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Plan Review Overhaul Shows Early Progress with Faster Scheduling, Decisions

MADISON, Wis. – Just a month into Secretary-designee Dawn Crim’s comprehensive overhaul of the agency’s longstanding plan review process, the Department of Safety and Professional Services is making progress and is shortening wait times for customers. For example, customers with complete plumbing plans can expect decisions within four to five weeks from the time of initial contact. This is a marked improvement from last year, when some customers were waiting months rather than weeks for plans to be scheduled and then reviewed.

“We expected improvement once we implemented our plan, and I am pleased to see such significant gains in such a short amount of time,” Secretary-designee Crim says. “We worked closely with our staff and industry partners to identify the biggest barriers to faster plan review, and we were deliberate about the changes we implemented. Clearly, they are working.”

Initial process changes included removing projects from the schedule if they were not ready for review. When plan scheduling staff members thoroughly evaluated the projects already in the calendar, they were able to identify and remove cancelled projects, duplicate bookings, and slots held without complete plans. In plumbing plan review alone, the team cleared more than 1,000 hours from the schedule. This enabled staff to move up the review for projects with complete plans on file.

The process changes also involved shifting the readiness evaluation from the plan reviewers themselves to plan schedulers, who work closely with customers to identify and procure required information and materials. This move enabled plan reviewers to spend more of their time on plan review itself instead of related administrative tasks, and it enables schedulers to better identify project readiness prior to scheduling. It also keeps incomplete projects off the schedule altogether. Secretary-designee Crim says this is a better use of resources and fosters a more collaborative approach to the work.

“Every person on the team contributes, and together we are giving our customers what they want—which is getting plans that are ready to be reviewed on the schedule sooner,” Secretary-designee Crim says. “These are the kinds of improvements that enhance customer service and efficiency without compromising safety, which is critical given our responsibility to our customers and the public.”

Secretary-designee also recently called on the Commercial Building Code Council and the Plumbing Code Advisory Committee to evaluate plan-review thresholds using a risk-based approach to determine which projects must be submitted to the agency for review and approval. Current Commercial Building Code thresholds are based primarily on size and plumbing code thresholds are based primarily on fixture number. New risk-based guidelines could vary depending on building type, use, occupancy and the project’s eventual public risk exposure.

Now into her second year of leadership, Secretary-designee Crim is implementing process improvements across the wide-ranging agency services and programs. The Department of Safety and Professional Services issues more than 240 unique licenses, administers more than 100 boards and councils that regulate professions, enforces state building codes, and maintains the Wisconsin Enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, which is a key tool in the multi-faceted public health campaign to stem excessive opioid prescribing. A fee-based agency, the Department of Safety and Professional Services is self-sustaining and receives no general fund tax dollars for

its day-to-day operations. With five offices and 250 employees throughout Wisconsin, DSPS collaborates with constituents and stakeholders across a wide range of industries to promote individual and state economic prosperity.

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