



COUNTY of VENTURA

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*Rec'd
9/9/24*

Response to 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury Report Form (Please See California Penal Code Section 933.05)

Report Title: ***Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes***

Responding Entity: Director Rachel Dimond, City of Ventura

SEP 10 2024

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the Findings numbered: F-6, F-7, F-8, F-9, F-10, F-12, F-13, F-15, F-16, F-17
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the Findings numbered: F-11, F-14
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the Findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered R-5, R-6, R-7, R-8, R-9, R-10 have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered R-4, R-10 (M1), R-11 have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a summary indicating the timeframe for implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered N/A require further analysis.
(Attach an explanation to include: scope and parameters of the analysis or study and timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion with the agency or department head. The timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the report.)
- Recommendations numbered R-10 (M41, M42) will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: September 04, 2024

Signed: *Rachel Dimond*

Title: Community Development Director

Number of pages attached: 14

CITY OF
VENTURA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Honorable Kevin G. DeNoce
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California
County of Ventura
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93003

Re: Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes

Honorable Kevin G. DeNoce:

The City of Ventura received the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury report titled: *Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes*. In accordance with Penal Code Section 933.05, we submit this response to the Ventura County Grand Jury findings and recommendations.

The Community Development Director agrees with the following findings:

- **Finding-06**
The City of Ventura is following California's Permit Streamlining Act for 30-day requirement to deem Complete or issue an Incomplete Letter, but not for the lead agency approving or disapproving a project with an exempt CEQA status within 60 days.
- **Finding-07**
The City of Ventura did not meet the regional housing-needs requirements from its 2014-2021 Housing Element, and little data was available from the annual progress report dashboard.
- **Finding-08**
There has been inadequate training for the EnerGov system from deployment to present.
- **Finding-09**
Inadequate staffing and leadership turnover have led to lengthy delays in project approvals.
- **Finding-10**
Departures of experienced individuals have caused a lack of continuity and institutional memory in several Community Development Divisions.
- **Finding-12**
The City of Ventura has not implemented several of the 2019 Matrix Consulting Group Report recommendations as highlighted in the Discussion Section of this report.

- **Finding-13**
Lengthy delays in project approvals and increased costs are causing dissatisfaction among the development community and discouraging development activities.
- **Finding-15**
The lack of training on the EnerGov software system is causing inefficiency and workplace stress for entire divisions of the Community Development Department.
- **Finding-16**
The staff of the Community Development Department and the Information Technology Department are attempting to fix implementation and configuration deficiencies in using EnerGov software, causing increased workloads.
- **Finding-17**
Utilizing the Historic Preservation Committee and the Design Review Committee in non-decision-making roles has delayed project approvals.

The Community Development Director disagrees wholly or partially with the following findings:

- **Finding-11**
The City of Ventura's Community Development Department is unable to generate meaningful reports using EnerGov software.

Response to Finding-11

The City of Ventura wholly disagrees with Finding F-11. Since 2020, the city has worked diligently to improve the EnerGov process and meaningful reporting. EnerGov can produce various quality reports through automated reporting, system wide search features and system advanced search. These reporting options provide reporting metrics for information that has been input into the system. The key to successful reports is inputting the right data into the system, and staff has worked to improve the data fields in each permit type to help generate meaningful reports. Here are the reports we currently produce and distribute to the larger development advisory group:

- a) Citywide Items in Review
- b) Realtime Data Display
- c) Resubmitted applications
- d) Items in Review Coordinator
- e) Review Coordinator - Incomplete tasks
- f) Application Days Open
- g) Metrics Dashboard
- h) Permits Days to Issuance
- i) Year over Year Permits Report

These help to track key performance indicators such as review time and employee workload.

- **Finding-14**

Since 2020, assessed property values adjusted for inflation have not increased. This indicates that city services may be maintained but could be expanded by streamlining the approval process.

Response to Finding-14

The City of Ventura partially disagrees with Finding F-14. To suggest that property values adjusted for inflation have not increased due to the permitting process is not substantiated with metrics. The City agrees that streamlining the process may produce more permits which would increase assessed property values. However, other factors such as COVID-19, cost of materials, time of year, and financial capabilities are also factors when it comes to individuals investing money into improving a property that is required to go through the permitting process.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Community Development Director agrees that the following items have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented:

- **Recommendation-05**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura work with the California Department of Housing and Community Development to correct errors in annual progress reports by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-05

The city has engaged with the California Department of Housing and Community Development. There were several items identified including items reported incorrectly. An internal group has been established consisting of Housing, Planning, Building, Permit Services, and Information Technology to review the annual reports process along with the data sources. The processes for generating reports will be updated to primarily rely on automated EnerGov reports to ensure accurate information is provided.

