

An aerial photograph of Seattle, Washington, showing the city skyline, the waterfront, and the Space Needle. The image is used as a background for the title and the bottom section of the slide.

# SDCI PLAN TO REDUCE PERMIT BACKLOG

Presentation to the Planning, Land Use, and Zoning Committee  
Nathan Torgelson, Andy Higgins | July 17, 2019



# PURPOSE AND VALUES

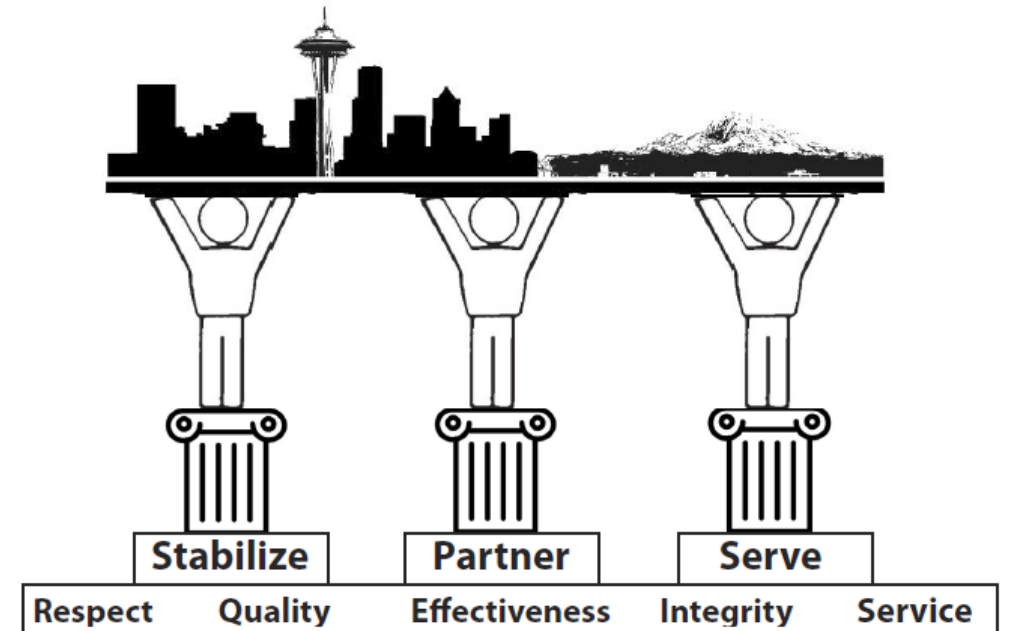
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## Our Purpose

As stewards and regulators of land and buildings, we preserve and enhance equity, livability, safety, and health of our communities.

## Our Values

- Respect
- Quality of work
- Effectiveness
- Integrity
- Service



# SDCI OVERVIEW

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- 2019 adopted \$85M budget (91% funded by permit and other revenues)
- 51,472 permits issued in 2018
- 9,821 enforcement complaints in 2018
- 31,142 registered rental properties comprising 155,031 units
- 1,765 eviction or tenant protection contacts in 2018



