



City of Seattle
Mayor Edward B. Murray

**Confirmation of Nathan Torgelson for
Director of the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections**

1. What are your major goals for the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) over the next year? Over the next four years?

Major goals over the next year:

Reset the mission, vision and core values of the Department. With a new Director for the first time in 14 years, a new Administration/HR Division Director just hired and with the planning division transferring into the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), it's time to revisit the Department's mission, vision and core values. In 2016 we will complete a new Strategic Plan for the Department.

Successful launch of the Permitting, Regulation, Enforcement and Property Project (PREP). In late 2016 PREP will implement a new system—Accela—that will replace our current permit tracking system (Hansen) and many of the Department's existing Web applications, such as Hansen Web Tools. The system will track all permitting, code compliance, and property management processes. This is a huge and important undertaking for the Department and will improve the efficiency in which staff, our customers and the public can track permits.

Successful coordination with new Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and new Department of Neighborhoods (DON). In 2016 it is crucial that we start off on the right track with coordinating with the new OPCD. The policies and initiatives that OPCD proposes will directly impact how SDCI issues permits for development projects and how we enforce codes. We must ensure that the two departments are well coordinated. SDCI will retain four planners from DPD's planning division who will lead the coordination between OPCD and the permitting functions of SDCI. Also, I look forward to working more closely with the Department of Neighborhoods on a more coordinated and broader outreach strategy. Using the District Coordinators and DON's PACE leadership program we can improve the effectiveness of our communication with neighborhoods.

Continued focus on RSJI and Change Team (please see Question #7).

Successful completion of the registration phase of the Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance (RRIO) program and implementation of new tenant protections. In 2016 we will

complete the initial registration process for the 1-4 unit rental properties, thus concluding the citywide registration process for the program. In addition, we are working on legislation to strengthen protection for renter households.

Major goals over the next four years:

Be the most technologically advanced permitting and inspections department in Washington. Currently, most development plans are submitted electronically, and our website Shaping Seattle (www.shapingseattle.com) is a wonderful example of how our Department is broadening its access points and informing the community about development activity happening in Seattle.

But we can do more. I would like to see our website improve, as it is a gateway to the public for a wide variety of information about our Department, and it is not always easy to navigate. In addition, our weekly Land Use Information Bulletin, our report on land use applications, decisions and notices, can be improved. Finally, as the codes we regulate become increasingly more complicated, it is essential that we provide better public information such as info graphics to educate the public and our customers. Our goal should be to reduce the number of trips our customers feel like they have to make downtown in order to do business or to get information from SDCI.

Ensure that Accela can track housing affordability requirements in new development projects implemented through HALA legislation. The City's ambitious Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) and 50,000 housing unit goal over the next ten years will require that SDCI carefully track all development projects subject to affordable housing requirements (either through performance on-site, off-site or fee in lieu of).

More meaningful dialogue with neighborhoods about land use. Too often land use discussions are within the context of a controversial policy or development proposal. The Design Review process, for example, is frustrating for residents who show up to discuss issues other than the design of a development proposal, and for the review boards and staff who have to explain that issues such as traffic and parking impacts are not part of the purview of the board. Working with OPCD and DON, my goal is to have more meaningful discussions with the neighborhoods about land use issues. This will include improvements to the Design Review process, but also bigger land use context discussions with individual neighborhoods. I would also like to work with DON to explore ways to educate the PACE leadership program participants about how land use decisions are made at City Hall and how land use decisions can be influenced through positive community engagement.

Improved conditions in Seattle's rental housing stock as demonstrated by the RRIO inspections program. The RRIO inspections program kicked off in 2015 and encountered a few problem properties that clearly demonstrated the need for ongoing and proactive inspections. In 2016 we will work with a stakeholders group to fine tune the inspection and outreach components of the program. We expect to be requiring up to 500 inspections per month, not including those

based on complaints from tenants. We must do more to reach out to historically underrepresented communities and to educate landlords about their responsibilities to maintain safe and healthy conditions in all their units.

2. What do you see as the primary challenges facing your department in the next four years?

Change management. There has probably never been a time when so much change is on the horizon for this Department. Changes include a new Director for the first time in 14 years, a new Administration Division/HR director, a new permit tracking system projected to go live at the end of 2016, new tenant protection ordinances, new Councilmembers and a District based system, IT consolidation, and all of this in the middle of perhaps the biggest development boom in Seattle's history. Staff will need support to weather all of these changes.

Keeping staff morale high during boom and down times. The current development cycle is stretching staff thin, and a development decline will mean layoffs. The ups and downs of the economy present a challenge to keep staff morale high amidst huge workloads one year and staff layoffs the next. Staff morale is especially important within a regulatory agency, as residents, neighborhoods, businesses, property owners and project applicants are all important customers but they all have very different needs and expectations. For example, staff hear from the public and customers that they are moving too fast or too slow, and that they are regulating too much or too little.