- **Recommendation-06**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify and recruit potential hires having EnerGov experience in the Planning and Building Divisions of the Community Development Department by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-06

While EnerGov is not the predominate software for permit tracking, the city has begun to hire more employees with experience using this software, including the new planning manager. However, job descriptions do not call out EnerGov experience as recommended, which would help in recruiting EnerGov experienced staff. In lieu of solely relying on recruiting potential hires that specialize or have experience with EnerGov, the city will produce a quality

training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings opportunities hosted by EnerGov. The city has engaged with Information Technology and Human Resources to create an EnerGov training program for both new hires and existing employees.

- **Recommendation-07**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura create a standardized training protocol for new hires and existing employees for the EnerGov software system, including ongoing periodic training, by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-07

The city will produce a quality training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, produce training videos/manual, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings opportunities hosted by EnerGov. The city has engaged with Information Technology and Human Resources to create an EnerGov training program for both new hires and existing employees.

- **Recommendation-08**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura properly configure and put into practice all originally purchased EnerGov modules by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-08

Prior to the Grand Jury report being released, the Planning module was partially configured. This included configuring a workflow and digital application. There are additional configurations that will be designed and implemented over the next six months. There are workflow configurations and training for other departments such as Park and Recreation, Public Works, Fire and Water to facilitate the development process workflow for both plan review and inspections. Information Technology is conducting meetings with the various groups to understand business processes so that they can be implemented into EnerGov.

- **Recommendation-09**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura, in conjunction with the IT department and expert consultants, implement and properly configure meaningful reports regarding compliance, workload and timeliness within the EnerGov software system by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-09

A report has been produced that demonstrates each phase of the process with an associated amount of time. The report also separates the total time the city was processing the submittal versus waiting for the applicant to provide additional

information. This provides data to show shortfalls and allows opportunities to shift resources ensuring that the process is efficient and effective. There will also be additional training and guidance on using system-wide reports and advanced search capabilities through the training program.

- **Recommendation-10 (Matrix 13, 17, 20, 32, 34)**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-10 (Matrix 13, 32, 34)

The City of Ventura has implemented or is in the process of implementing these recommendations.

- **Matrix #13:** *Start the CEQA process as soon as the appropriate project scope and materials have been provided, even if the application has not been deemed complete.* The City of Ventura has begun to initiate the CEQA process prior to completeness for projects likely to have an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND).
- **Matrix #17:** **Develop consolidated list of review timelines for all building application types.** General timeframes will be posted on the city website along with automated emails provided to applicants through Ventura OPS. The automated emails have been revised to be sent out with every status change of the permit. The emails contain an explanation of the current process the applicant is going through, next steps, and an estimated timeframe. The timeframes will be evaluated frequently to ensure that they are as up to date as possible.
- **Matrix #20:** **Create a development review webpage that acts as a central hub and provides an overview of permitting requirements and links to departments for more information.** The focus is to have a user-friendly webpage that contains accurate links, up to date information, easy to understand development process, and resources to assist in the development process, including up to date timeframes for processing applications and permit issuance. An overhaul of the Permit Center webpage is being completed with the assistance of the city's communications team.
- **Matrix #31:** **Provide permitting software user training to all plan review staff, including a formalized training program for new hires, involved in the development review process.** The city will produce a quality training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, produce training videos/manual, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings opportunities hosted by EnerGov.

- **Matrix #32:** *Utilize the features on the permit software system to calculate the appropriate plan check and permitting fees.* Information Technology has configured the appropriate fees to be associated with permit work classes configured. Information is pulled from custom fields on the application triggering the appropriate fee from the city's master fee schedule. Fees are updated in EnerGov by Information Technology annually upon approval of the City Council.

Matrix #33: *Utilize EnerGov for all development related activities (plan review and inspections) across all departments.* There are configurations and training for other departments such as Park and Recreation, Public Works, Fire and Water to facilitate the development process workflow including review and inspections conducted. This will continually be addressed through the Matrix Report process improvement with support from the development departments. Information Technology is conducting meetings with the various groups to understand business processes so that they can be implemented into EnerGov.

