

BELLA VISTA BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Moving Forward by Benjamin Hunt updated 8/29/2026

Building Trust, Accountability, and Excellence: A New Path Forward

Summary

Bella Vista has experienced unprecedented growth over the past several years. With that growth has come increased demand on the Building Division, greater expectations from residents and contractors, and a need for stronger processes to ensure quality development throughout our community.

As the City worked to more consistently enforce its adopted building codes and regulations beginning in 2024, tensions developed between the Building Division and the builder community. Builders who had become accustomed to certain practices found themselves facing stricter enforcement and increased scrutiny. At the same time, inspectors and staff were expected to carry out the City's adopted policies while managing growing workloads and limited resources.

The result was frustration on all sides.

Builders felt the process had become more difficult and less predictable. Staff felt unsupported while attempting to enforce the City's requirements. Residents experienced delays and confusion. City leadership received criticism from the development community while the Building Division struggled to meet increasing demands.

The purpose of this document is not to assign blame. Instead, it is to acknowledge the challenges that have occurred, identify lessons learned, and establish a clear plan that creates accountability, transparency, efficiency, and mutual respect among all stakeholders moving forward.

How We Got Here

Bella Vista's growth created pressures that exceeded the capacity of existing systems and staffing levels and several factors contributed to the current situation:

- Rapid Community Growth
- Development activity increased significantly, resulting in higher permit volumes, more inspections, and greater demands on Building Division staff.
- Staffing Limitations
- The number of inspectors and support personnel did not initially keep pace with development activity, creating scheduling challenges and longer response times.
- Inconsistent Expectations

As enforcement of adopted codes became more consistent, many builders perceived a significant change in expectations. What was intended to improve compliance and quality was often viewed as a sudden shift in how projects were being evaluated.

Communication Gaps

Communication between leadership, staff, contractors, and residents was often reactive rather than proactive. This created misunderstandings and contributed to frustration among all parties.

Lack of Clear Accountability

While inspectors were tasked with enforcing code requirements, there was often uncertainty regarding responsibility for policy decisions, interpretation disputes, process improvements, and conflict resolution.

The result was an environment where builders, staff, and leadership often found themselves working against one another rather than together toward a common goal.

Lessons Learned

Several important lessons have emerged from this experience.

- Growth Requires Planning
- Staffing, technology, and processes must evolve alongside community growth
- Consistency Matters
- Builders and residents need predictable expectations from permit application through final inspection
- Accountability Must Exist at Every Level
- Accountability cannot be limited to inspectors or contractors alone. Leadership, management, staff, and builders all share responsibility for successful outcomes
- Communication Prevents Conflict
- Most disputes can be avoided when expectations are clearly communicated before work begins.
- Quality and Efficiency Are Not Opposing Goals

The City can maintain strong code compliance while also providing efficient service and predictable timelines.

Vision for the Future

The Building Division should become a service-oriented organization that protects public safety, supports responsible development, and provides predictable, professional, and transparent interactions with every customer.

The goal is simple: Clear expectations. Consistent enforcement. Faster service. Better communication. Shared accountability.

Proposed Organizational Structure

City Administrator: Provides executive oversight, policy direction, budget authority, and performance review. We currently do not have a City Administrator like other cities so I propose we have that conversation. We may or may not decide a City Administrator is in the best interests of Bella Vista but I'd like to find out.

Building Official / Director: Responsible for department leadership, code interpretation, operational performance, staff management, policy implementation, and stakeholder relations.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Department leadership
- Code interpretation and dispute resolution
- Performance management
- Builder relations
- Strategic planning
- Reporting to City Administration and Council

Permit and Development Services Manager: Responsible for managing permit intake, plan review coordination, permit tracking, customer service, and workflow management.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Permit processing
- Application review coordination
- Permit timeline monitoring
- Customer communication
- Workflow management

Chief Inspector: Responsible for field operations and inspection scheduling.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Inspection scheduling
- Inspector workload management
- Field consistency
- Inspection quality assurance
- Training and mentoring inspectors

Building Inspectors: Responsible for inspections, documentation, customer communication, and code compliance verification.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Conduct inspections
- Document findings
- Communicate clearly with contractors
- Participate in training and standardization efforts

Permit Technicians: Responsible for customer support and permit administration.

