

Worker shortages in Kootenai County impact planning and building

Average time to issue single-family home permits is three months

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David Callahan

Kootenai County Community



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BY ERICA BULLOCK JOURNAL OF BUSINESS

DEVELOPMENT

Staffing shortages are contributing to delays at the Kootenai County Community Development Department, which is responsible for issuing building permits and completing building inspections, says David Callahan,

director of the department.

“It’s going to be a little harder than usual to process things,” Callahan says.

The Community Development Department wants to fill four vacant positions, including a professional engineer, two planners, and a permit technician, says Callahan.

Forty full-time employees currently work in the department’s building division, including eight inspectors and four new hires, he says. The department also includes a three-person code-enforcement unit.

The average time it takes for the county to issue a permit varies, depending on the type of structure. As of May 20, the building division team has issued 650 permits in 2024.

Single-family building permit applications currently take an average of three months to process, but Callahan says he’d like to see the turnaround time closer to three weeks.

“That’s probably a little optimistic,” Callahan says.

Worker shortages also are impacting inspection schedules.

“Generally, there’s at least 12 inspections for every home. It’s not uncommon for one of our inspectors to be out in the field driving 200 miles and doing 15 inspections in one day,” says Callahan.

Hiring workers for the department has been impacted by high turnover, stagnant wages, and limited office space, he says.

“This has really been going on since COVID,” he says. “That was also coincidentally about the time that growth in our county just exploded. ... We’ve been under the gun since then.”

Worker shortages also are attributed partly to the rising cost of living in North Idaho.

“The median home price these days is well over \$500,000, and that leaves us with about 47% of our population that can’t even afford to rent here,” says Callahan. “Only about 25% of the population can afford to buy.”

The department’s building division issues building permits for single-family

and multifamily dwellings, commercial structures, pole barns, fences over 7 feet tall, decks, reroofing projects, garages, commercial storage buildings larger than 120 square feet, and residential storage structures over 200 square feet in size.

The department's planning division regulates land use and zoning for developments.

For anyone considering building or development in the county, Callahan suggests calling the community development department.

"We can dialogue about scheduling and how to get coordinated in a way that runs smoothly," he says.