- **Matrix #34:** *Implement electronic application and plan submittals for all development application types.* All applications and plan submittals are electronically submitted through Ventura OPS by applicants. Community Development is working closely with Information Technology to enhance the electronically submitted application process.

The Community Development Director agrees to implement the following recommendations in the future:

- **Recommendation-04**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify specific steps that will be taken to reduce turnaround times to comply with California's Permit Streamlining Act and include expected completion dates for those steps by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-04

This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-10 (Matrix 1)**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Matrix #1: *Upon updating the adopted codes, create a decision-making authority matrix that summarizes the respective roles of staff, boards, and commission in the development review process. This authority table should be posted on the City's website.* Staff is working on developing a decision-making matrix to explain the entitlement process to be posted on our website

and to be used for training staff. Information Technology is identifying development processes including decision makers and respective roles of staff. These processes will be used to facilitate conversations on the roles of boards and commissions in the development process.

- **Recommendation-11**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council re-examine the roles of the HPC and DRC, taking into consideration the goals outlined in the Matrix Consulting Group Report to streamline the entitlement approval process by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-11

The Community Development Department will again re-examine the roles of the HPC and DRC with the City Council and receive direction on a desired path moving forward.

The Community Development Director believes the following recommendations are not warranted or reasonable:

- **Recommendation-10**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-10 (Matrix #41, 42)

See the below detailed information on each Matrix Recommendation.

Matrix #41: Utilize features in EnerGov to track time spent on all stages of the development projects (e.g. inspection, plan check, etc.). This is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Planning Division will track time spent on processes when a deposit fee is collected. However, time tracking for each individual task will take more staff time than the city would benefit from the metrics captured.

Matrix #42: Utilize features in EnerGov to generate comprehensive reports on time spent on development activity. This is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Planning Division will track time spent and will be able to generate a report on time spent for processes that a deposit fee is collected. With Matrix #41 being deemed as not warranted or not reasonable, there is no need for Matrix #42 as there will be no data to capture through reports.

The City of Ventura is committed to improving the development review process. Streamlining the Development Review Process has been a priority for several years. In 2019, the Ventura City Council contracted with Matrix Consulting Group to improve the process of reviewing land use applications. The consulting group conducted a multiphase analysis, examining the organizational and operational aspects of development services across all relevant divisions. As

commented in the Ventura County Grand Jury report, “the Grand Jury also found that Oxnard and Ventura are striving to improve their processes, hire staff and comply with state laws that combine stricter timelines with more flexible land use.”

The City of Ventura has identified improvements that needs to be completed including milestones through the process. This document is being used in coordination with workshops, status updates, and focal sessions with stakeholders. A large portion of the recommendations have been upgraded to in the process of implementing since the response letter provided by the City of Ventura Mayor on behalf of the City Council. We will continue to strive to improve processes through addressing the recommendations of the Ventura County Grand Jury, completing recommendations from the Matrix Consulting Group and enhancing services to the community.

Respectfully,



Rachel Dimond, AICP
Community Development Director

Cc: Ventura County Grand Jury, 800 S. Victoria Avenue, L#3751 Ventura, CA 93009
Ventura County Grand Jury, Fax (805) 658-4523

Attachment:

