



Department of Community Development

Josh D. Peters, AICP, Director

Phil Cecere, Building Official / Fire Marshal

Greg Ballard, Development Code Administrator

Chelsea Pronovost, Administrative Services Manager

May 20, 2024

Board of County Commissioners Meeting

Subject: **Permit Process**

DCD - What we do

▶ Permit Center

- ▶ customer assistance, application intake, addressing

▶ Land Use

- ▶ Comprehensive Plan (Policies), Development Code (Regulations), Development Review (Subdivisions, Permits)

▶ Building

- ▶ plan review, inspections, floodplain administration

▶ Code Compliance

- ▶ for (potential) land use and building code complaints

▶ Office of the Fire Marshal

- ▶ burn regulation, fire life-safety inspections, road naming (E911)

Recent history

- ▶ **Pandemic** - office closure, record permit numbers
- ▶ **Oct 2021** - start of 1-year development **moratorium**
- ▶ **Oct 2022** - Site Development Review (**SDR**) & Legal Lot of Record (**LLOR**) program
 - ▶ pent-up demand results in > 100 SDR applications in first week
 - ▶ implementation challenges following intensive legislative process
- ▶ **Dec 2022** - new Enterprise Permitting & Licensing (EPL) “**EnerGov**” software
- ▶ **Late 2022 & first half of 2023** - ***staff exodus = 13***
 - ▶ those who left: some veteran, some at 6 mos.
 - ▶ *no (internal) administrative support for over 6 mos.*
- ▶ **Jun 2023** - **new management team**, org structure
- ▶ **Jan 2024** - essentially a **new team**: **9** staff of 21.4 total with **< 7 months** at dept
 - ▶ 5 staff just passed through 6-mo. probationary period
 - ▶ No one has left since last summer
- ▶ **Mar 2024** - **new building codes** take effect after 240-day delay
 - ▶ DCD issues press release re: permit surge, with 6-month estimate for permit review

Concerns expressed

- ▶ Permit review
 - ▶ Timelines too long; need to track better; limited information available online
- ▶ SDRs & LLOR program
 - ▶ Program not working
 - ▶ Up-front review (then and now)
- ▶ Customer assistance
 - ▶ Bring back (self-scheduling for) CAMs
- ▶ Lobby hours for walk-in service
- ▶ Staff work flexibility - alternate & hybrid schedules
- ▶ Annual staff training - impact on inspection schedule
- ▶ On-call consultant services
 - ▶ Land use applications
 - ▶ Building permit plan review and inspections

Building code cycle

- ▶ State Building Code Council
- ▶ Timelines
 - ▶ Initial schedule - Jul 1, 2023 then 120-day delay to Oct 29, 2023
 - ▶ Modified schedule to second 120-day delay to Mar 15, 2024
- ▶ Permit surge
 - ▶ **49** Residential building permits submitted between Mar 1 and Mar 14 deadline
 - ▶ Prior 2 months combined DCD received **36** RBLDs
 - ▶ Plus **> 70** including applications for SDRs & other permit types
- ▶ Why 6-month estimate in press release?
 - ▶ Unprecedented surge
 - ▶ Staff on family leave
 - ▶ Limited Plans Examiner capacity
 - ▶ Consultants also backlogged

SDR-LLOR backlog

- ▶ Initial situation (surge Oct 2022)
 - ▶ 178 SDR applications Oct-Dec 2022
 - ▶ 647 total SDR applications Oct 2022-May 16, 2024
- ▶ Consultant review - Atwell, LLC
 - ▶ 266 SDRs reviewed Sep 2023-Mar 2024
 - ▶ Investment concluded; SDRs now back to in-house
- ▶ Implementation policy; simplification of process; resolution of (some) challenging cases
- ▶ Current status
 - ▶ 53 SDRs completed by DCD Apr 1-May 20, 2024
 - ▶ Included finalizing Atwell SDRs (e.g., confirming mapped critical areas); average processing time = 23.8 weeks
 - ▶ DCD in-house review (started & finished) = 11.3 weeks (EPL data)
 - ▶ Today's queue = 64 SDRs waiting and currently in review
 - ▶ Includes 18 going through a more complicated pathway to LLOR
 - ▶ Includes 9 waiting on the completion of review from Environmental Public Health