Increasingly complex regulatory codes, especially with changes coming with HALA. At 868 pages, the Land Use Code is a large and complicated regulatory tool. The housing code, RRIO, and a variety of tenant protection ordinances bring challenges of working with vulnerable communities and sometimes customers who are not happy to see us. The city's building and technical codes, as well as critical areas, grading, stormwater, noise, sign and energy codes are similarly multifaceted. As Seattle changes, the City needs to amend codes to adapt to emerging issues, which usually means a longer Code! Staff, the public and applicants are challenged when reviewing development projects and complaints to keep on top of all the regulations.

3. How will you work with the City Council and citizen advisory bodies? How will you be responsive to their requests in order to accomplish priorities that they have identified, in those instances that their priorities compete for time with yours? What processes would you use to set priorities among competing needs?

Personally, I will be accessible and responsive to all Councilmembers and advisory bodies. I understand that growth is one of the top issues in our community, and that with District Councilmembers our Department needs to be increasingly more responsive to Council requests for information. Thank you for approving the new SDCI Council liaison position. This will help us to respond faster to your questions and requests.

I look forward to a positive working relationship with the new chair of the City Council Committee who will work on planning and land use issues. I will work with the chair to help prioritize requests coming from all Councilmembers, and to work proactively on behalf of the Executive on an agreed upon work program.

We will continue to work with the City's Planning and Design Commissions, the Landmarks Board and Special Review District Boards, our Design Review Boards and Construction Code Advisory Board, and other advisory boards that touch our work. I have presented to many of these boards and have relationships with their members and staff. The advisory boards are great touching points for our work as they represent the diversity of Seattle's population and interests.

4. What opportunities do you see for improving collaboration between your department and other City departments? How do you see your relationship with OPCD? How will you make sure that your staff is involved in decisions of OPCD, or other departments, that will affect SDCI programs and policies?

I have had the privilege of working for the City of Seattle for over 20 years and for four different Departments, and have developed relationships with staff in every department.

Our relationship with OPCD will be crucial—policies and Code changes developed by OPCD, proposed by the Mayor and adopted by Council have to be implemented by SDCI. As Deputy Director of DPD, I oversaw the Planning Division of DPD and have relationships with all of the staff. SDCI's future Code Development Section will be made up of 4 individuals who worked in the Planning Division of DPD, and they will work closely with OPCD and the Operations (permitting) Division of SDCI. These existing relationships will be important and I am committed to setting up systems so that SDCI Operations and Code Development and OPCD staff are well coordinated. In addition, every major department, including SDCI, will have a liaison to OPCD and will work with OPDC on policy and code development.

5. What is your organizational management approach? How does SDCI's current structure help achieve City priorities? Given your knowledge of the Department, is there anything related to the structure of the Department that you plan to change?

My organizational management approach is to surround myself with really smart people, to lead and inspire people to do their best work, and to challenge people to grow professionally and to take risks. Having a new strategic plan for the Department will help set goals for our Department that people can aspire to. Staff need encouragement, support and thanks. As a new Director, I will take time to listen, learn and ask a lot of questions. I am known as a leader who can smile, be pleasant and have a good sense of humor, even in times of stress. I believe that this type of attitude instills confidence. SDCI's current structure is not overly hierarchical, thus decisions can be made more quickly to help achieve City priorities.

I don't plan to make any major changes to the structure of the Department at this time. The Department's Executive Leadership Team is rather small with five people, and I do plan to expand this team. As part of the Strategic Planning process for the Department I do think it will be smart to look carefully at the Operations Division of the Department which is made up of about 80 percent of the Department's staff. Should this Division remain as one?

6. What is your general philosophy for how to engage with the public on permitting and enforcement issues? How will you support the public in understanding and effectively engaging with SDCI's processes? What strategies will you use to ensure that your department listens to and responds to citizens, businesses, and organizations with an interest in permitting and enforcement activities?

My philosophy for engaging with the public on permitting and enforcement issues is to listen, be honest and respectful, and to be upfront with all stakeholders. To build a successful community requires relationships. Every stakeholder has a particular point of view that is important to respect. You are never going to please everyone, but you can respect everyone. Empathetic listening is getting inside of the other person's frame of reference, seeing the world through their eyes and reflecting back what you hear. After that need is met, you can focus on problem solving.

I will support the public in understanding and effectively engaging with SDCI's processes by constantly striving to provide better public information and to better engage the public about land use (Goals as listed in Question #1). One of my main strategies to ensure SDCI listens and responds to community, businesses and stakeholder groups is to continue to take time to listen to, learn from and dialogue with them. Our codes and permitting and enforcement issues are complicated. It is important to engage with the public in a patient manner with more effective public information. As I take over the Director position, I intend to reach out to these diverse groups for their suggestions on how to improve upon SDCI.