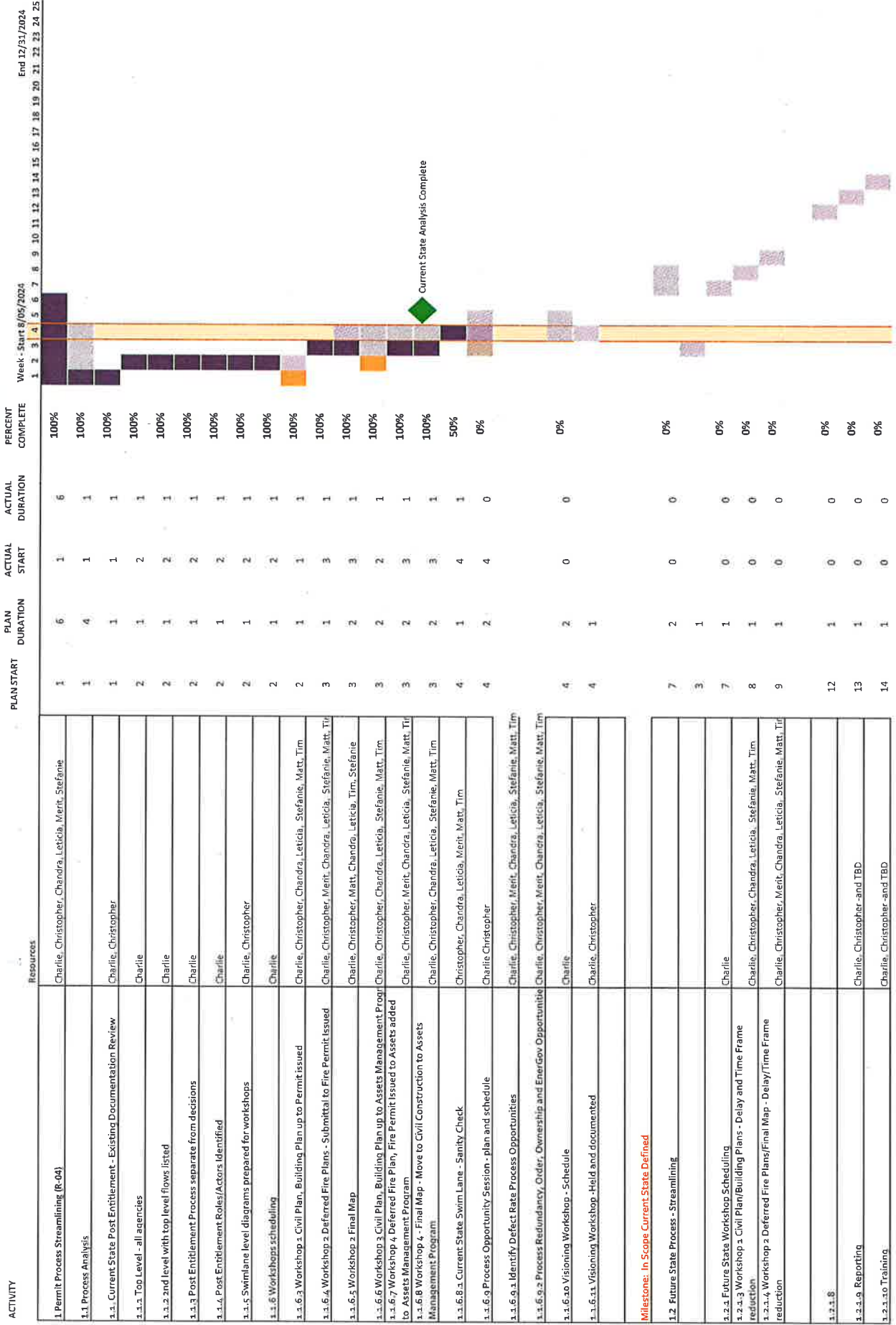
- A. Grand Jury – Permitting Improvements

ATTACHMENT A

Grand Jury - Permitting Improvements

Select a period to highlight at right. A legend describing the charting follows

Period Highlight: 4 Plan Duration Actual Start % Complete Actual (beyond plan)



ACTIVITY	Resources	PLAN START	PLAN DURATION	ACTUAL START	ACTUAL DURATION	PERCENT COMPLETE
Milestone: Streamlining Process Changes Defined		0	0	0	0	0%
2 Annual Progress Report Error Correction (R05)		0	0	0	0	0%
2.1 Report Error Analysis		0	0	0	0	0%
2.1.1 Error Identification	Shana, Leona	5	1	0	0	0%
2.1.2 Report Error Resolution	Shana, Leona	6	1	0	0	0%
2.1.3 Annual Progress Report Draft Approval	Shana, Leona, Jonathon	7	2	0	0	0%
2.1.4 Annual Progress Report Publishing	Shana, Leona, Jonathon	9	3	0	0	0%
2.1.4.1 Report Distribution	Shana, Leona, Jonathon	12	1	0	0	0%
3 EnerGov Recruiting (R-06)	Leticia and April - Permits Tim and Josh - Inspection Matt - Land Development staff and the City Surveyor	0	0	0	0	0%
3.1 Recruiting Classification Development		0	0	0	0	0%
3.1.1 Position Recruiting Strategy		8	2	0	0	0%
3.1.1.1 Continuous Recruitment Deployed		10	5	0	0	0%
4 Standardized Training (R-07)	Leticia and April - Permits Tim and Josh - Inspection Matt - Land Development staff and the City Surveyor	0	0	0	0	0%
4.1 New Hire Training Program		0	0	0	0	0%
4.1.1 New Hire Training Materials		0	0	0	0	0%
4.1.1.1 New Hire Training materials requirements		5	5	0	0	0%
4.1.1.2 New Hire Training materials design		6	1	0	0	0%
4.1.1.3 New Hire Training materials development		7	2	0	0	0%
4.1.1.4 New Hire Training materials testing		8	3	0	0	0%
4.1.1.5 New Hire training materials finalized		11	1	0	0	0%
4.1.2 New Hire Trainer Identified		8	2	0	0	0%
4.1.3 New Hire Training Available		12	1	0	0	0%
4.2 Existing Staff Training Program		0	0	0	0	0%
4.2.1 Existing Staff Training Materials		0	0	0	0	0%
4.2.1.1 Existing Staff Training requirements		8	1	0	0	0%
4.2.1.2 Existing staff training materials design		9	1	0	0	0%
4.2.1.3 Existing staff training materials development		10	5	0	0	0%
4.2.1.4 Existing staff training materials test		15	1	0	0	0%
4.2.1.5 Existing staff training materials finalized		16	1	0	0	0%
4.2.2 Existing Staff Training Delivery		17	1	0	0	0%

