



JEFFERSON COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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SquareONE Resource Center | Building Permits & Inspections | Development Review | Long Range Planning

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DCD Announces SquareONE: A Resource Center to Inform and Assist the Public

Port Townsend, WA - The Jefferson County Department of Community Development (DCD) is pleased to announce a new name for their resource center that offers a collection of tools and services intended to help the public navigate through the often complex world of land use development and building construction. SquareONE is located in the DCD office at 621 Sheridan Street, Port Townsend in the Castle Hill QFC shopping mall.



SquareONE can be beneficial to anyone, including first time developers and professionals. The best time to begin taking advantage of a resource center is at the earliest stage possible of a project. “The idea behind SquareONE is that if people start here, they can get the information and assistance they need to have the most efficient and smooth permitting process possible, and also develop in a manner that can protect property values and enhance the environment”, says Carl Smith, DCD Director.

Grand Opening Celebration

As part of a grand opening series of events, DCD will host an open house to introduce these customer assistance resources to the public from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm on Friday, February 21 at SquareONE. A brief overview presentation with viewing of a promotional video and tour of the adjacent demonstration garden will be offered at 9:30 am and 10:30 am that morning.

Also scheduled for that week: Director Smith will present DCD’s Annual Report to the Board of County Commissioners at their regular meeting the morning of Tuesday, February 18 to highlight the many departmental improvements made last year and to introduce the new SquareONE concept; project partners Clallam County Conservation District and City of Sequim will offer a tour of the Sequim Low Impact Development Demonstration from 2:00 to 3:00 pm on February 20 at the Albert Haller Playfields next to Carrie Blake Park.

Response to Customer Experience

DCD’s efforts to provide these improvements are in response to customer concerns about the complexity of the land use permitting process and in fulfillment of a major grant from the federal EPA which has funded a number of activities over the past three years as part of the Watershed Stewardship Resource Center pilot

project. New brochures, handouts, slideshows, and guidance documents about shoreline, critical area and stormwater issues are products now available and nearing completion. The SquareONE approach is the result of a collaborative community process; DCD worked closely with stakeholder groups that included property owners, realtors, builders, other development professionals and County staff to understand needs and expectations and to develop customer assistance tools and services.

The complexity of land use permitting has increased over the course of many years, as local, state and federal agencies have adopted thousands of pages of rules, regulations, plans, programs and laws regarding land development and construction. These regulations collectively address both the public interest and private property interests.

Complete Permit Applications

Although these requirements are well intended, with a goal of guiding development in ways to maximize its benefits and minimize its impacts, they add up to make the permitting process a complex, sometimes frustrating and time consuming ordeal for many people. In fact, recent experience at DCD shows that only about 62% of all building permit applications are complete at initial submission. For land use applications (such as a lot line adjustment or subdivision) the rate of complete applications on first submittal is even lower, ranging from 27% to 50%, depending on the complexity of the application type. When applications are submitted incomplete, it means delays and extra time for applicants and County staff as well.

Although DCD must apply all relevant regulations, the department continually seeks ways to make the permitting process more efficient and improve the customer experience. Over the past several years, DCD has made significant strides in improving customer service and its permitting procedures for greater efficiency. DCD staff can help customers explore options and understand what requirements apply to a proposed project and provide guidance on completing their permit applications.

To further help people submit complete applications; a pre-intake phone consultation with the permit technician is scheduled. DCD has found this is highly useful in helping people to prepare complete applications. When a person is ready to submit their application, an appointment is also scheduled. These appointments provide better customer service by making the most efficient use of everyone's time.

Informational Resources

Additionally, DCD has also been developing new materials to inform the public on development topics, especially in the area of environmental stewardship. For instance, information materials are available on "low-impact development (LID), to help people manage stormwater runoff in a way that minimizes environmental impacts or even provides environmental benefits. One popular technique is the use of a rain garden, designed to mimic nature by the use of native plants and amended soils to infiltrate stormwater on a development site, rather than having it flow across streets or other properties where it may pick up pollutants that eventually drain into rivers, lakes and marine waters where pollutants can accumulate harming water quality, habitat, and wildlife. DCD has installed an actual LID demonstration garden near its offices so people can see its features, including rain gardens, native plant landscaping, and permeable pathways.

Other informational books, brochures and handouts cover topics such as tips on building construction, permitting and code requirements. DCD also offers two computers for public use where people can find information about their particular property such as maps, existing permit info and reports, as well as more general information regarding zoning, code requirements, and sensitive features like shorelines and critical areas.

Coaching Service

DCD staff are also available at scheduled times during the week for one-on-one coaching sessions called a customer assistance meeting or “CAM”. This process starts by filling out a brief CAM intake form available at the office or online. If a coach is available, assistance may be given on a first come, first served, walk-in basis. If not, then the applicant will be contacted by staff to set up a CAM appointment.

This coaching service was previously offered at no cost thanks to the EPA grant funds that paid for staff time. Now a CAM is free for the first 15 minutes; after which a minimum one hour fee is charged at DCD’s hourly rate; currently \$76. The fee charged includes the time needed for DCD staff to prepare information and to meet with the customer. Additional time past the one hour is billed at the hourly rate in 15 minute increments as needed. For this fee, the applicant will receive printed information and maps to help them complete their development application with greater accuracy and reduce the need to submit follow-up materials during the permit review process. Initial experience with providing CAMs shows that many people can get their questions answered within the 15 minute window of free assistance. Even if a fee is required for the time needed, this can save people significant time and expense in the long run.

To summarize: DCD’s SquareONE seeks to achieve the following goals and provide these benefits:

- The first stop when people start thinking about buying or developing land or building construction.
- A customer assistance portal into the world of development.
- Information on protecting and beautifying property while also protecting the environment, with low impact development stormwater techniques such as rain gardens, rain barrels, permeable pavement and more.
- Encourage use of low-impact development priorities: good site planning, retention of native vegetation and reduction of impervious surfaces, as appropriate.
- Adding value to your property and protecting your investment
- Promotes environmental consciousness and why’s it’s important
- Protects water quality by informing people how to prevent polluted runoff water from entering waterways
- Informs how individuals can make a difference in protecting the environment and watersheds
- Helps people understand and navigate the complexity of the permitting codes and processes
- It’s a resource center to learn about “good stewardship”
- Helps enhance the quality of life for everyone
- Helps anyone who wants to get their project done right, reduce permitting timeline, achieve more certainty, and maximize the environmental benefits.
- Helps anyone, including development professionals (realtors, designers, engineers, contractors), as well as do-it-yourselfers, and prospective buyers.

SquareONE helps deliver information, assistance and improved processes for anyone wanting to understand and proceed through the permitting process as efficiently as possible. As the new slogan says “Better Building Starts Here.”

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