SDRs & up-front review

- ▶ Why SDRs first?
 - ▶ Land use review (including critical areas) before land-disturbing activity, home design
- ▶ Types of SDRs - *different situations*
 - ▶ Lawfully platted after August 11, 1969 (or not)
 - ▶ Existing development or vacant land
 - ▶ “Limited” - e.g., garage on developed property (or addition when septic capacity available)
 - ▶ With EPH review of minimum land area requirements - e.g., < 2 acres
 - ▶ Critical areas special reports needed (or not) - e.g., wetland delineation
- ▶ Timelines depend on complexity
 - ▶ Short (2 weeks or so) for limited; otherwise depends on complexity and queue
 - ▶ LLOR complications - e.g., Residential Development Exception process (Type II)
- ▶ Building permit review following SDR
 - ▶ Consistency review with findings & conditions of SDR
 - ▶ Reduced typical list of findings & conditions on building permits from ~20 to ~5
 - ▶ Stormwater management specifics for proposed construction
 - ▶ *Requirements simplified since last year for typical rural residential development*
 - ▶ Increased typical number of building permits reviewed by Planning per week from around 2 to around 10 since June 2023

Building permit queue

- ▶ Status after the “rush hour”
 - ▶ To accommodate applicants wanting to vest by applying (just) before Mar 14 deadline, DCD allowed submission of applications outside of standard intake appointment
 - ▶ *Result:* applications incomplete and/or with “significant deficiencies” (consultant quote)
- ▶ Review process
 - ▶ 3rd-party review - **18** permits currently sent out
 - ▶ In-house plan reviews - **17** in queue
 - ▶ Current status of all RBLDs, CBLDs, BWOPs (built without permits) in review - **105** in queue
 - ▶ Includes EPH reviews (water, septic = ~86)) & DCD consistency review (post-SDR)
- ▶ Addressing queue
 - ▶ **211** plan reviews done since Jan 1
 - ▶ **131** plan reviews done *since Mar 1* (kudos to the Building Official & team!)
- ▶ Plan moving forward
 - ▶ Current staff member returns from leave, gets certified as Plans Examiner
 - ▶ Select 3rd-party review for RBLDs (in addition to CBLDs)
 - ▶ Compliance with **Senate Bill 5290** re: permit review timelines, etc.

Average permit review timelines

- ▶ DCD permit review timelines for permits issued since **Apr 1, 2024**
 - ▶ Accounting for anomalies (e.g., resubmission, additional info request), average time = **16 weeks**
 - ▶ Data from EPL reports - RBLDs, CBLDs, BWOPs
- ▶ Neighboring counties
 - ▶ Clallam - **26** weeks
 - ▶ Kitsap - **282 residential permits** pending with no timeline given
 - ▶ Mason - **12-14 weeks** - with crew of 4 plans examiners
- ▶ Consultants also backed up
 - ▶ Strain from jurisdictions that have on-call contracts, yet haven't requested work until surge from this code cycle
 - ▶ Added staff (incl. plans examiners) for surge capacity expected to last through summer
 - ▶ Zenovic & Associates (PA) *out 6-8 weeks* on engineering
 - ▶ Also say inferior quality of applications submitted to beat building code deadline

Permit trends

YEAR OVER YEAR PERMIT REPORT (RBLDS, CBLDS, BWOPS)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	mid-May
Permits Applications	274	287	347	360	312	261	117	
Permits Issued	271	269	273	314	315	194	103	

Highlights of this report:

Demonstrates challenges in 2023 (staff turnover, SDR backlog, EPL issues, etc.)

So far in 2024, DCD has issued 103 permits through 5/14

In 2023, DCD had issued 62 permits from January to May

At this rate, the projection is that the 2024 total would be around 273 (i.e., "normal")

- Note: pandemic years had record highs for permit applications

Senate Bill 5290

- ▶ Concerns permit review timelines
- ▶ Contains local gov't timeline commitments for different types of permits
 - ▶ Potential for partial refund of fees if timelines aren't met
- ▶ 3rd-party review encouraged when needed
- ▶ Potential for grant funds
 - ▶ Including full permit system digitization
- ▶ Permit tracking system
 - ▶ [Focus needed here](#) (Permit Center Coordinator mission)
- ▶ *We will also:* Identify development code provisions that could be amended
 - ▶ Regulatory Reform (Board Resolution)
 - ▶ *Continue to* simplify, streamline, tailor to Jefferson County needs