Streamlining Changes Defined

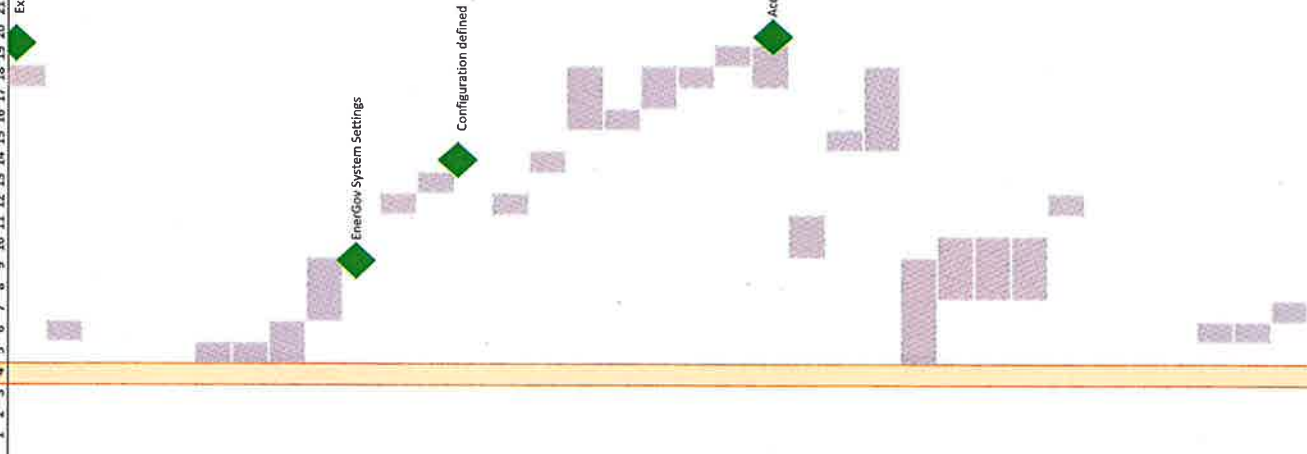
Progress Report Error Correction Complete