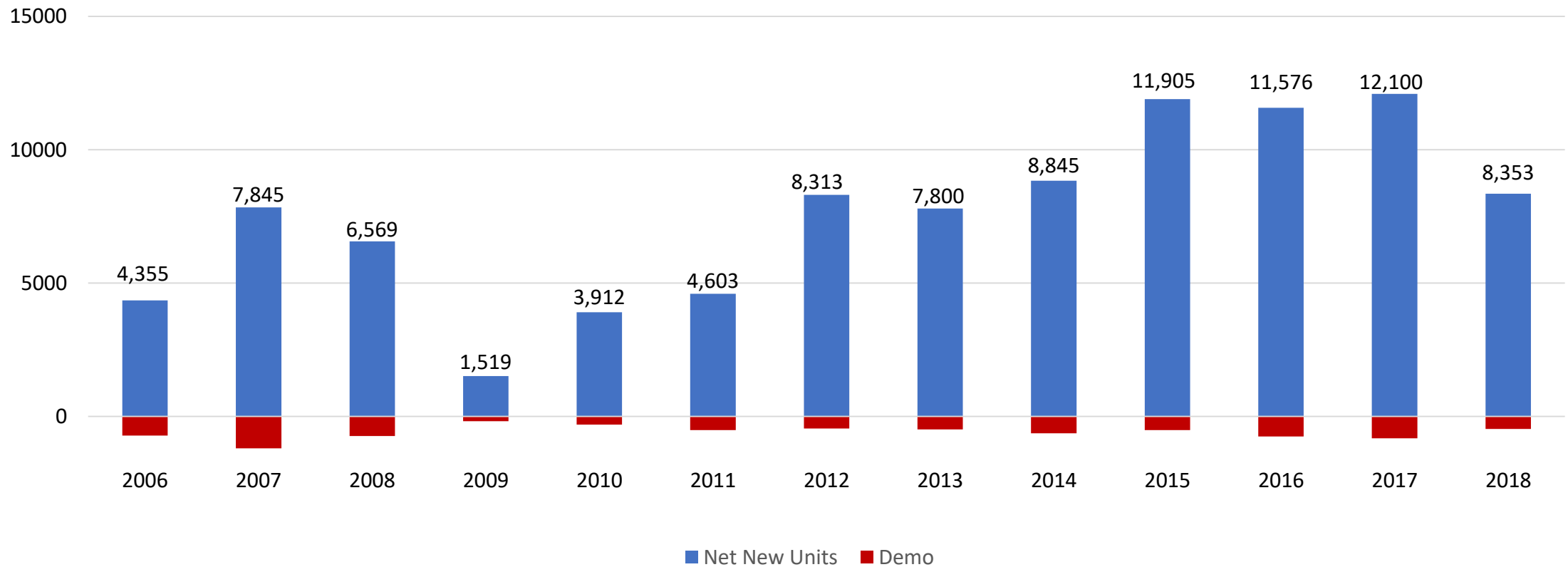
# SDCI FORECASTING

- Permit application volumes have been at record levels since 2015.
- 2016-2017 marked peak in intake volumes which have been difficult to manage



# RESIDENTIAL UNITS

Residential units reported in the year the construction permit was issued  
(includes units completed and those that are permitted, but not yet built); 69,000 gross units in last 7 years



# PERMITTING SYSTEM UPGRADE

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April 2018, launched new permitting system using the Accela platform; in parallel with major Seattle IT consolidation

- Previous system was out-of-date, unsupported, and failing daily
- Accela allows for a city-wide platform to integrate services and provide a single interface for customers
- Accela will make systems and processes more streamlined
  - Better automation progresses permits through the system
  - Better process efficiencies and better tracking
  - Increase coordination with other departments (Fire and SDOT)



# PERMITTING SYSTEM UPGRADE

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The initial roll-out negatively impacted our customers. We worked to immediately improve the system by:

- Prioritizing system enhancements for implementation, including adding fields to the customer records
- We created a short-term customer support team and increased IT staffing to address immediate issues
- Developing a feedback loop to continue gathering customer suggestions for improvements
- Created short videos on selected topics
- Adding to the Help Center as we get new information
- Automating current manual processes and removing bottlenecks from complex workflows





# PERMITTING SYSTEM UPGRADE

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Implementing a \$3.1 million investment with Seattle IT to add staff and resources

Current and Forthcoming enhancements:

- Working to bring back Shaping Seattle Mapping Application
- Allowing applicants to add contacts and delegate authority
- Auto assignment of records—quicker staff response
- Ability to pre-assign SDCI and other department reviews during intake, rather than after fees are paid
- Notifications now sent to side sewer contractors when their credentials expire
- Better reporting and performance metrics—will help us identify bottlenecks
- Legislative driven enhancements: Vacant buildings, MHA, ADU/DADUs, Demolition, EV Readiness



# SDCI OUTLOOK

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## Since Accela Go-Live, Permit Intake-Issuance Times Have Remained High