Office hours

- ▶ History on Fridays at DCD
 - ▶ Office was first closed on Fridays to accommodate a 32-hour work week due to budget constraints during the **Great Recession**
 - ▶ Friday closures continued after the 40-hour work week was reinstated to allow staff to catch up on work
 - ▶ Issue: volume of work within small government generally always outweighs staff capacity, budget
- ▶ *What happens on Fridays?* Staff uses that time to:
 - ▶ Issue permits with limited interruption (i.e., walks-ins)
 - ▶ Return phone calls & reply to email
 - ▶ Greater potential for in-depth explanations, focused attention than when lobby is open
 - ▶ Complete required yearly training
 - ▶ For some: use flex time from extra hours for night meetings, etc., during week
- ▶ **Finding:** We could improve messaging around Fridays
 - ▶ Lobby closed to walk-in service, but staff available on phone or by appointment

Work schedules

- ▶ **Staff schedule flexibility helps employees *and* organization**
 - ▶ Hybrid schedules between in-office and remote
 - ▶ *DCD currently has 1 fully-remote staff member and 2 staff members working hybrid (with consistency)*
 - ▶ *Those working from home are able to communicate with other staff and customers via phone, email, or virtual meeting tools, and have full access to software and digital files*
 - ▶ *Hybrid option increases productivity as people are able to complete work at home when they would otherwise have to take PTO; allows DCD to continue to serve community without interruption*
 - ▶ Alternate Schedules: ***enables hiring and retention of high-quality employees***
 - ▶ E.g., part-time, 4-10's
 - ▶ Flex out hours to avoid accruing overtime
 - ▶ At times, front staff work over their allotted hours, serving customers or facilitating Planning Commission meetings
 - ▶ This time is best flexed out when lobby not open to public so front area not left short-staffed
 - ▶ **Work-life balance** - within a "Permit Center" agency that is customer-focused

Occupational burnout

- ▶ *Occupational Burnout: The science behind stress in the workplace*
 - ▶ training last week for city & county staff facilitated by Janelle Tarasewicz, M.A., Aperture EQ
- ▶ Gallup poll showing 28% of U.S. employees *very often* or *always* feel burned out at work
- ▶ Chronic stress is linked to a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and physical consequences, and can lead to workers missing work and developing health issues
- ▶ The International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) included “burnout” in its 11th revision (2019) as an occupational syndrome
 - ▶ “Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”
- ▶ Ultimately, burnout results when the balance of deadlines, demands, **working hours**, and other stressors outstrips rewards, recognition, and relaxation
- ▶ Susan D. Moffatt-Bruce, MD, PhD, MBA
 - ▶ “Burnout occurs when an individual experiences too much stress for a prolonged period. The employee is left feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. Not only that, **they are less productive at work, show reduced concern for others, and are more likely to miss work.**”
- ▶ Manage organizational pressure by **implementing written policies and procedures to identify and minimize stress-related burnout** and assure legal compliance with those efforts

Mental health & the workplace

- ▶ May is **Mental Health Awareness Month** - Board Resolution
- ▶ Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Supervisor Newsletter for May
 - ▶ Issue focus: “Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace”
 - ▶ *Work plays a significant role in workers’ mental health. The impact is so substantial that managers impacts workers’ mental health more than doctors do, according to the Workforce Institute’s Mental Health at Work study.*
- ▶ Among strategies to support workers offered by **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health** (NIOSH):
 - ▶ Promote a safe and healthy workplace culture
 - ▶ *Implement organizational and management policies that eliminate root causes of stress and provide workers with increased flexibility and control over their work and schedules.*
- ▶ *Alternate & flexible schedules* - within reason considering lobby hours - is part of DCD’s set of measures to promote work-life balance and manage stress

Customer assistance

Community Development

Welcome!

Jefferson County's Department of Community Development (DCD) is your "one-stop shop" for all [building permits](#), [code enforcement](#), [land use](#) (development review), and [long-range planning](#).

DCD is here to assist you with questions you may have about land use policies, development regulations, and the permit process.