EnerGov Recruiting

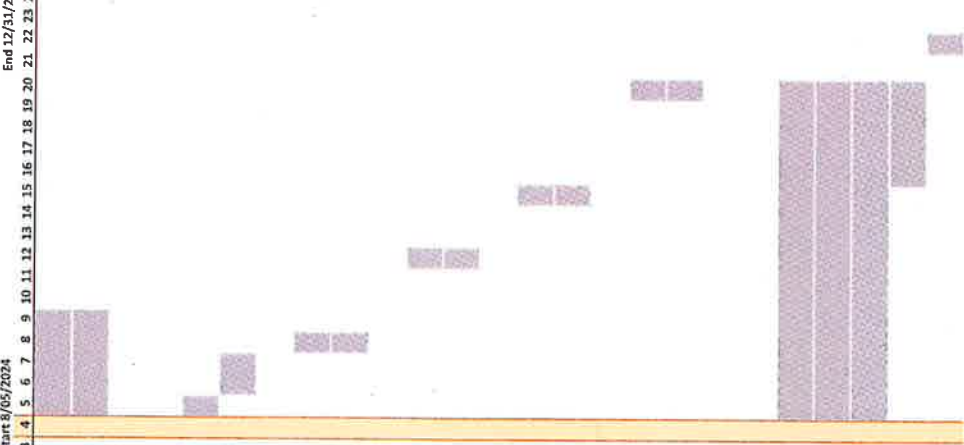
New Hire Training

ACTIVITY	PLAN START	PLAN DURATION	ACTUAL START	ACTUAL DURATION	PERCENT COMPLETE
4.2.3 Existing Staff Trainer Identified	18	1	0	0	0%
4.3 Training Baseline Statistics	6	1	0	0	0%
5 EnerGov Utilization (R-08)	0	0	0	0	0%
5.1 EnerGov Current Use	0	0	0	0	0%
5.1.1 User Access by Department -	5	1	0	0	0%
5.1.2 Current configuration settings	5	1	0	0	0%
5.1.3 Current system dependencies	5	2	0	0	0%
5.1.4 Current Integrations	7	3	0	0	0%
5.2 Future Use Design	0	0	0	0	0%
5.2.1 Access requirements	12	1	0	0	0%
5.2.2 Configuration Planned Changes	13	1	0	0	0%
5.3 Testing	0	0	0	0	0%
5.3.1 Test plan	12	1	0	0	0%
5.3.2 Unit testing	14	1	0	0	0%
5.3.3 User acceptance	16	3	0	0	0%
5.3.3.1 User acceptance scripts	16	1	0	0	0%
5.3.3.2 User acceptance testing	17	2	0	0	0%
5.3.3.3 User acceptance regression	18	1	0	0	0%
5.3.3.4 User acceptance sign off	19	1	0	0	0%
5.4 Change Control	18	2	0	0	0%
5.5 Training scope defined	10	2	0	0	0%
5.6 Operations support - Run Book	15	1	0	0	0%
5.7 Documentation of system settings	15	4	0	0	0%
6 Reporting (R-09)	5	5	0	0	0%
6.1 Report Specification Development	8	3	0	0	0%
6.2 Report Development	8	3	0	0	0%
6.3 Report Training	12	1	0	0	0%
7 Matrix Consulting Recommendations					
7.1 Authority Matrix (1)					
7.1.1 Identify activities requiring authorization	6	1	0	0	0%
7.1.2 Identify roles of staff, boards and commissions	6	1	0	0	0%
7.1.3 Identify / model condition driven authorizations	7	1	0	0	0%

Resources



ACTIVITY	PLAN START	PLAN DURATION	ACTUAL START	ACTUAL DURATION	PERCENT COMPLETE
Resources					
7.1.4 Draft, review, finalize the authority matrix	8	1	0	0	0%
7.1.5 Post the authority matrix to site	9	1	0	0	0%
7.2 CEQA Process (13)					
7.2.1 Change future state process flow					
7.3 Consolidated list of review timelines (17)					
7.4 Development Review Webpage (20)					
7.5 Permitting Software Training (covered in R-07) (31)					
7.6 Utilize permit software to calculate plan and permitting fees (32)					



ACTIVITY	PLAN START	PLAN DURATION	ACTUAL START	ACTUAL DURATION	PERCENT COMPLETE
8 Change Management					
8.1 Awareness	5	5	0	0	0%
8.1.1 Survey	5	5	0	0	0%
8.1.2 Messaging	0	0	0	0	0%
8.2 Desire	0	0	0	0	0%
8.2.1 Survey	5	1	10	0	0%
8.2.2 Messaging	6	2	0	0	0%
8.3 Knowledge	0	0	0	0	0%
8.3.1 Survey	8	1	0	0	0%
8.3.2 Messaging	8	1	0	0	0%
8.4 Ability	0	0	0	0	0%
8.4.1 Survey	15	1	0	0	0%
8.4.2 Messaging	15	1	0	0	0%
8.5 Reinforcement	0	0	0	0	0%
8.5.1 Survey	20	1	0	0	0%
8.5.2 Messaging	20	1	0	0	0%
9 Communication					
9.1 Leadership	0	0	0	0	0%
9.2 Management	5	16	0	0	0%
9.3 Supervisor	5	16	0	0	0%
9.4 Staff	16	5	0	0	0%
9.5 Customers	22	1	0	0	0%