
Building Standards Division

2003 Annual Report



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Building Standards Manager

CONSTRUCTION \$ VALUES & PERMIT ACTIVITY

Permit issuance continued very strong in 2003 and exceeded the record pace of the previous years in the number of permits issued. The year 2003 ended up with nearly \$60 million in construction value, \$15 million short of the record set in 2001 of \$75 million (2002 was nearly \$70 million).

2001 saw many large-scale, costly projects and 2002 was similar. This past year started a trend of increased number of permits although for smaller projects. 2003 however, still ranks as the third highest year of construction values and first in the total number of permits issued.

All other facets of permit issuance had high levels in number of permits: new homes, signs, electrical, heating, plumbing, change of use, day care homes, moving/demolition, sidewalk/driveway, etc.

2003 Year End Report – Permits, Fees, and Valuations

| Permit Type | # 2002 | # 2003 | Fees 2002 | Fees 2003 | Values 2002 | Values 2003 |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 family | 82 | 100 | | | | |
| 2 family | 10 | 5 | | | | |
| 3 family | 9 | 0 | | | | |
| Other Res | 96 | 123 | | | | |
| Total Res | 197 | 228 | 42,778 | 41,184 | 15,917,482 | 18,585,594 |
| Total Com | 94 | 113 | 68,548 | 68,285 | 32,870,850 | 30,789,393 |
| Total Bldg | 291 | 341 | 111,326 | 109,469 | 48,788,332 | 49,374,987 |
| Electric | 458 | 489 | 71,182 | 60,399 | 8,182,863 | 3,728,337 |
| HVAC | 340 | 294 | 63,150 | 63,966 | 6,379,186 | 3,652,727 |
| Plumbing | 248 | 241 | 76,936 | 59,325 | 5,516,390 | 2,969,707 |
| Signs | 97 | 134 | 4,891 | 6,162 | | |
| Demo/Move | 19 | 13 | | 962 | | |
| Sidewalk | 11 | 11 | | 451 | | |
| Total All | 1,464 | 1,523 | 327,485 | 300,734 | 68,866,771 | 59,725,758 |
| % change | | 4% | | -9% | | -14% |

OPERATIONS

All inspectors were required to enroll in mandatory State of Ohio continuing education training for their respective State licenses. All inspectors completed this training during 2003. Additionally, all inspectors participated in the annual Ohio Building Officials Conference held in Columbus during February. The conference had inspector training and seminars conducted by experts from around the country. Other training was completed as required by the State of Ohio.

The City has been undergoing a transition in commercial fire alarm monitoring and the Building Standards Division has spearheaded this effort. Over 150 private commercial structures have undergone a transition from the City monitoring their fire alarm systems to private alarm monitoring companies. This change was required to bring the City in line with the law and to limit liability. The result has been a definite improvement in the performance of the fire alarms within the city.

The Division completed their Insurance Services Office review during November, 2003. We were graded on the "Building Code Effectiveness Grading Program". This program was developed by the ISO in the wake of the tremendous losses insurance companies and their customers experienced after hurricanes Hugo in 1989 and Andrew in 1992. According to the industry, as much as a quarter of the \$16 billion in damages inflicted by hurricane Andrew alone were due to poor code enforcement. ISO field personnel evaluated key elements of local code enforcement. This evaluation produces a rating on a scale of 1 to 10 (one being the highest) and incorporates information on personnel training, certification, staffing levels, plan review, inspection expertise, and other factors that measure effectiveness of code enforcement of a jurisdiction. Insurers now use these building code evaluations as a key factor in assessing risk and determining residential and commercial insurance premiums. In general, a better ISO rating often reflects lower insurance premiums in a community. The City's Building Standards Division received a rating of 3 for commercial construction and a 4 for residential construction. These are considered very good scores for building departments in a city the size of Wooster.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

The property maintenance inspector has continued to reach out to the various neighborhood groups (SPINK, Inc., etc.), real estate manager/owner groups (TRICREA, etc.), and government entities (WMHA, etc.). This increased synergy and public education has helped clean up neighborhoods, address problem properties, and produced better enforcement of our maintenance code. Over 250 inspections were conducted in 2002 with emphasis placed on removing unlicensed motor vehicles and garbage and debris from properties. The Division hired a towing company and a hauling company to clean up the properties when the owners were unresponsive. The abatement costs (including administrative costs) were then assessed to the property owners. This has proved to be an extremely effective enforcement tool. During 2003, this effort continued with **393 inspections** conducted and additional emphasis placed on other violations. 367 cases were started and 345 were resolved. Some of the cases handled included: abandoned refrigerators, tent inspections, right-of-way violations, trash container violations, unprotected open ditch inspections, yard sale violations, fence inspections, animal nuisances, accessory building inspections, rental unit smoke alarm inspections, seasonal merchandise violations, illegal dumping, sidewalk snow removal violations, noise/odor violations, etc.

BACK FLOW VALVE PROGRAM

The backflow valve program is in place to protect public health by guarding the water supply. The program takes on special importance at various special events during the year and during 2003, Independence Day, Woosterfest on the Square, and the Wayne County Fair this proved to be true. Approximately 150,000 visitors used our water during these times through over 400 water taps. By being proactive during these times, these events were safe and successful concerning the water supply.

Additionally, non-testable valves were added to our water system on residential water supplies and testable valves were added to commercial water supplies. Approximately 1,000 valves were tested and test data maintained in our database. Several hundred inspections, surveys, and site observations were made during 2003 by the backflow program coordinator.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Building Standards Division has continued to keep up with the increased construction and permit activity during the last few years with very little overtime and no increased staffing. We are establishing the goal of initiating our periodic exterior property maintenance inspection program during 2004. With this program, targeted areas of the City will have entire streets, blocks, or areas undergoing an exterior inspection for compliance with our adopted property maintenance code in several key areas. This will be the first proactive approach to property maintenance the City of Wooster has initiated. All inspectors will assist the property maintenance inspector in the site inspections and violation notices.

The Building Standards Division generated revenue to offset budgeted expenses. The revenue policy of “covering” 80% of the expenses through permit sales, fees, and plan reviews was successfully met again this year. The utilities division paid for the backflow program and offset these expenses. We have the goal of evaluating fees again this year and increasing these to keep pace with rising expenses and meet our policy guidelines.

As a final note, the municipal building renovation took place in 2003 and we expect to be completed early in 2004. The Building Standards Division contributed a lot of time and effort to this project. We were excited by the opportunity to participate in a successful project that will meet the needs of the citizens and employees of the City of Wooster.