Code Enforcement Operational Assessment

May 13, 2025

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MAY 13, 2025

Operational Assessment for the Code Enforcement Division

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

Presented by Guidehouse

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Agenda

- Project Background and Approach
- Our Understanding of Code Enforcement
- Peer City Leading Practices
- Future State Recommendations
- Implementation Roadmap



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Project Background and Approach

Project Background and Objectives

The City engaged Guidehouse over 12 weeks to conduct an operational assessment of the Code Enforcement Division

Project Purpose

The operational assessment of the Code Enforcement Division includes the rapid analysis of processes and resources against the Division's current workload, a review of alignment between customer and City Council expectations and Division objectives, and identifying opportunities to streamline, prioritize, or invest in services

Key Objectives



Discovery and Current State Analysis

Identify gaps and challenges in current services, organizational structure, staffing levels, and processes



Operational Analysis

Understand customer experience and expectations from residents and City leaders



Leading Practices Research

Identify leading practices from peer cities to support the Division in meeting its goals



Future State Recommendations

Develop future state recommendations and implementation roadmap that refine and strengthen the way Code Enforcement serves the public

Project Approach and Inputs

We engaged over 30 city stakeholders, 72 customers, and 3 peer cities, and analyzed 1,134 customer survey data points

Project Approach: Facilitated and collected City staff and community feedback through stakeholder engagement methods. Leveraged current state and operational analysis findings to develop recommendations for the Division.

Project Inputs

Documents and Data

80+ Documents

- Reviewed internal documents
- Conducted workload analysis based on 2024 Division caseload data
- Mapped key General Code processes

Council and Staff Interviews

30+ City Touchpoints

- Spoke with 39 City staff members through dedicated interviews and 5 working sessions
- Spoke with Mayor Mahan's team and 3 City Council District Offices

Customer Touchpoints

72 Participants

- Spoke with 8 customers through in-depth 1:1 interviews
- Observed 64 customer interactions through call listening, front desk observations, and inspection ridealongs

Survey Analysis

1,134 Survey Respondents

- Reviewed and analyzed data spanning ten years of Customer Surveys, highlighting pain points, strengths, and trends
- Survey results taken from 2013-2014, 2019-2020, and 2023-2024
- Responses came from all regions of San José

Peer City Engagement

3 Peer City Interviews

- Landscape desktop research to understand comparative characteristics and data points
- Spoke with representatives from Code divisions in San Diego, Seattle, and Austin to understand practices and innovative ideas

Our Understanding of Code Enforcement

The Division's Key Challenges

The Division is facing key challenges across the following five areas, leading to expanding duties, overwhelming staff workloads, challenges in prioritizing strategic work, and barriers to effective communication[1]



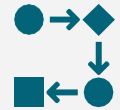
Communication Breakdowns

Communication breakdowns cause frustration among stakeholders and prolong case lifecycles



Overextended Scope

Division is assigned tasks beyond primary program responsibilities, expanding scope of work without corresponding increase in funding, staffing, or authority



Process Inefficiencies

Primarily engaged in operational and reactive work, taking away time for strategic, proactive pursuits to support an optimized organization



Technology Gaps

Division's case management system and available devices prevent inspectors from working as effectively as possible



