

October 9, 2003

Honorable Mayor and Members of
the Hermosa Beach City Council

Regular Meeting of
October 14, 2003

Review of Customer Service and Complaint System

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the City Council review the attached information regarding the City's Customer Service and Complaint System and provide any further direction regarding the program.

Background:

Council Member Sam Edgerton requested that this item be placed on the agenda in order for the City Council to review the program.

The present suggestion/complaint system was introduced in 1997. A copy of the survey form is attached for your review and information. The survey forms have not historically generated a great deal of input. We have in the past received comments ranging from the condition of City Hall (not since the remodel) to actions by employees either through direct contact or in general. The present system was designed to get feedback from our customers on how we are doing and how we can improve. Ideally we would have enough comments in order to review procedures and determine if the service provided was up to standard.

In addition to the survey forms, complaints are also received in person at City Hall, over the telephone, by written letter to me, or to me through the City Council Members individually. Upon receipt of a complaint the appropriate department director is contacted to review the circumstances and gather any necessary documentation. No formal written complaint has been required in order for me or other senior staff member to look into complaints. Historically, the City has not kept comprehensive records of complaints received for all departments. Generally we receive very few complaints regarding City operations and/or staff. The complaints we do receive are generally of a nature that is able to be resolved very quickly; most often they are resolved immediately or within the same day. In certain circumstances we have made changes to policies or procedures as a result of feedback received. For example, we made changes to the procedures for alternate refuse billing. Previously we required the property owner to fill out a form, return it to City Hall, and pay a fee. This step was eliminated after City Council approval and the process is now handled directly by the refuse hauler.

As the City Council is aware, there have been some complaints that involve extensive time and research to resolve. Once a problem has been determined, we attempt to resolve it and make necessary changes that help to prevent a reoccurrence. When appropriate, employees have received disciplinary action for serious errors or policy violations. Any such action is conducted

in accordance with applicable employment laws and city policies. Also, we have conducted customer service training in response to situations where we have found that employee skills in this area needed improvement. On occasion, we have solicited the assistance of outside consultants to conduct independent reviews of problems brought to our attention through complaints.

The Police Department has a detailed complaint procedure that is required by the penal code and also complies with the Police Officers' Procedural Bill of Rights. Any allegation of improper conduct against a police officer received by the Police Department initiates a full "internal affairs" investigation complete with taped interviews and documented facts. Complaints are classified and the complainant is notified of the results of the investigation. Sustained complaints may then result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee. As stated, this formal process is required under law and must be carried out in compliance with applicable state laws and department policy. More detailed information regarding this is contained in the attached memo from the Chief of police.

The Public Works Department has provided a detailed explanation of their requests for service. Requests for service may involve such things ranging from potholes to inspection complaints but are generally related to repairs that need to be made in the public rights of way or public facilities.

In an effort to improve service to residents and ensure there is a meaningful avenue to address service problems there are a number of improvements that can be implemented. First, I have made sure that the customer service survey forms are displayed on all public counters at each city facility. Staff will also work on developing a formal complaint form. A complaint form will allow us to better track when complaints are received and how and when they are resolved. While the completion of a form would not be required for a customer to express a service concern, it does provide an avenue for individuals to more formally express concerns and know they will be addressed. The Community Development in particular has made and implemented suggestions for improving service delivery. See the attached memorandum from the Community Development Director. Some of the suggestions may involve revisions to policies or codes requiring City Council approval. These will be brought to the City Council in the future. Staff will also provide monthly reports regarding the complaints received and how they were resolved. Additional training will also be scheduled to reinforce policies, procedures, and professional service. We will also continue to seek independent reviews of problems conducted by consultants who are experts in their fields to ensure objective evaluations of the most sensitive, volatile, and critical situations.

Overall, it is my belief that we deliver quality service to the businesses and residents of the City. And, given the number of people we serve both at the public counters and in the field, we receive very few complaints. We are committed to making improvements to our services and providing a meaningful appropriate method for correcting problems.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen R. Burrell
City Manager