



BELLA VISTA
A place to call home

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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DATE: JANUARY 13, 2016
TO: MAYOR, CLERK, AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: CHRISTOPHER SUNESON, PLA, DIRECTOR

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

The Community Development Services Department manages the City’s planning, building safety, code enforcement, and engineering functions. Planning reviews development applications for conformance with adopted Municipal Code regulations for zoning, subdivision, and flood damage prevention and manages the City’s Storm Water Management Plan. Building safety issues permits and performs building plans review and inspections for conformance with various technical codes. Code enforcement interacts with the public to log complaints and investigate nuisance and parking ordinance violations. Engineering secures professional services agreements, monitors construction of special projects, and obtains grant funding to offset capital improvements expenses.

DEPARTMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

In 2015, the Department operated on a budget of approximately \$975,000 with an average staff of eight. The two largest contributors to budgeted expenses were payroll and benefits for employees followed by professional services contract fees. The Department finished the year well under budget returning approximately \$70,000 to the general fund.

The Department generated continued revenue growth in 2015, finishing year 24.29% ahead of budgeted revenue projections with a \$26,000 positive variance. The Department manages two stream of income from permit issuance including building inspection fees and planning fees. Building permit fees are by far the largest contributor to revenue.

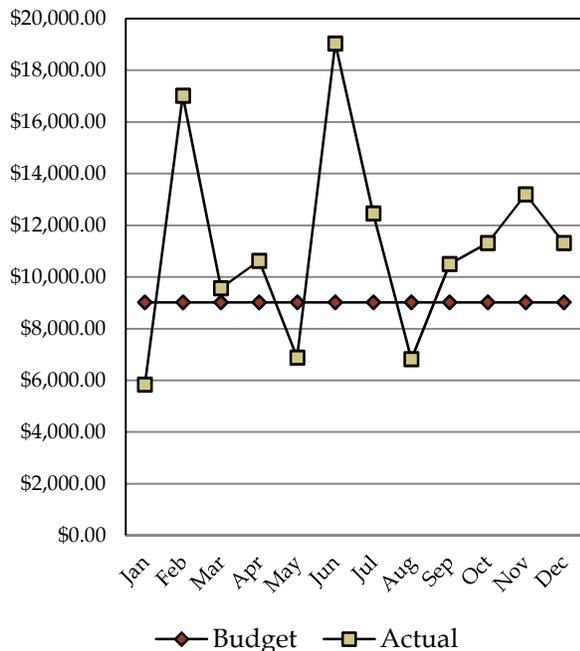


FIGURE 1: MONTH TO MONTH DEPARTMENT INCOME

The Department generated \$134,541 in permit fees from all sources in 2015, well ahead of budget revenue of \$108,250. In 2014, the Department generated \$121,357 in revenue, representing a 10.86% year over year growth.

BUILDING SAFETY

The Department issued 1,395 building and planning permits, representing a 21.14% increase in permit volume over 2014 and continuing upward trend for the last five years.

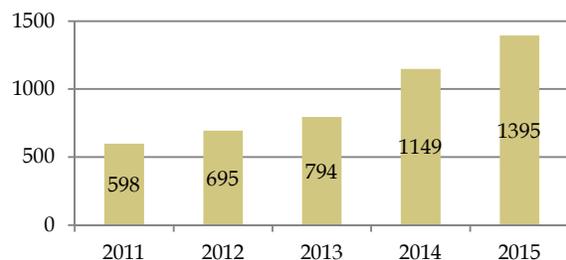


FIGURE 2: YEARLY PERMITS VOLUME GROWTH

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Construction activity in the City continued at a brisk pace in 2015 with the largest contributor to Departmental managed income being new residential housing permits. The Department issued 68 new home permits with a permit valuation of \$18,654,000. This represents a 33.33% increase for new housing starts over 2014, and continues a 4 year growth trend in new residential housing permits.