Staffing Gaps & Workload

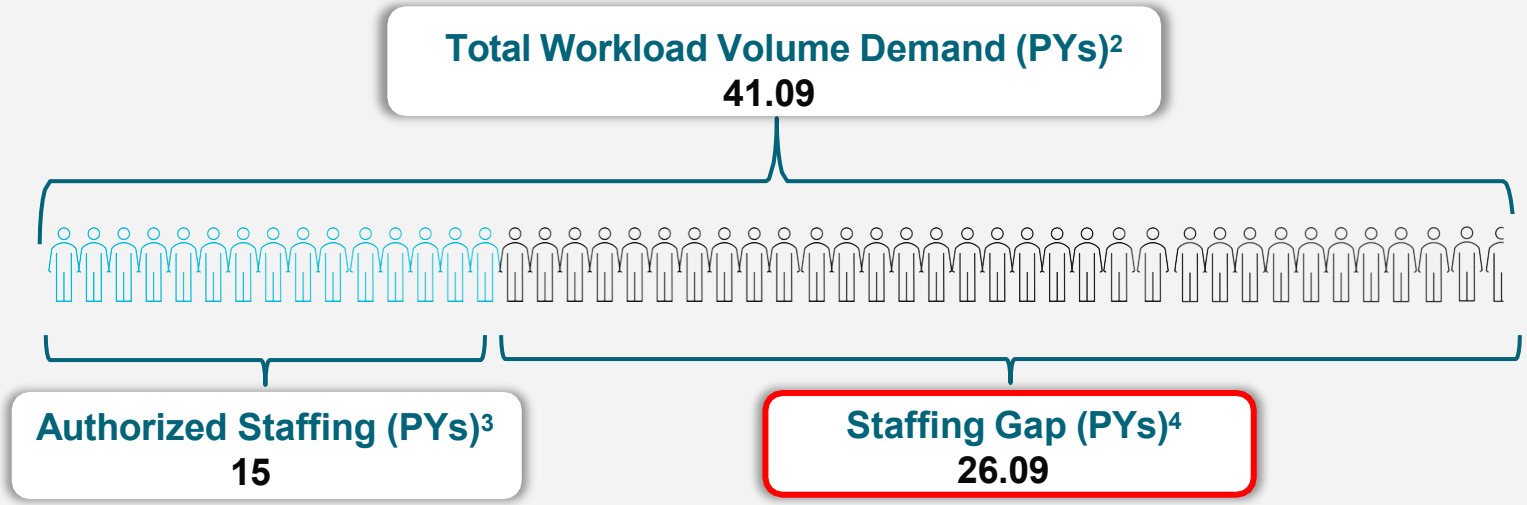
Staffing and workload challenges lead to vacancies, a reactive management approach, and long processing times

[1]*Detailed findings can be found in the Appendix*

Current State Estimated Staffing Gap

To close Code Enforcement's 2024 General Code caseload[1] in one year without any operational improvements, the Division would need an additional ~26 General Code inspectors

- Managing and closing the current caseload is not feasible with the existing staffing levels, processes, scope, and technology available
- Operational improvements, training, etc. can help reduce the number of staff required to close all cases



[1]2024 data include open (4,289), new (3,404), and closed cases (3,088).1,300 inactive cases were subtracted from caseload
[2]Required staffing level based on estimated workload volume demand
[3]Number of funded positions
[4]Formula: Total Workload Volume Demand – Authorized Staffing

The Customer Experience

Five key themes emerged from customer observations and interviews, which highlight frustration with the time it takes to close cases, concern with quality of service and consistency of enforcement, and confusion around Code Enforcement's purview[1]



Time to Close

Many customers feel that case timelines are overly long, causing frustration and inefficiencies



Service Quality

Survey analysis demonstrates that over time, customers' satisfaction with Code Enforcement's service quality has decreased



Communication Inconsistencies

Communication is inconsistent, with some customers highlighting this as a strength and others expressing frustration with gaps



Complexity of Scope & Cases

Customers are often confused by Code's purview, which can be exacerbated by the Division's wide range of programs and the general complexity of cases



Inconsistent Enforcement

Some customers feel enforcement is inconsistent across inspectors, regions, and socioeconomic status

[1]*Detailed findings can be found in the Appendix*

Survey Analysis Key Trends

Three key trends in residents' Code Enforcement concerns and service satisfaction were identified through a review of 1,134 responses from three survey years (2013-2014, 2019-2020, and 2023-2024)



1 Regional differences in Code Enforcement concerns exist

The top concern across all areas of residence in San José is blight (e.g., overgrown vegetation, storage of items/debris, graffiti, lawn parking, and inoperable vehicles). However, illegal occupancy is a larger concern in East and South San José than other areas, while sub-standard housing conditions is a larger concern in North, Central, and West San José than other areas.

2 Although overall most respondents indicated their reported Code Enforcement issue was corrected, public perception of Code Enforcement's effectiveness has declined, and trends vary by region

Since 2013-2024, positive ratings on effectiveness have declined across all San José areas of residence except for North San José, where positive ratings have increased by 20 percentage points.