If you have a land use question, please describe the information you seek in an email message to planning@co.jefferson.wa.us or call us at 360-379-4465. The DCD planning team will respond by email or phone as quickly as possible. Should a more involved discussion be warranted, staff will contact you to schedule a customer assistance meeting (CAM).

For walk-in customers: If our Planning Technician is available during lobby hours, they will be happy to answer simple land use questions. For more complex discussions, they can help to direct you to a planner with expertise related to your question or schedule a CAM for you, as needed.

If you have general questions or an inquiry about building permits, email us at: dcd@co.jefferson.wa.us

Customer assistance

- ▶ Overall approach
 - ▶ **Balance** between hands-on, non-permit assistance v. dedicated permit review for applicants
 - ▶ *Budget*: permit revenue enterprise fund v. general fund transfers
- ▶ Self-service tools
 - ▶ *Website, guidance, tools*: IRBC, IBC, Jefferson County Code (JCC), GIS, **CSS Portal coming Jul 1**
- ▶ **Answering questions**
 - ▶ Email (dcd@ or planning@), phone, drop-ins (**new Permit Tech has learned quickly!**)
 - ▶ Answer questions right away (or as soon as there is time) - *may involve planner with specialization*
 - ▶ If more complicated and/or with multiple departments, schedule a meeting (including on a Friday, as needed)
 - ▶ Customers scheduling 'free' CAMs wasn't working (repeats, no-shows, 5-min questions, wrong staff)
- ▶ How 'formal' CAMs, SDRs, and Pre-Application Conferences fit into picture - *new paradigm*
- ▶ Customer contact data from **Jan 1-May 8, 2024**
 - ▶ Front office staff made and received **4,248** calls totaling **16,440** minutes, averaging out to **47.2** calls per day
 - ▶ "dcd@" front staff emails totaled **4,045**; "planning@" emails totaled **1,354**
 - ▶ Note: data does *not* include phone calls made to/from specific staff phones
or emails sent to/from individual staff accounts

Enterprise Permitting & Licensing (EPL) permit system software (a.k.a., EnerGov)

- ▶ Multiyear project
 - ▶ Tidemark turned off Oct 2022
 - ▶ EPL turned on Dec 2022
- ▶ Customer Self-Service (CSS) portal
 - ▶ Phase 1 scheduled for deployment Jul 1, 2024
 - ▶ Meanwhile, DCD created a Permit Tracker, updated weekly, as an interim measure
 - ▶ Working with 'Early Adopters' test group of customers
- ▶ All the bells & whistles...
 - ▶ Seamless integration with data storage system (currently Laserfiche)
 - ▶ Notifications & permit templates for land use cases
 - ▶ Fully functioning case tracking & data reporting system
- ▶ County project - IT, consultants, Public Health, DCD
 - ▶ DCD is an internal end user
 - ▶ Limited software programming / database management expertise within DCD
 - ▶ ...and mostly new staff

Other things happening at DCD...

