

## Department of General Services

### Strengthening the Division of the State Architect's Workload Management and Performance Measurements Could Help It Avoid Delays in Processing Future Increases in Workload

#### REPORT NUMBER 2011-116.2, ISSUED MAY 2012

This report concludes that the Division of the State Architect (division), within the Department of General Services (department) has been able to keep the amount of time plans wait for review—bin time—under six weeks primarily due to a decrease in workload. Should the division's workload return to previous levels, it will likely struggle to maintain this goal. Recently, the division was prevented from contracting for plan review and instead drew on staff from its construction oversight activities. Further, although the division has a goal for keeping bin time below six weeks, it does not have goals for how long it should take to review plans. Without a plan review time goal, the division has less assurance that it is reviewing plans efficiently and school districts' design professionals have little certainty about how long they should expect to wait for the division to return plans to them for correction.

Also, the division's monthly performance reports on the length of each phase of the plan approval process do not report clear or accurate information. For example, the division includes in its reports some projects for which no plan review activity has occurred because the applications were incomplete, counting the length of time it took to complete each phase as zero days. Finally, the division cannot provide assurance that it has received and approved all plan changes before the start of related construction. After the division approves plans, districts must submit changes to the division for review and approval before undertaking related construction. However, the division does not have a process to ensure that it has received and approved all relevant plan changes. If the division does not approve plan changes before construction, construction may not comply with building standards and risks being unsafe.

In the report, the California State Auditor (state auditor) made the following recommendations to the division. The state auditor's determination regarding the current status of recommendations is based on the division's response to the state auditor as of December 2012.

#### **Recommendation 1.1—See pages 21—23 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To better gauge the timeliness of its plan review and better communicate with design professionals, the division should develop goals for the time spent on the plan review phase, in the style of those used by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, and measure and report its success at meeting these goals.

#### ***Division's Action: Pending.***

According to the department, the division is actively developing reports that measure anticipated and actual plan review finish dates. The department stated that the division is reviewing data to ensure the validity of the information and is preparing metrics on the success of meeting plan review goals. The division plans to publish this information in January 2013.

#### **Recommendation 1.2—See pages 23—25 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

In order to avoid delays in plan review, the division should develop a policy that defines when it will expedite plan review using its statutory authority to contract for additional plan review resources.

***Division's Action: Partially implemented.***

On November 30, 2012, the division published a policy to provide guidance regarding when it will use consultants to conduct plan review of school projects. The policy states that the division will use consultants for plan review when the division is unable to meet the project owner's need for turnaround time, plan review cannot be accommodated in some other way, such as by transferring plans to another region, and resources exist for consultants. The policy outlines some steps the division will take to determine whether to use consultants, however, according to the division, it does not typically request that districts provide a turnaround time for projects. Further, the policy does not tie the division's use of consultants to any kind of metric, such as that which will be developed according to Recommendation 1.1.

**Recommendation 1.3.a—See pages 25—27 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To more accurately report on its plan review activities to stakeholders and provide relevant information to management, the division should provide current information on its performance, by phase, at the time of the reporting period.

***Division's Action: Pending.***

According to the department, the division will change its methodology to capture relevant information upon completion of each plan review phase in January 2013.

**Recommendation 1.3.b—See pages 25—27 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To more accurately report on its plan review activities to stakeholders and provide relevant information to management, the division should exclude zero values from its calculations related to projects that did not have activity in a particular phase.

***Division's Action: Fully implemented.***

The division no longer issues monthly plan review workload reports, but its monthly plan review scorecard excludes zero values by design. The report includes only projects with approved plans and thus every plan in the report will have completed each phase of the plan review process.

**Recommendation 1.3.c—See pages 25—27 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To more accurately report on its plan review activities to stakeholders and provide relevant information to management, the division should exclude projects from client phase calculations that were not returned to the division for back check within the division's deadlines.

***Division's Action: Pending.***

According to the department, the division changed its calculation of plan review processing times to use a maximum of 365 days for projects that have not been returned for back check. It said the division would begin using the new calculation in its November 2012 metrics' reports. However, the division's November 2012 plan review scorecard still included projects that had not begun back check within the division's one-year deadline.

**Recommendation 1.4.a—See pages 27—29 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To appropriately oversee changes to approved plans, the division should develop policies and procedures to ensure that it receives all relevant plan changes.

***Division's Action: Partially implemented.***

The division issued a revised interpretation of its regulations regarding construction changes. That interpretation outlined a process for design professionals to submit certain construction changes to the division for approval prior to the start of construction. However, the interpretation did not describe how the division intends to ensure it receives all relevant construction changes. According to the division, it is implementing a process for electronic submittal of construction change documents that will allow all involved parties access to information on the project. Additionally, the division states it is implementing a process to audit project inspector records, in part to ensure the division has received all construction changes requiring approval.

**Recommendation 1.4.b—See pages 27—29 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To appropriately oversee changes to approved plans, the division should develop policies and procedures to ensure that it reviews and approves all relevant plan changes before the start of related construction.

***Division's Action: Partially implemented.***

In a procedure adopted in November 2012, the division outlined its process for recording approval of plan changes. Specifically, the division's policy states it will retain a copy of approved changes as will the project inspector. The division will also require design professionals to attest to the fact that all changes to structural, access, or fire and life safety portions of a project have received division approval. Additionally, the division will require that project inspectors monitor changes to plans and notify design professionals if any changes appear to require division approval. However, as described in Recommendation 1.4.a, the division has not yet completed a process to ensure it receives all relevant construction changes prior to the start of related construction.

**Recommendation 1.4.c—See pages 27—29 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To appropriately oversee changes to approved plans, the division should develop policies and procedures to ensure that it documents its approval of all relevant plan changes.

***Division's Action: Fully implemented.***

In a procedure adopted in November 2012, the division outlined its process for recording approval of plan changes. Specifically, the division's policy states it will retain a copy of approved changes, as will project inspectors.

**Recommendation 1.5—See pages 29 and 30 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To ensure that the division performs a final review in all disciplines, the division should require and provide a means for recording final plan review of fire and life safety and access compliance-related work in the database.

***Division's Action: Pending.***

According to the department, the division is working with information technology staff to develop additional fields in its project database to capture final review dates. The division estimates it will complete this task in June 2013.

**Recommendation 1.6—See page 30 of the audit report for information on the related finding.**

To ensure that staff are current on building standards, the division should document its staff's participation in building standards update trainings by maintaining attendance rosters.

***Division's Action: Fully implemented.***

The division submitted to the state auditor instructions provided to staff via e-mail informing them that the division requires an attendance sheet be kept as a record of who attends trainings and that the division maintains this sheet in training records. Additionally, the division submitted an example of the attendance sheet used at a recent training.