3 Although customer service satisfaction is still mostly positive or neutral, satisfaction has also declined over the time frame analyzed

For example, agreement that Code Enforcement staff are courteous and timely fell from 72% in 2013- 2014 to 54% in 2023-2024, reflecting concerns about service delivery. This concern is also reflected by the ratings provided on the Code Enforcement Division's responsiveness and helpfulness.

Peer City Leading Practices

Peer City Benchmarking | Overview

The Guidehouse Team analyzed data and interviews with three cities to identify leading practices for code enforcement operations

		San José	San Diego	Seattle	Austin
Code Enforcement Division Attributes	**Total Code Enforcement Budget (FY24-25)**	$13.38M	$12.3M	$15M	$32.5M
	Per Capita Spend (Code Budget)	$13	$9	$20	$33
	Number of Residents Per Inspector	19,789	24,356	34,322	12,893
	Total Code Enforcement FTEs	70.5	90	60.5	116
	Total Inspector FTEs	49	57	22	76
	Total Manager / Supervisor FTEs	11	18	9	15
	Number of Programs	16	11	6	8
	Workload Assigned by	Census Tract	Council District	Region	Region
	Case Management Application	CES	Accela	Accela	AMANDA
	Use of Tablets	-	✓	✓	✓
	Formal Succession Planning	-	✓	✓	✓
	Community Engagement Program	-	-	✓	✓

Key

- > ~10% or more
- < ~10% or more
- ✓ exists in the Division
- - does not exist in the Division

Peer City Benchmarking | Key Strategies & Initiatives

Peer departments and divisions in Austin, San Diego, and Seattle exhibited several key leading practice strategies and programmatic initiatives that San José may consider[1]



Succession Planning

Facilitate succession planning by allowing staff to substitute YOE for educational requirements and staffing multiple tiers of inspectors



Streamlined Enforcement Process

Create a strict, automatic case prioritization process that escalates to enforcement efficiently



Focused Scope

Maintain a narrower program scope aligned with building/zoning compliance and have additional support staff to enable inspectors to focus on new scope



Robust Community Engagement

Use community engagement initiatives to raise awareness and employ a Community Engagement Manager



Strategic Roles

Employ roles such as Chief Strategy Officer, Legal Liaison, and Strategic Advisor to coordinate strategic pursuits

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[1]*Detailed findings can be found in the Appendix*

Future State Recommendations

Recommendations Overview

Current state gaps map to three recommendations themes to support Code Enforcement's mission and objectives

Current State Gaps

- Staffing Gaps and Workload
- Communication Breakdowns
- Process Inefficiencies
- Overextended Scope
- Technology Gaps
- Decreasing Service Quality
- Inconsistent Enforcement
- Complexity of Scope & Cases
- Long Case Closure Times

Recommendation Theme

Develop & Optimize Workforce

5 Recommendations

Improve Operational & Program Performance

7 Recommendations

Increase Customer Service & Communication

3 Recommendations

Outputs

Streamline Service Delivery

Prioritize Services

Opportunities to Invest

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Theme 1 | Develop & Optimize Workforce

Theme	Recommendation	Description	*Level of Impact*	*Level of Effort*	*Output*
Develop & Optimize Workforce	1.1 Modify organizational structure and hire in key areas	• Modify the Division's organizational structure to better align operations with Division functions • Hire temporary Transformation Program Manager to implement recommendations • Increase Division capacity by creating four new staff positions in key areas	High	High	⋙ $
	1.2 Conduct classification assessment	• Conduct a classification assessment to understand current inspector job levels and staff capabilities • After resolving cases pending clearing from General Code backlog, conduct a detailed workload analysis considering case complexity and priority. Hire additional General Code Inspectors based on updated workload analysis	High	Low	⋙ $
	1.3 Increase training opportunities	• Introduce new training opportunities and reinforce existing training to empower staff and improve performance	High	Low	$
	1.4 Optimize recruitment and retention	• Review recruitment practices to optimize and maximize reach and build talent pipeline • Review talent management and retention practices	High	Medium	$
	1.5 Establish a succession planning process	• Prioritize succession planning and prepare staff to take over additional tasks when inspectors or leadership exit the organization	Medium	Low	$

