Response to Questions on the FY 2019 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Herrity

Question: Please provide metrics on the improvement in the permitting process since the booster shot program was approved in 2014? How many positions have been added since approving this program and what have the results been to date?

Response:

With support from industry, the Booster Shot was approved on December 2, 2014 and raised development-related fees (exclusive of zoning fees) to provide additional resources to bring site and building plan review queues and timelines back in line with expectations. Prior to the Booster Shot, review timelines were increasing as the volume of permit applications outstripped the existing capacity to manage the workload in a timely manner. As part of the Booster Shot, 28/28.0 FTE positions were created in FY 2015. More specifically:

Agency	Positions/FTE
Land Development Services (LDS)	15/15.0
Fire and Rescue Department	5/5.0
Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)	3/3.0
Department of Transportation	2/2.0
Health Department	1/1.0
Stormwater Services	1/1.0
Office of Capital Facilities	1/1.0
TOTAL	**28/28.0**

It should be noted that review times are also affected by other factors, including the complexity and quality of applications submitted. Recent demand for infill and mixed use development has increased the complexity significantly. The customer service-oriented approach emphasized under Fairfax First has resulted in a higher level of collaboration with industry which has improved the quality of applications entering the review process, thereby having a positive impact on review times.

As shown in the following tables, despite significant increases in workload between FY 2012 and FY 2015, commercial building plan review and site plan submission review times improved. However, the increased work volume did result in over 29,000 "holdover" first inspections that could not be completed as requested. With the Booster Shot, review times have continued to improve and are now within the targeted timeframes. Additionally, increased review capacity has resulted in a significant reduction of 60 percent in holdover inspections despite the sustained trend of increased work volume.

LDS Work Volume

	Pre-Booster Shot			Post-Booster Shot	
	FY 2012	FY 2015	% Change	FY 2017	% Change from FY 2015
Infill Lot Grading Plans Submitted	704	950	35%	1,201	26%
Major Site Plan Reviews Completed	168	194	15%	200	3%
Total Building Permits (New)	1,123	1,270	13%	1,400	10%
Total Building Permits (Alteration)	12,639	13,764	9%	14,094	2%
Total Site/Building/Trade Inspections	185,753	204,115	10%	216,750	6%

Selected LDS Process Times & Metrics

	Pre-Booster Shot			Post Booster Shot		
	FY 2012	FY 2015	% Change	FY 2017	% Change from FY 2015	GOAL
Average # of Days for LDS Review of:						
1st New Commercial Building Plan	49	45	-8%	39	-13%	40
1st Site Plan	68	59	-13%	43	-27%	45
Holdover Building/Trade Inspections	NA	29,130	NA	11,766	-60%	1,000

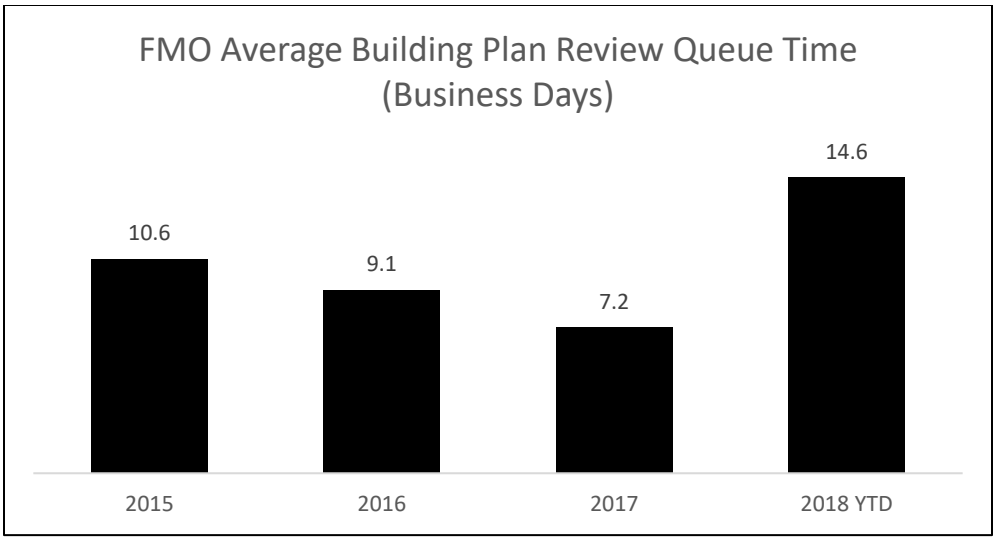
With Booster Shot resources, DPZ was able to dedicate support to facilitate the transition between the entitlement stages of the process to the site review stage. This additional capacity has helped to address zoning compliance, proffers and development conditions concerns and improve review and approval timelines. As a result, site plan-related proffer questions are now addressed concurrently with the site plan review to reduce and eliminate delays in site plan approval.

In the Fire Marshal's Office (FMO), the plan review workload increased 48 percent between FY 2009 and FY 2015 and continued to sustain this high work volume after the Booster Shot was implemented.

The FMO tracks queue times for several different plan types to measure of the office's ability to meet industry demand, including reviews of architectural plans for new construction which some of the positions created with the Booster Shot support. The goal queue time for the architectural plan reviews is less than 10 business days. The additional capacity created by the Booster Shot helped the FMO meet this goal in FY 2016 and FY 2017; however, growth in the demand for plan reviews has outstripped available capacity and, through March 2018, queue times have more than doubled to 14.6 business days and are now exceeding the less than 10 business day goal.

FMO Plan Review Workload

	Pre-Booster Shot				Post Booster Shot	
	FY 2009	FY 2012	FY 2015	% Change FY 2009 to FY 2015	FY 2018 (estimate)	% Change from FY 2015
Plans Reviewed	7,432	8,763	11,004	48%	11,700	6%



The Booster Shot also created additional Fire Inspector capacity to support additional witnessed testing of fire protection systems, with the goal of providing inspections in less than 5 business days. This measure was not tracked before the implementation of the Booster Shot, but anecdotally, wait times of more than 21 business days were occurring regularly. The FMO now tracks three types of inspections – hydrostatic testing of fire sprinkler systems, fire alarm inspections, and visual inspection of fire sprinkler systems – since the time required to complete each type of inspection is different. Beginning in 2018, these wait times are now being tracked and have been cut in half compared to the Pre-Booster Shot period.

Fire Inspection Wait Times

Time Period	Category	Wait Time (Days)
Pre-Booster Shot	Anecdotal Experiences	21+
Current Average Wait Times (January-March 2018)	Fire Alarm Inspection	11.6
	Hydrostatic Testing	11.1
	Visual Inspection	6.6

Overall, the Booster Shot funding and the associated staffing resulted in improved review times initially. However, increased volume and complexity is causing review times to edge up. It should be noted, though, that in addition to the Booster Shot, an extensive effort to improve the development review process is underway. Many changes have been implemented and others are under development which will contribute to improved review times and customer outcomes.