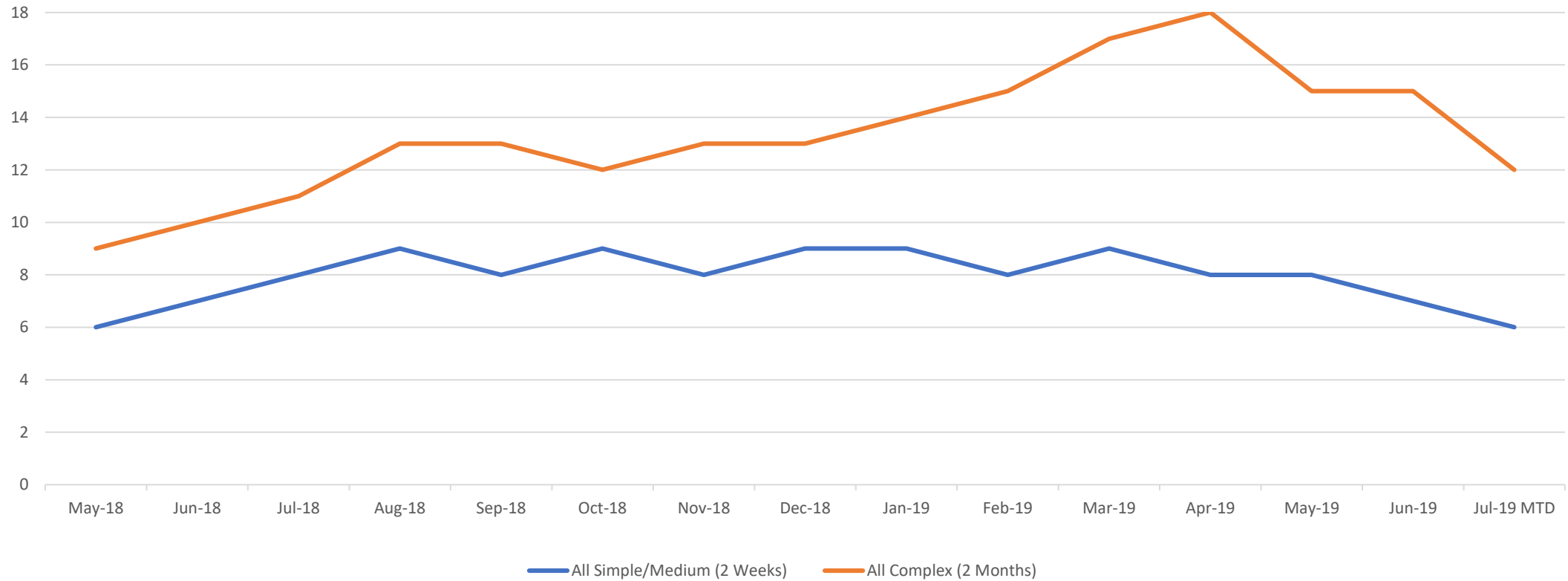
- Average number of review cycles increased with increasing code complexity
- Amount of time plans are out for corrections has *increased*
- Amount of time plans at SDCI for review has *increased* but has improved in last 4 months
- Percentage of overall permitting time in SDCI's possession has *decreased* over last decade

## SDCI Positioned to Improve Performance Timelines

- Extension of existing sunset positions and addition of 13 term limited, contingent budget authority (CBA) positions, currently interviewing. Majority of 13 positions in zoning review
- Adjusted fees for 2019 to fill funding gaps
- In Engineering Services Division, hiring processes underway for building plan reviewers, structural plan reviewers and permit specialists.
- Established core staffing reserve for eventual downturn

