

# Memo

**To:** Scott Huber, Town Attorney

**From:** Josh Pino, Investigator

**cc:** Michael O'Brien, Interim Town Manager

**Date:** October 13, 2025

**Re:** Town of Paradise Building Department

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## Introduction:

As per your request, over the past two weeks I have been investigating & auditing the current organization structure, permit issuance processes and inspection methodology & procedures. Below I will list some of the issues I found and recommendations that can be implemented in short order to correct the major issues and help in regaining the public's trust in the important work performed by Town staff in the issuance of permits, review of plans and in conducting field inspections.

## Community Development Department Administration:

Currently the Community Development Department is managed by two "co-directors" which is unique for most jurisdictions in California. In addition, the current director in charge of the building, code enforcement, plan review, development engineering and is also the fire marshal and oversees the supervision of the building permit issuance personnel. These management duties, in conjunction with being the department's co-director, can lead to inefficiencies and lack of proper supervision.

## Recommendation:

I recommend that the Town organize the community development department in the following manner:

- That the Town employs a community development director as soon as possible to allow the current co-directors to concentrate on the management of day-to-day operations. This will also provide for an additional level of accountability. The Town may want to consider employing this individual through a consulting firm while recruitment is conducted.

- That the Town consider moving the code enforcement section under the planning director and reclassify the current “Director of Building & Code Enforcement” to: “Building Official/Fire Marshal.”

### **Permit Counter:**

In the review of the permit issuance process I found various issues regarding the verifications of licenses and workman’s compensation insurance. In addition, I found that the verification of ownership and agency to represent an owner for the purposes of obtaining building permits to be inconsistent with legal requirements, including the required signatures.

### **Recommendation:**

- Provide in-person training to all employees involved with the issuance of permits related to best practices, ethics, and legal requirements for permit applications.
- Assign a minimum of two permit technicians that are solely dedicated to the intake and issuance of building permits.
- Provide classroom training for the two assigned permit technicians and their supervisors as soon as possible.
- Arrange for trainers to work with Town staff at the permit counter for a period of two weeks to ensure that the above-mentioned training is properly implemented.
- Revise the procedures manual to reflect new procedures.
- Change permit technician classification to require ICC Permit Technician Certification
- Provide informational material to the public regarding any changes in procedures.

### **Building inspections:**

My review of the building inspection process included the review of various inspection results, review of complaints, including permit records, photographs and other supporting documents. In addition, I interviewed the director and the three building inspectors. My investigation revealed that there is a lack of basic knowledge among the building inspectors relating to code knowledge, following inspection protocols and the understanding the requirements of supplemental plan documents, including truss calculations, energy calculations and manufacturer’s installation requirements. In talking with the personnel involved, it is my opinion that the lack of this understanding is leading to various missing items during the inspection process which are therefore leading to the current flurry of complaints the Town is experiencing from those purchasing the new homes being built in the Town of Paradise. The building inspectors are there to assure that the minimum building code standards are enforced and as a result must be competent to perform these duties.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide in-person ethics training to all employees involved with the building inspection process.
- Provide classroom training in the inspection of residential buildings, including plan reading, interpreting structural, energy and truss calculations.
- Employ the services of a Field Training Officer (FTO) that can daily serve as a resource for building inspectors and audit their work for a period of at least six months. (Recommend that the Town retain the services of Mike Genna, building inspector with BPR. Mike has worked in the Town before, lost his house during the Camp Fire, and is extremely knowledgeable in all areas of residential building inspection).
- Provide off-site training offered by various professional organizations for all building inspectors employed by the Town.
- Require that Building Inspector II, obtain a second certification as required by the Town's job specifications within ninety days of returning to work.

**Additional:**

Due to the volume of current complaints being generated and being referred to the building department, I would recommend that the Town employ the services of an "ombudsman" that can assist homeowners with obtaining the help they may need to resolve various construction defect issues, including with local, state or legal resources. By employing such an individual, the Town will help its constituents with problem resolution and allow department staff to further work on preventing current issues from recurring.