Primary Responsibilities:

- Permit intake
- Permit issuance
- Customer assistance
- Records management

Operational Improvements

1. Builder Partnership Program: Quarterly meetings between City staff and builders to discuss:

- Common inspection issues
- Code updates
- Process improvements
- Scheduling concerns
- Industry feedback

The objective is collaboration rather than confrontation.

2. Published Service Standards: The City should establish and publish performance targets.

Examples:

- Permit review completion targets
- Inspection request deadlines
- Response time commitments
- Correction notice standards

Everyone should know what to expect.

3. Standardized Inspection Process: Every inspector should follow the same standards.

This includes:

- Uniform inspection checklists
- Standard correction notices
- Consistent documentation requirements
- Standard communication procedures

4. Enhanced Scheduling System: Implement a structured inspection scheduling process that provides:

- Predictable inspection windows
- Online scheduling
- Inspection status updates
- Improved coordination between contractors and inspectors

5. Pre-Construction Meetings: For larger projects, require a pre-construction meeting involving:

- Builder
- Inspector
- Building Official

This meeting establishes expectations before construction begins and reduces future disputes.

6. Formal Dispute Resolution Process

When disagreements arise regarding interpretation or enforcement:

- Inspector review
- Chief Inspector review
- Building Official determination
- Appeal process if necessary

This creates clarity and fairness.

Accountability Framework

Leadership Accountability

Leadership is responsible for:

- Staffing adequacy
- Department performance
- Policy consistency
- Customer satisfaction
- Resource allocation

Staff Accountability

Staff are responsible for:

- Professional conduct
- Consistent enforcement
- Timely communication
- Accurate documentation

Builder Accountability

Builders are responsible for:

- Code-compliant construction
- Proper scheduling
- Timely corrections
- Professional interactions

Shared Accountability

All parties are responsible for:

- Respectful communication
- Problem-solving
- Cooperation
- Maintaining trust

Expected Results Within 6–12 Months

- Improved Permit Turnaround
- Faster permit processing through improved workflow management and staffing.
- Better Inspection Scheduling
- More predictable inspection schedules and reduced delays.
- Improved Builder Relationships
- Regular communication and clearly defined expectations will reduce conflict and build trust.
- Increased Staff Morale
- Employees will have clearer responsibilities, stronger leadership support, and better operational systems.
- Greater Public Confidence
- Residents will see a process that is transparent, efficient, and focused on quality construction.
- Higher Quality Construction
- Consistent inspections and predictable enforcement will result in safer, higher-quality homes and developments.

Conclusion

Bella Vista's growth presents both challenges and opportunities. The events of the past several years have demonstrated that strong code enforcement alone is not enough. Success requires leadership, communication, accountability, and partnership.

The future Building Department must balance public safety, quality construction, customer service, and economic growth. By establishing clear expectations, strengthening accountability at every level, and improving communication between all stakeholders, Bella Vista can create a Building Department that serves residents, supports builders, and earns the confidence of the entire community.

The objective moving forward is not to revisit past disagreements, but to build a system that works better for everyone.

BELLA VISTA BUILDING DEPARTMENT

12-Month Implementation Plan

Objective

Create a Building Department that provides:

- Clear expectations
- Consistent code enforcement
- Faster permit processing
- Predictable inspections
- Improved communication
- Shared accountability

Success will be measured through permit turnaround times, inspection scheduling performance, builder satisfaction, staff satisfaction, and code compliance outcomes.

PHASE 1: STABILIZATION (FIRST 90 DAYS)

Goal: Restore trust, establish leadership accountability, and create operational consistency.

Action Item 1: Conduct Internal Department Assessment

Review:

- Staffing assignments
- Workloads
- Inspection volumes
- Permit processing timelines
- Current bottlenecks

Deliverable: Written assessment identifying immediate operational improvements.