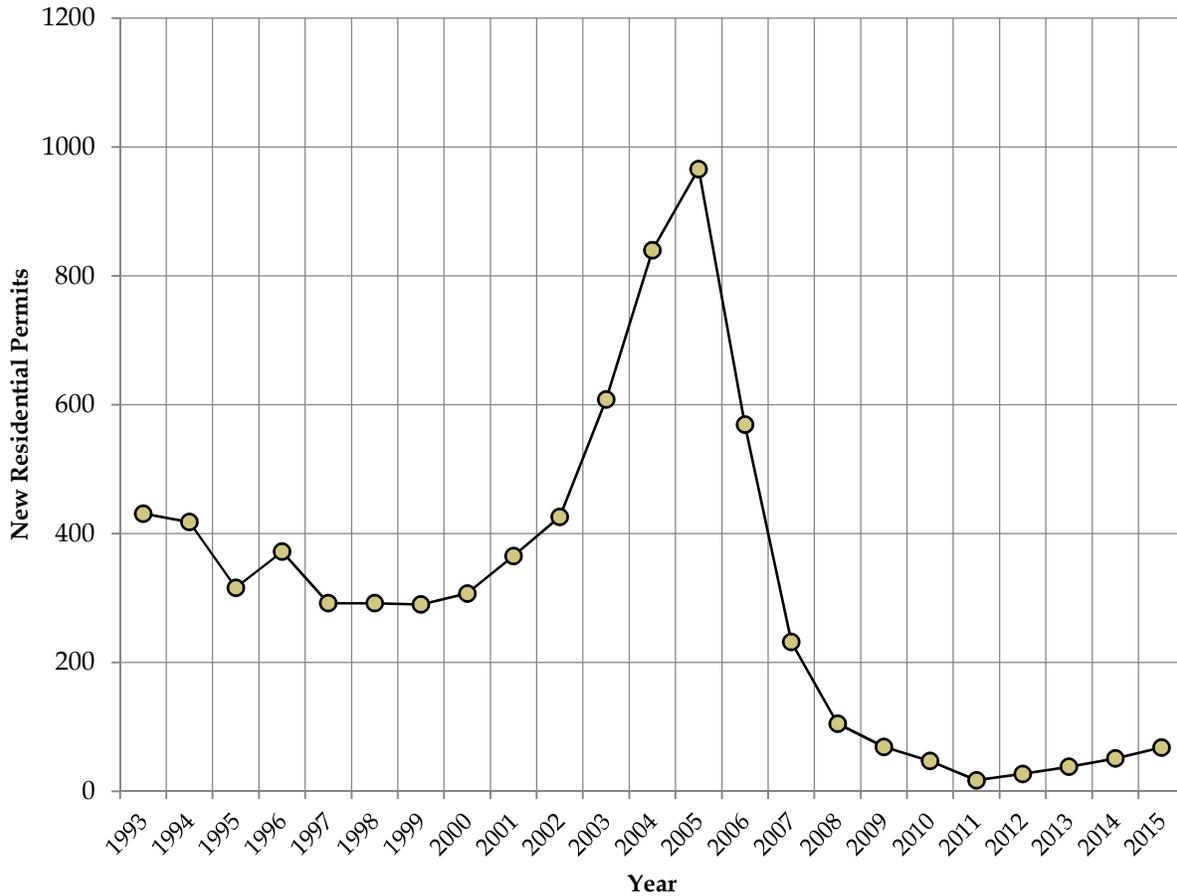


FIGURE 3: LONG TERM RESIDENTIAL HOUSING PERMITS ISSUED

The Department decreased average permit review time for residential housing permits from an average of 6 days in 2014 to an average of 2 days in 2015.

Commercial development in the City outpaced the previous year. The Department issued four new commercial permits in 2015 compared to two in 2014. The projects requiring permits included the TH Rogers hardware store, the Village Bible Church, the City Streets Department building, and Fire Station #4.

The Department decreased building permit review time for commercial development from an average of 20 days in 2014 to an average of 18 days in 2015.

Building inspection activity for the Department increased year over year. In 2015, the Department performed 1,886 inspections compared to 1,550 inspections in 2014, representing a 21.67% increase.

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PLANNING

The Department facilitated the adoption of two key, long-term policy documents in 2015. The Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and Bella Vista's particular individual community action plan were adopted by the City Council in January. This document laid the ground work for regional catalyst projects, including the northward expansion of the Razorback Regional Greenway through Bella Vista. In May of last year, a parallel effort for trails planning was adopted by the City Council – the Bella Vista Trails and Greenway Master Plan. This ambitious policy document lays out 155 miles of trails throughout the community with a twenty year time horizon.

The Department prepared an amendment to the Master Street Plan to reclassify portions of McNeely Road (Benton County 40) that was adopted by the City Council in February.