Key: ★ *Council Action* **Low**: *4 - 6* **Medium**: *7 - 9* **High**: *10+* ⋙ *Streamline* *Prioritize* $ *Invest*

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Theme 2 | Improve Operational & Program Performance

Theme	Recommendation	Description	Level of Impact	Level of Effort	Output
Improve Operational & Program Performance	2.1 Set strategic vision for Division	• Establish strategy to align on vision, goals, outcomes, and metrics	High	High	
	2.2 Realign and narrow program scope	• Identify programs that need realignment and/or resource planning	High	High	
	2.3 Expand pilot programs	• Expand current pilot programs and introduce new programs to take a more proactive approach to violations and increase accountability	High	High	
	2.4 Update policies to support strategic enforcement	• Revise existing and implement new policies to support strategic enforcement and encourage compliance	High	Low	
	2.5 Streamline processes, reduce manual tasks, and implement quality controls	• Update process steps for complaints intake, inspections, scheduling, citations, Compliance Orders, and Appeals Hearing Board preparation	High	Low	
	2.6 Enhance performance metrics and accountability	• Assess current KPIs, assess gaps, and select KPIs in support of the Division's goals • Establish benchmarks and targets for each metric	High	Medium	
	2.7 Expedite and prioritize adoption of CodeX	• Prioritize the adoption of CodeX as a new Case Management system, identifying opportunities to expedite this timeline where possible • Ensure CodeX meets specific requirements and needs of the inspectors and customers • Identify which mobile technologies are best suited for each group, position, and duty and procure/expand use of chosen technologies	High	High	

Key: ★ *Council Action* ***Low**: 4 - 6* ***Medium**: 7 - 9* ***High**: 10+* *Streamline* *Prioritize* $ *Invest*

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Theme 3 | Increase Customer Service & Communication

Theme	Recommendation	Description	Level of Impact	Level of Effort	Output
Increase Customer Service & Comms.	3.1 Optimize communication and improve self-service	• Create internal reference tools and templates to standardize customer service processes and support effective communications • Update call center scripts to include instructions on accessing the self-service portal • Require inspectors to leave a voicemail when calling back a customer and develop a standard script for what information inspectors should share	High	Low	⟫
	3.2 Invest in community education and partnerships	• Offer educational workshops to inform residents about local codes, rules, and regulations • Distribute informational flyers and newsletters through various channels to inform the public about code violations and offer materials in multiple languages • Host public meetings and explore hosting office hours to discuss enforcement issues, upcoming changes in regulation, and gather feedback from residents • Tailor community outreach to the needs of the specific neighborhood	Medium	Medium	$
	3.3 Improve cross-departmental coordination	• Explore strengthening and formalizing partnerships with other City organizations	High	Medium	⟟

Key: ★ *Council Action* ***Low**: 4 - 6* ***Medium**: 7 - 9* ***High**: 10+* ⟫ *Streamline* ⟟ *Prioritize* $ *Invest*

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Implementation Roadmap

Recommendation Roadmap Phases

Below are the three phases for implementing the recommendations

Now Phase

The first implementation phase focuses on 1) strategic recommendations that will impact how other recommendations are implemented and 2) recommendations that can be implemented relatively quickly with lower effort and limited dependencies.

Priority Level

1.1	Modify organizational structure/hire in key areas *(strategic)*
2.1	Set strategic vision for Division *(strategic)*
2.7	Expedite and prioritize adoption of CodeX *(strategic)*
1.4	Optimize recruitment and retention *(quick win)*
2.4	Update policies to support strategic enforcement *(quick win)*
3.1	Optimize communication and improve self-service *(quick win)*
1.3	Increase training opportunities *(quick win)*

Next Phase

The second implementation phase focuses on 1) high impact recommendations that are dependent on recommendations in the "Now" phase and 2) medium to high-impact but lower effort recommendations with no dependencies.

1.2	Conduct classification assessment *(dependent on 1.1)*
2.2	Realign and narrow program scope *(high effort, high impact)*
2.3	Expand pilot programs *(dependent on 1.1)*
2.5	Streamline processes, reduce manual tasks, and implement quality controls *(high impact, medium effort)*
2.6	Enhance performance metrics and accountability *(dependent on 2.1)*
3.3	Improve cross-departmental coordination *(high impact, medium effort)*

Later Phase

The final implementation phase focuses on the remaining recommendations that are dependent on recommendations outlined in the previous phases.