7. Please describe your approach to ensure the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) is implemented through the SDCI's work. For example, how do you intend to reach out to constituencies that have not historically participated in permitting and enforcement activities, and are not usually represented in your department's discussions? What is your plan for making SDCI welcome for more people of color, women, and people with disabilities to the City workforce, where they may not have been traditionally represented in large numbers? Overall, how do you see the RSJI relating to your goals for SDCI?

I have learned so much by watching my last two supervisors, both Department Directors, who are people of color, and who are leaders in the greater Seattle community. Both have championed RSJI within their respective departments and within the community.

With the revisit of the Department's vision, mission and core values, now is the perfect time to reinvigorate our RSJI efforts, to include them in our new Strategic Plan, and for me to help

facilitate that change. I am pleased that SDCI's new Administrative Division/HR Director will be the Executive Sponsor for SDCI's Change Team in 2016. This individual was the Change Team Executive Sponsor in SDOT, and I am looking forward to his new ideas.

DPD and the future SDCI are proud to be made up of employees that reflect our community's diversity. I am committed to efforts to ensure that we continue to have a diverse workplace, that we attract as diverse a pool of candidates as possible for our job openings, that people involved in any aspect of the hiring process continue to have a minimum of 12 hours of RSJI training, and that we make every effort to hire and promote people of color. I am also committed to making improvements in obtaining WMBE goals for contracting and purchasing. I will continue our Department practice that employees will not be eligible for full 6 days of merit leave without contributing to RSJI objectives in some meaningful way.

Our work is highly technical but we must continuously monitor SDCI webpage updates and revisions and printed documents to ensure that "Plain Language" and RSJI inclusion principles and strategies are applied. It is crucial that we continue to increase awareness of the Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance program and our code enforcement program with special emphasis in historically underrepresented communities. I am committed to events and discussions with community leaders and organizations to assess their knowledge of our programs. We need to have more open house meetings to answer questions and provide technical support for homeowners interested in understanding requirements and gathering information on home improvement projects. We are currently planning such a session for Southeast Seattle in 2016 with the help of HomeSight.

8. Please elaborate on your goals when it comes to enforcement and compliance. What do you see as the limitations of a complaints-based system, and how do you intend to address those limitations? How can DPD improve its "reach" when it comes to enforcement? What role do you see the code compliance team playing in helping to educate tenants of their rights and to report violations of their rights?

My goal is to maintain response times for high priority categories for violation complaints— issues involving health or safety, emergency situations, rental housing maintenance, unsafe units, and vacant buildings. I recognize that we do not inspect every complaint that is a lower priority category (such as vegetation overgrowth if not significantly blocking pedestrian travel).

The limitation of a complaints-based system is that people who do not trust government or who fear retaliation from landlords or neighbors are less likely to file complaints. SDCI can expand its reach by educating residents about the services we provide and their rights to healthy and safe communities and housing. We can work more closely on outreach with DON, Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR), the Office of Housing (OH) and the Human Services Department (HSD), as well as with community organizations to communicate with historically underrepresented communities. For challenging issues such as vacant buildings, squatters, noise and hoarders we are building stronger relationships with Public Health, the Seattle Police Department and the Seattle Fire Department.

Doing proactive outreach and education is a new role for the code compliance team. The Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance (RRIO) program is a good example of how SDCI is beginning to extend the reach of our City codes to help increase compliance with rental housing standards. RRIO is working jointly with DON, SOCR, OH and HSD and other sections of DPD to present concise and understandable information in brief consolidated meetings or training sessions with historically underrepresented communities. The first such meeting will be on December 3rd at Goodwill Industries. We may be able to increase understanding of our codes regarding vacant building and perhaps outdoor (junk) storage by working with DON and the district coordinators, or through earned media when we are able to clean up or alleviate problems in neighborhoods throughout the city. The Mayor's Find It Fix It walks are another means of proactively reaching to the community that we will continue participating in to help people understand their rights and know who to call.

9. The Design Review overhaul currently underway represents an attempt to simplify the code and increase the efficiency of permit review, while still allowing for community input and involvement on project design. What other opportunities do you see to improve permit timing and efficiency while soliciting meaningful input from the community on controversial projects?

The Major Institution Master Planning process is one opportunity where permit and process timing and efficiency and community input and conversation can be improved. Our hospitals, colleges and universities are spending millions of dollars on this process that takes several years, and our communities and major institutions are still frustrated. Rapid changes in health care, and educational funding opportunities from the state and philanthropy cannot be anticipated in the Master Planning process and these opportunities often result in amendments to the Plan that are time consuming. I envision a process where we can focus more on the design of the new buildings and their relationship with the adjacent neighborhood, and on "public and community benefit" that focuses more on the human needs of the surrounding neighborhoods (job training and skills for low income individuals in the surrounding neighborhood who could work at the institution, for example) rather than on minor physical improvements.