The Department prepared a zoning amendment that was adopted in April that revamped variance review criteria, expanded building height limitations, provided for a planned zoning district, and added cash or letters of credits to acceptable means of posting financial guarantees for required landscape improvements.

The Department assisted with two annexations to the City in 2015. The first was an island annexation along Chelsea Road for property containing “Hole in the Wall” cave. This territory was completely surrounded by both Bella Vista and Gravette, and was annexed into Bella Vista since there was a more perimeter along Bella Vista's municipal boundary. The second annexation was a voluntary annexation by Wonderland Caves, LLC along Dartmoor Road, east of Cooper Elementary. The two annexations represent approximately 50 additional acres that were added to the City.

The Department completed three rezoning applications in 2015, including property owned by Tom Fredericks at the corner of Highway 279 and Sherlock, land owned by the Bella Vista Property Owner's Association containing the south entry sign along Highway 71, and land owned by The Greens for the construction of an office building.

The Department facilitated five resolutions opening public rights-of-way and easements over the course of 2015.

The Department issued 18 letters of zoning compliance for home based businesses in 2015.

In June, the Department filed the City's annual report for the Storm Water Management Plan with the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) and received word that the report was in compliance in December. The Department continues to progress with implementation of the five year storm water plan, completing mapping of approximately one-fifth of the City's drainage system. In addition, educational outreach continued through a regional agreement with the Benton and Washington County Extension Service offices. Departmental staff facilitated the selection of artists and artwork for inclusion on drainage boxes throughout the City in the Upstream Art program.

Over the course of 2015, departmental staff represented the City at various subcommittees of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission on issues regarding transportation improvements, storm water management, alternative transportation, and geographic information systems on a month to month basis.

Planning continued to participate in training for Flood Plain Managers, as required by Arkansas statute. The City must maintain staff accredited as the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission to maintain participation in the National Flood Insurance Program for local property owners.

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CODE ENFORCEMENT

In 2015, the Department processed 1,757 code enforcement cases with 994 of those being generated by the public. This case volume represents a decrease of 31.13% from 2014.

Despite lower case volume, points of public contact to process cases remained relatively steady from 2014 to 2015. In 2015, the Department made 2,253 point of contact with the public, 15.13% fewer than the 2,594 made in 2014.

In 2014, the average response time for code enforcement complaints was 14 days but was reduced to 11 days in 2015.

Over the course of June and July of last year, the Department completed demolition of a nuisance property located behind the Visitor's Center along Highway 71.

ENGINEERING

The Department secured the professional services for many capital improvements projects in 2015. Due to the size and scope of the projects, construction managers were solicited, interviewed, and selected for both the Streets Building and Fire Station #4 projects. This included price negotiation and contract approval through the City Council.

As part of an ongoing project with the Bella Vista Property Owner's Association, the Department facilitated and reviewed an agreement to enter into a cost share agreement for erecting entrance signage at the north and south ends of US Highway 71. Construction was completed on the project in October of 2015.

In March, the Department prepared a grant funding application to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department for utilization of Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds to construct the Dartmoor Hybrid Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) Crossing project. The project was awarded \$50,000 in December from the Arkansas Highway Commission.

In August, the Department prepared three grant funding applications to the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. Funds were sought from Surface Transportation Program - Attributable for the Mercy Way Bridge and Corridor Improvements project for preliminary engineering and environmental assessment. Funds totaling \$256,000 were awarded in September for federal fiscal year 2017.

Grants were sought from regionally designated TAP funds for the Riordan Road Trailhead project and the Dartmoor HAWK Crossing project. The Riordan Road Trailhead project was allocated \$236,632 for construction for federal fiscal year 2017.

In late October, the Department filed a Trails for Life grant application with the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism for additional funding of the Dartmoor HAWK Crossing and trail expansion. Outcomes from this application are still pending.

The Department also kicked off several projects in late 2015 that will be completed in 2016 including improvements to the Riordan Road corridor, lower Suits Us Drive, and Rothbury / Crosshill Drives.

In late December, the Department prepared and filed three applications for General Improvement Funds with the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District. Two of the applications were filed separately to fund 1) the Dartmoor HAWK Crossing project, and 2) a trail expansion from the HAWK location northward to Blowing Springs Road. The third application was provided to fund an economic development study for the City.