Action Item 2

Builder and Staff Listening Sessions

Conduct separate meetings with:

- Builders
- Inspectors
- Permit staff
- Department leadership

Purpose: Identify recurring concerns and opportunities for improvement.

Deliverable: Summary report with common themes and recommended actions.

Action Item 3

Establish Leadership Structure

Clearly define responsibilities for:

- Building Official
- Chief Inspector
- Permit Administration
- Inspectors

Deliverable: Published organizational chart and responsibility matrix.

Action Item 4

Immediate Inspection Scheduling Improvements

Implement:

- Standard inspection request cutoff times
- Daily route planning
- Consistent scheduling procedures

Goal: Reduce uncertainty for contractors and inspectors.

PHASE 2: STANDARDIZATION (MONTHS 3–6)

Goal

Create consistency across all department functions.

Action Item 1

Develop Standard Operating Procedures

Create written procedures for:

- Permit intake
- Plan review
- Inspection scheduling
- Correction notices
- Reinspection procedures
- Complaint handling

Deliverable: Department Operations Manual.

Action Item 2

Create Standard Inspection Checklists

Develop consistent inspection criteria for:

- Footings
- Foundations
- Framing
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Mechanical
- Final inspections

Benefit: Builders receive consistent expectations regardless of inspector.

Action Item 3

Implement Code Interpretation Policy

Create a formal process for:

- Code questions
- Interpretation disputes
- Appeals

Goal: Eliminate inconsistent code interpretations.

Action Item 4

Launch Builder Resource Center

Provide:

- Checklists
- Common corrections
- Permit requirements
- Inspection procedures

Goal: Reduce preventable delays.

PHASE 3: COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION (MONTHS 6–9)

Goal: Build long-term trust between the City and development community.

Action Item 1

Establish Builder Advisory Group

Members:

- Builders
- Contractors

- Inspectors
- Building Official
- Meet quarterly

Purpose: Discuss concerns and process improvements.

Action Item 2

Monthly Department Performance Reporting

Publish:

- Permit volumes
- Turnaround times
- Inspection response times
- Reinspection rates

Benefit: Transparency and accountability.

Action Item 3

Pre-Construction Coordination Meetings

Required for larger projects.

Discuss:

- Project scope
- Inspection expectations
- Scheduling requirements
- Common code issues

Goal: Prevent problems before construction begins.

Action Item 4

Customer Service Standards

Adopt standards such as:

- Phone calls returned within 24 hours
- Emails answered within 48 hours
- Inspection reports completed same day whenever possible

PHASE 4: PERFORMANCE & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT (MONTHS 9–12)

Goal: Create a sustainable culture of accountability and excellence.

Action Item 1

Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Track: Permit Review Performance

- Residential permits reviewed within established target.
- Inspection Scheduling Performance
- Percentage of inspections completed within target timeframe.
- Correction Rate
- Average number of corrections per inspection.
- Customer Satisfaction
- Builder and homeowner feedback surveys.
- Employee Satisfaction
- Annual staff survey.

Action Item 2

Annual Process Review

Review:

- Policies
- Procedures
- Staffing levels
- Technology needs

Goal: Continuous improvement.

Action Item 3

Performance Accountability Program

Leadership responsible for:

- Meeting service standards
- Staffing efficiency
- Process improvements

Staff responsible for:

- Timeliness
- Documentation quality
- Professional conduct
- Builders responsible for:
- Prepared inspections
- Code compliance
- Professional communication

Expected Results Within 12 Months

Builders

- Faster permit approvals
- Predictable inspections
- Consistent enforcement
- Better communication

Staff

- Clear expectations
- Improved morale
- Reduced conflict
- Better workload management

Residents

- Higher quality construction
- Faster project completion
- Increased confidence in City processes

City Leadership

- Improved public trust
- Better performance metrics
- Greater accountability
- Stronger relationships with the development community

Long Term Vision

The Bella Vista Building Department will become recognized as a department that is professional, responsive, predictable, and fair - protecting public safety while supporting responsible growth and development throughout the community.