" and will be distributing it in water bills and in many locations throughout the city. This flier will connect callers with the correct department for a wide variety of common issues.
- In addition we are going to market our general information number, 367-8000, for people who want an easy number to remember or who don't know who to call about an issue.
- When someone calls 367-8000, the call goes to the 211 center. We have a contract with 211 for them to answer these calls. We receive about two dozen calls per day (and 2/3 of those are generally not city-related, but result in the operator sending the caller to the correct party)
- We are training the 211 staff to answer basic city questions and to enter basic complaints on our web form. In addition, they will be able to directly transfer callers to city departments, so the caller won't need to hang up and dial a separate number.
- We will also be standardizing how our city staff answers citizens' calls. If a citizen calls the wrong department, whoever took the call will first call the right department and make sure someone is available before transferring the citizen. If no one is available, whoever took the call will take the information and make sure it reaches the correct department. In addition, we will train our staff to make sure they know which departments handle which issues.
- We will also ask citizens if they would like a follow up call or email on their issue. We have found that most do not, but we want to offer this option.
- We will continue to work on updating the code enforcement website, where citizens can email complaints in to us.
- We will begin completing a common database to keep track of number of complaints logged, types of complaints and information regarding the type and timeliness of our follow up actions.
- We will look at making a standard form available (Police may have the template for this) so that city employees can easily report potential violations if they choose.
- We believe these changes are relatively easy to implement, affordable, and will result in better customer service.

Customer Service Standards for receiving a Code Enforcement Complaint

- The City of Sioux Falls believes strongly in the importance of excellent customer service. That is why we have decided to publish a set of standards that communicates to the general public what kind of treatment they should expect when making a code enforcement related complaint with City staff.
- Customer service is everyone's responsibility, not just those who staff the front desks of offices. Every time we interact with an individual, answer the telephone, send an e-mail, write a letter, or attend a meeting, we are making an impression on our customers – whether they are citizens, visitors, elected officials, people working in Sioux Falls, people working

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with our staff on a project, or even other City employees. These customer service standards were created for employees to follow to ensure that the quality of service to all of our customers meets or exceeds their expectations – specific to the City of Sioux Falls Code Enforcement program.

- All new employees will be introduced to these standards as part of their departmental orientation program, and the City will continue to provide customer service training opportunities for employees so that all staff understand the value of customer service as well as the importance of following the City's approved standards.
- While it is understandable that all departments currently track code enforcement complaints differently, it is anticipated that the standards identified below are uniform enough that all departments and particularly those responsible for answering the telephone can easily accommodate.
- Customers have a right to the following general expectations:
 - Courtesy, respect, honesty, and professionalism
 - That the staff person will listen to their request / question, ask for clarification if necessary, and provide complete, knowledgeable, accurate, precise information regarding their inquiry.
 - Telephones will be answered promptly whenever possible.
 - Calls will be answered in a courteous manner.
 - A person, not voicemail, will answer the main number(s) as identified on the "Who to Contact" brochure during business hours (8AM – 5PM). (Each department is responsible for making arrangements to ensure the telephone is answered during business hours).
- All Staff with identified numbers on the "Who to Contact" brochure will forward calls to a live number when they are unable to answer. The number to which calls are forwarded should be decided upon per each department.
- Staff will listen and understand the nature of requests / complaints (general training will be provided on the "Who to Contact" brochure and information needed when customers provide complaint information via the phone).
- As the first option, Staff will provide the caller with a "live" transfer. If a "live" transfer is not available, Staff will provide the caller with one of three options: go to voicemail, leave a message, or file a complaint. (It should be noted that each of these options requires the caller to leave a follow-up number for further communication by the appropriate department / inspector to which it is assigned.)
- If the caller wishes to file the complaint with the Staff person on the phone rather than being transferred to a voicemail, Staff will access the online report filing system, complete with as much information as possible from the caller and submit online.
- When transferring, Staff will inform caller of the telephone number, division, and name of the person to whom they are being transferred.
- Voicemail messages will give at least one optional telephone number to call.

Discussion was held regarding who receives the initial complaints, the process used to follow up on the complaints, whether or not a specific form is used to document and follow up on the call and who is responsible for inspections and citations. Citations are issued only if the complaint has not received compliance after a reasonable amount of time. The response timeline is dependent on the nature and level of severity of the complaint.

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The Public Health Department has their own citation officer because public health issues are unique and different.

A request was made to ask the City Attorney's office to send a representative to the next meeting to give an update on the citation procedure and collection process used after their office receives the updates from Hartmann. Senate Bill 99 is effective in July, 2009 and will allow the city attorney's office to send unpaid citations to small claims court vs. circuit court. This will result in a faster, more efficient way, of handling unpaid citations.

Discussion was held regarding who is responsible for paying the citations. The rental registry is used quite often to track the property owner vs. the tenant and is an important tool for code enforcement. Due to the large turnover in rental property, the registry is updated every three years.

Discussion was held regarding the number currently used for complaints: 367-8000. Cooper stated that the city has a one year contract with HELP!Line to answer calls and direct the caller to the correct department. The following points were made by members of the committee regarding this process:

- Other cities have successfully reverted to a '311' call number to direct non-emergency telephone calls from the '911' number. The Public Services Committee has been told that this type of process would cost \$250,000 to do here. The Committee would like additional information on why this process would cost this much. Chairperson Anderson Jr. would like to invite Mike Hall, Director of Central Services, to the next meeting to receive more information on this subject. Costello also wanted to know why this responsibility was being sent to an outside agency vs. being done by city employees.
- Cooper will advise the committee how much the city is paying HELP!line for providing this service.
- Brown cited an example where a citizen made multiple telephone calls to different departments and felt she was not going to get her concern resolved. She then called Council Members Staggers and Brown. The committee would like to ensure that there are streamlined procedures in place that will improve customer service functions so that citizen's requests or concerns are handled as soon as possible without additional efforts required by the citizen. The procedures should also incorporate a 'follow up' process to ensure that the complaint has been handled and that the citizen is assured of the results.
- Anderson Jr. asked if each department has their own standardized form for asking questions when a complaint is called in. He noted that it would be easy to produce an electronic menu form, provide a 'drop down' box for the employee to have immediate access to a standardized form for gathering the initial information from the caller. At the next Public Services Committee Meeting, Anderson Jr. would to see an example of the forms.

4. Open Discussion

No open discussion items.

5. Adjournment

A motion was made by Staggers and seconded by Brown to adjourn the meeting at 5:15 p.m. Brown called for a voice vote on the motion. All members present voted yes. **Motion Passed.**

Tamara Jorgensen, CMC
Assistant City Clerk