# INITIAL PLAN REVIEW PERFORMANCE FOR CONSTRUCTION PERMITS

Weeks To Achieve 95% Complete- All Critical IP Reviews



# CREATING SUCCESS FOR APPLICANTS

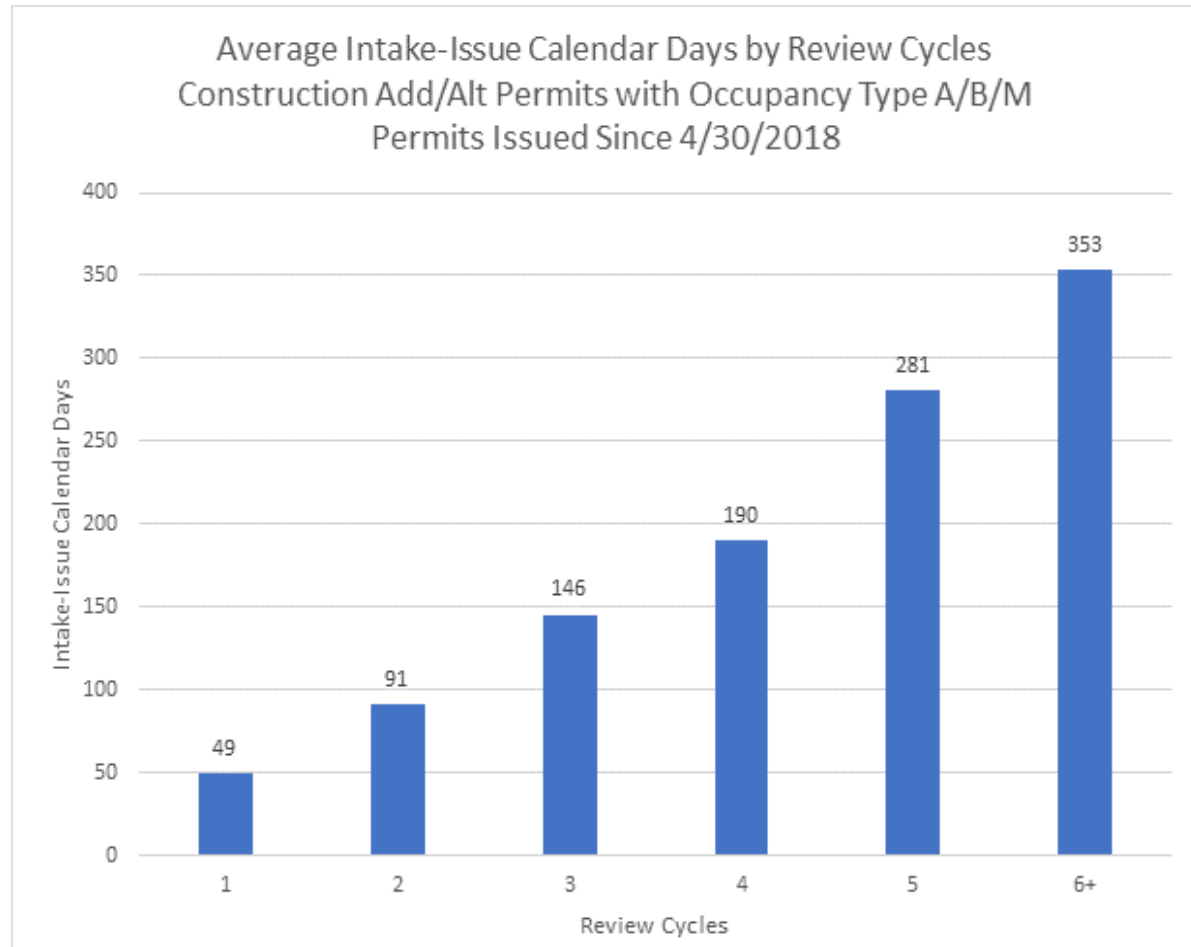
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- Upload application material when completed for significantly earlier intake appointment
- Encourage applicants for commercial projects to use free coaching services before signing a lease
  - Hire a design professional
  - Know the permitted occupancy/use of the space
  - Uncover unexpected life-safety improvements or costly upgrades
- Paid pre-submittal conferences are available for project-specific discussions
- Reduce the time for obtaining a permit with a code compliant submittal



# CORRECTION ROUNDS IMPACT TIMELINE

- Additional correction cycles can add months to the permit process
- Designers/engineers are busy as well, leading to more time in their hands before we can review changes
- Working with Seattle IT to create permit milestone reporting table to get better views into how long each step is taking
- Identifying permits with minor corrections so they don't go to bottom of queue



# IDEAS FOR PROCESS REFORM AND CODE SIMPLIFICATION

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- Increasingly complex Land Use, Building and Energy Codes; Land Use Code is 867 pages long
- Recently adopted Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) measures and verifications, while important, require careful and time consuming calculations by SDCI staff
- Land Use Code simplification is one option
- Raising SEPA thresholds
- Preparing to pilot new review/collaboration tools (Bluebeam Revu) to improve our communication with applicants and reduce need for multiple correction rounds

# QUESTIONS?

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