1.5	Establish a succession planning process *(medium impact, lower effort)*
3.2	Invest in community education *(medium impact, medium effort)*

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Council Actions and Support

City Council can support Code Enforcement improvements by enabling key recommendations

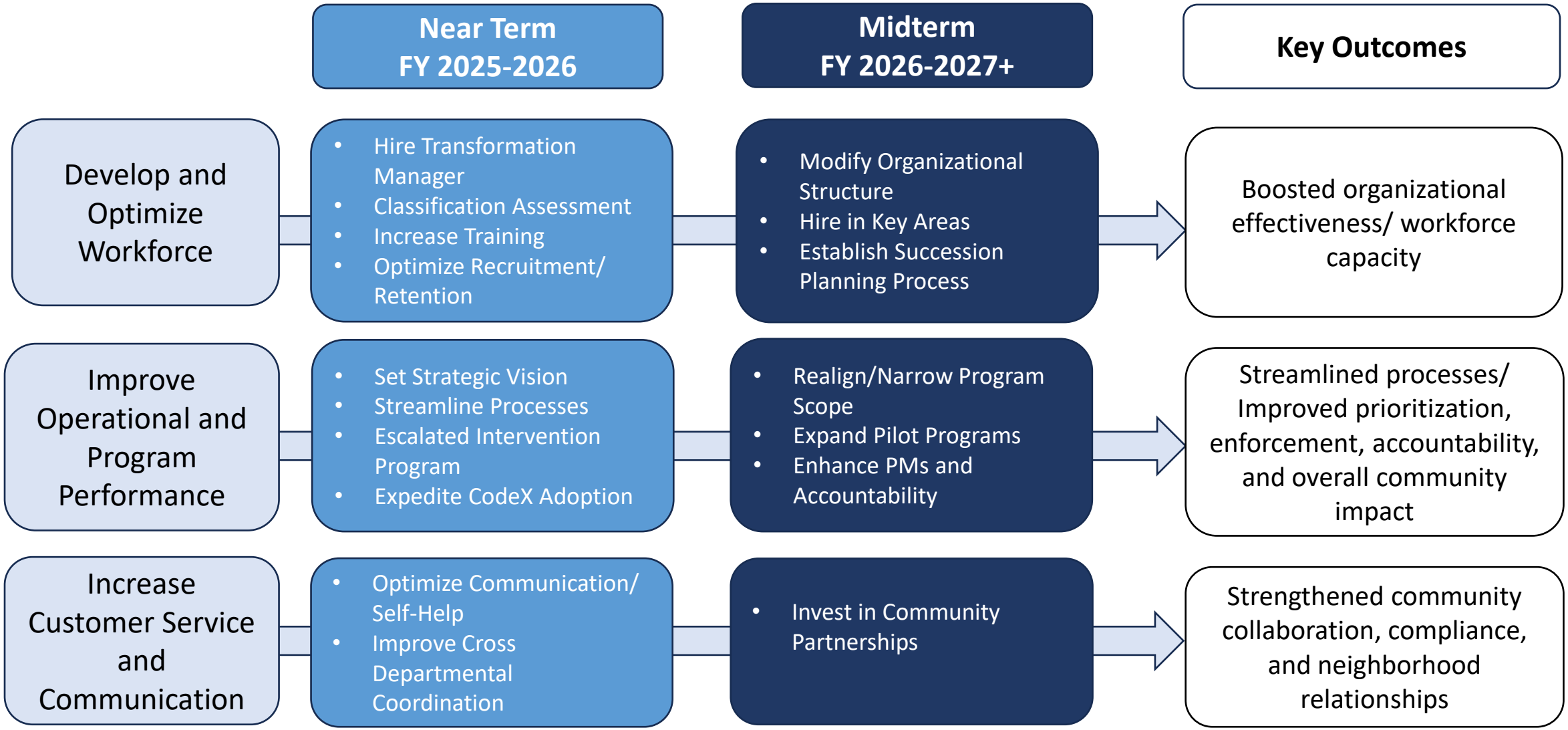
Key Recommendation	*Key Council Action*	*Phase*	*Dependency*
1.1 Modify org structure and hire in key areas	Enable Code Enforcement to create 4-5 new positions: Transformation Program Manager *(temp)*, Strategy & Engagement Manager, General Code Manager, Community Engagement Manager, and Support Analyst	Now	Budget for Program Manager in FY 25/26
1.2 Conduct classification assessment	Consider Code Enforcement recommendations around reclassifying inspectors to support internal career pathways and retention	Next	Rec 1.1 modify org structure
2.2 Realign and narrow program scope	Either 1) dedicate funding and/or 2) transition certain special programs that are beyond the Division's scope to other departments in the City	Next	Rec 2.1 set strategic vision
2.3 Expand pilot programs	Allocate funding to support expansion of FAST and Enhanced Vacant Buildings and Storefronts pilots, and initiation of new pilot program for repeat offender properties	Next	Rec 1.1 hire in key areas