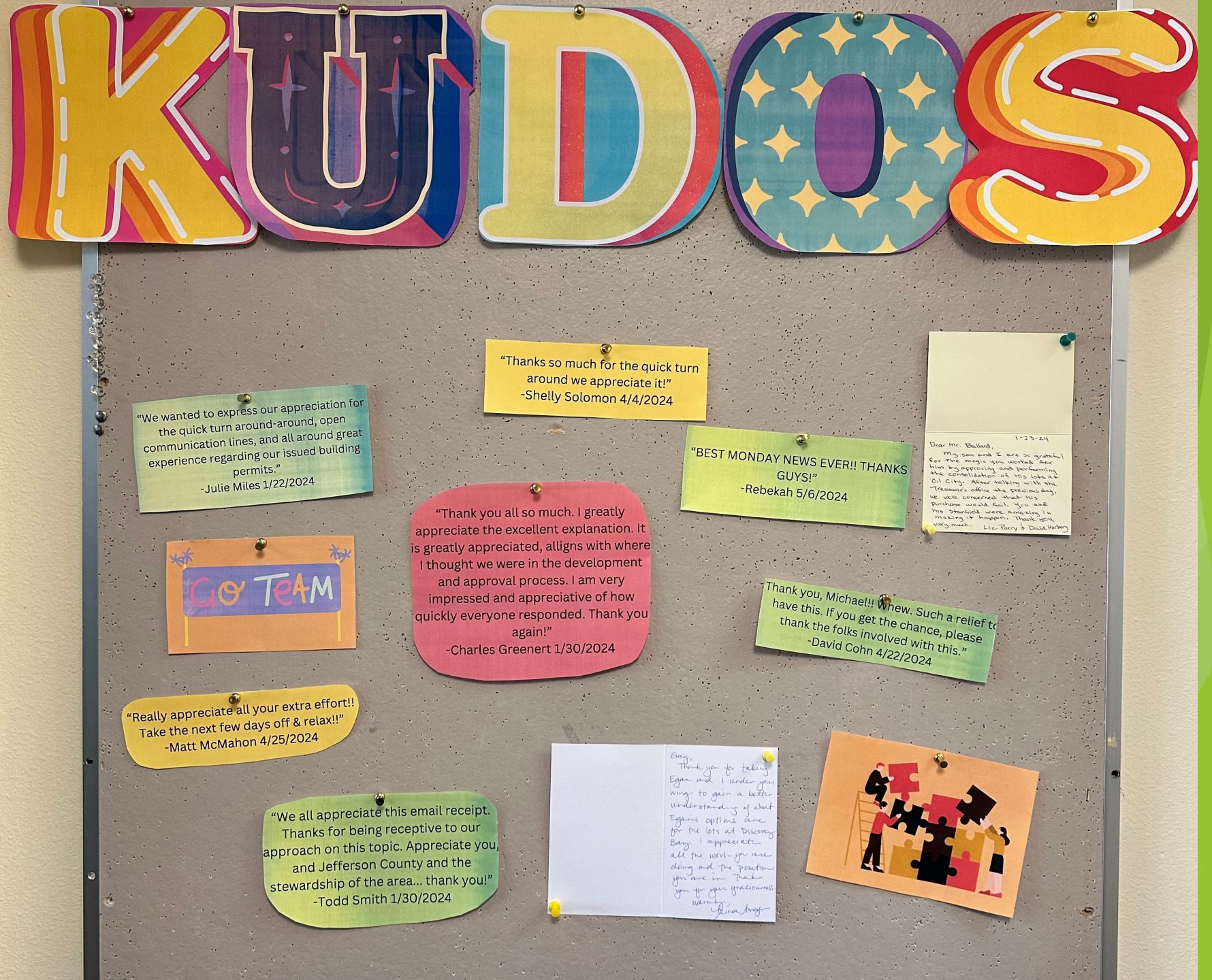
- ▶ Annual work program with over **20** projects
 - ▶ Long-Range Planning, Growth Management Act implementation & compliance, etc.
 - ▶ Short-Term Rentals, 2024 Comp Plan Amendment Cycle, **2025 Periodic Update**
 - ▶ Stock Plans, C-PACER
 - ▶ Floodplain damage prevention ordinance, Shoreline Master Program
 - ▶ Coordinated Water System Plan (CWSP)
 - ▶ Office of the Fire Marshal, annual burn restriction season
- ▶ Master Planned Resorts (MPRs)
 - ▶ Port Ludlow and Pleasant Harbor
- ▶ Controversial cases (examples, in addition to MPRs)
 - ▶ Temporary concrete batch plant
 - ▶ Radio tower
 - ▶ Retreat center
 - ▶ Treatment center
 - ▶ Master planned resort
 - ▶ Geoduck aquaculture

Recap

- ▶ Transition at DCD
 - ▶ New management
 - ▶ New staff
 - ▶ New stuff
- ▶ Permit review timelines
 - ▶ Numbers (and other perspectives) indicate a different situation than portrayal
 - ▶ Our permit review timelines are faster than or similar to neighboring counties
 - ▶ Considering circumstances, the backlog and near-term timelines could be (a lot) worse
 - ▶ We're always looking (and expecting) to improve
- ▶ DCD has a *full platter* of projects and programs
- ▶ Staff morale (is critically important and) has been high
 - ▶ Substantial changes not warranted and come with unpredictable consequences
- ▶ Decision upon reflection: Stay the course.

“Just trying
to keep my
customers
satisfied...”

- Simon & Garfunkel



Questions?