Thank you

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Code Enforcement Implementation Roadmap



Code Enforcement Implementation Roadmap

Near Term Initiatives

- Escalating Enforcement Policy Implementation- **In progress**
- Aged Case Triage/Reduction Project- **In progress**
- Increased Fines Ordinance – **Summer 2025**

Next Steps

- FY 2025-2026 Manager's Budget Addendum to allocate 400k ongoing General Fund Earmarked Reserve to begin implementation work

Evaluation and Follow up

- Provide implementation updates as part of Code Enforcement's Annual Report to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee

Appendix: Key Findings Details

Code Enforcement Division Key Challenges

The Division is facing key challenges across the following five areas, leading to expanding duties, overwhelming staff workloads, challenges in prioritizing strategic work, and barriers to effective communication

	Communication Breakdowns	Overextended Scope	Process Inefficiencies	Technology Gaps	Staffing Gaps and Workload
Findings	Communication breakdowns cause frustration among stakeholders and prolong case lifecycles	Division is assigned tasks beyond primary responsibilities, expanding scope of work without corresponding increase in funding or authority	Primarily engaged in operational and reactive work, taking away time for strategic, proactive pursuits to support an optimized organization	Division's case management system and available devices prevent inspectors from working as effectively as possible	Staffing and workload challenges lead to vacancies, reactive management approach, and long processing times
Examples	• Inspectors **have difficulty keeping up with necessary customer follow-ups** • Though communication has improved with key City partners, **there is an opportunity to further improve and formalize collaboration** • **Inconsistent communication** back to complaining parties causes frustration and leads residents to engage elected officials as mediators	• **Fireworks Program**, added to assist the Fire Department, has received no dedicated funding • **Illegal Dumping Enforcement Program and ADU Amnesty** have been absorbed by General Code resources and lacks dedicated funding • **Massage Program,** added to assist Police Department, but has resulted in significant increase of work for inspectors • **Mobile Vendors Program,** overseen by supervisors, with inspectors from all functions volunteering based on interest • **E3 and Soft Story Programs,** are future programs with no dedicated funding	• **Complaint intake process is decentralized** and Code often fields complaints for other departments/divisions • **Inconsistent case prioritization** can lead to high-priority cases not being addressed in timely manner • Lenient processes and fees may **disincentivize compliance** • Responsible parties can deny inspections, forcing inspectors to **request a warrant** from a judge through the CAO (~2-4 weeks) • **Hearing packets are burdensome to assemble and review**, and simple errors can lead to the case being thrown out	• **Case management system (CES) does not reflect complexity of most cases** (e.g., only allows one type of violation per case, when many cases have multiple related violations) • **CES does not provide workflow/notifications** for efficient case management • **Inspectors are not set up to manage cases on the go,** which requires them to take hand-written notes in the field and transcribe notes in CES at later time • **Self-service portal** for complaining or responsible parties to check complaint status is not leveraged	• Many inspectors are **new to the position**, and therefore encounter challenges in operating independently • **Several vacancies** in key leadership positions causes leaders to spend more time on operations and less on strategy • **No strong pathway for internal promotions,** exacerbated by differences in requirements for staff at different levels • Case volume is **higher than the staff available** to process cases leading to significant backlog and long processing times • Inconsistent reporting structures lead to accountability issues

Customer Experience | Key Takeaways

Five key themes emerged from customer observations and interviews, which highlight frustration with the time it takes to close cases, concern with quality of service and consistency of enforcement, and confusion around Code Enforcement's purview

	Time to Close	Service Quality	Communication Inconsistencies	Complexity of Scope & Cases	Inconsistent Enforcement
Findings	Many customers feel the amount of time it takes to close a case is longer than necessary	Survey analysis demonstrates that over time, customers' perception of Code Enforcement's customer service quality has decreased	Communication is inconsistent, with some customers highlighting this as a strength and others expressing frustration with gaps	Due to Code Enforcement's wide range of programs and the general complexity of cases, customers are often confused by Code's purview	Some customers feel enforcement is inconsistent, due to regional variations, complex cases, and reliance on inspectors' discretion
Examples	• Some customers referenced **frustrations about long-standing violating properties**. In addition to the hazards that these properties pose, customers felt that this represented a reluctance to enforce on complaints • **Many customers expressed frustration and confusion about delays in enforcement**, noting they had complained about the same cases for several years without any real movement	• Since 2013-2014, **overall positive responses in customer experience surveys have decreased by 14%** • However, **most surveyed customers had positive impressions** of the courtesy and timeliness of their inspectors in each surveyed year (70%, 61%, and 52% in each year)	• Some customers expressed frustration with **inconsistent, extended, or poorly communicated timelines** • Most customers from observations called to seek information about cases, violations, or laws, **often due to confusion about the website or redirections from other divisions and organizations**	• Most customers called to seek information about cases, violations, or laws, **often due to confusion about the website or redirections from other divisions** • Support staff **frequently received calls for another division** (for example, Building & Permitting) • Cases are nuanced and violations within a single code can vary significantly, which can make it difficult to maintain consistent processes and service	• Inspector discretion allows for more personalized experience; however, this can result in perceptions of inconsistent enforcement • Customers feel some residents receive preferential treatment; For example, one customer was frustrated with punitive enforcement for their permits, while a neighbor with safety complaints had no enforcement • According to survey data, **positive perceptions of the Division have increased in North San José by 20% and decreased in all other regions**

Peer City Benchmarking | Key Strategies & Initiatives

Peer cities exhibited several key leading practice strategies and programmatic initiatives that San José may consider

Succession Planning	• Allow experienced inspectors to substitute years of experience for education requirements to promote to leadership positions from within and retain talented staff *(Austin, Seattle, San Diego)* • Have up to three tiers of inspectors supporting a Division Manager, such as Inspector A-C, Code Investigator, and Inspection Supervisor to enable upward mobility and opportunities for growth *(Austin)*
Streamlined Enforcement Process	• Enable an automatic and/or strict case prioritization process to ensure severe and high-priority cases are closed in a timely manner *(Austin, Seattle, San Diego)* • Escalate to enforcement more rapidly and have less steps from complaint to enforcement – usually after first inspection if resident does not correct violation – to support an efficient case management process *(Austin, Seattle, San Diego)*
Focused Scope	• Maintain narrower program scope, primarily focused on building/zoning compliance to align with Code mission and help manage workload *(Austin, Seattle, San Diego)* • Enable inspectors to focus on inspections through support roles such as Program Managers, Permit Technicians, and Code Review Analysts *(Austin, Seattle)*
Robust Community Engagement	• Leverage community education initiatives such as public relations campaigns, hotlines, and social media activation to increase resident awareness of enforcement processes and their rights *(Austin, Seattle)* • Have Engagement Manager role to focus on community and stakeholder engagement *(Austin)*
Strategic Roles	• Have Chief Strategy Officer to oversee the Corporate Strategy, Marketing & Outreach, and Community Engagement functions in Development Services Department to keep the Division grounded in City's strategy and customer-centric culture *(Austin)* • Have Legal Liaison and Strategic Advisor to advise on legal and policy issues, manage Director's rule process, and coordinate with Attorney's Office and other City departments *(Seattle)*