

**RICHARD RODRIGUEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
CITY OF CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF CONSTRUCTION AND PERMITS



On February 6, 2006, Mayor Daley named Richard Rodriguez as Executive Director of the Department of Construction and Permits. Rodriguez brings a legal, public and private sector, and real estate background to his daily responsibilities and to meet his goals for the department. Those goals are significant and will improve the entire permit process for all city departments and their clients. Rodriguez is always wearing his customer service hat, focusing on improving the permit process and experience. He even assisted a client during our interview. Mr. Rodriguez was open, honest, personable, and equipped with a good sense of humor necessary in his position. Index was fortunate to catch up with Rodriguez to discuss his role and the future of DCAP. Index and DCAP are planning a conference in 2007 that will outline the permit process and how to better work with the City.

**What are some of your prior jobs and how have they prepared you for this job?**

After law school I moved directly into management and learned a lot from my and other managers's mistakes. I learned how to work with the Federal Government during disaster recovery while serving for the Attorney General's office in Guam. I also worked for FEMA as a field attorney continuing my involvement in disaster recovery, construction and debris removal. This was my initial involvement in real estate and construction.

With the City of Chicago I served as Managing Deputy Commissioner of Real Estate, Planning & Development in the Department of Aviation, Managing Director of Operations of the CHA, and Procurement Policy Manager for the Chicago Public Schools.

**What drew you to this position?**

My past jobs with the City have all been opportunities to improve services, and I believe I have improved those services during my tenure at the Board of Education, CHA and Department of Aviation. DCAP had some challenges some years back. Neither customers, city council members nor the Mayor were satisfied with how DCAP was issuing permits, the amount of time to issue permits and whether that amount of time was reasonable given the resources in place.

I grew up with a sense of civic duty to be part of making something better for everyone. I was asked if I wanted to join the City executive team and was given several options. I like to accept challenges, and the Mayor told me that DCAP was the one most broken, so that was my choice. DCAP's bad image was a matter of perception. Even staff had low moral. In fact, statistics showed progress in the permit processing times.

### **What is the nature and scope of your job?**

Part of my job is making sure that everyone understands what my authority is. We need to reeducate everyone what authority the Executive Director of DCAP has. My responsibility under the Chicago Municipal Code is to review plans, issue permits, provide advice and guidance to the Mayor, city council members and sister agencies in terms of how we can improve our building code.

### **What are your duties?**

My duties are to provide executive leadership, ensure that the finances and budget are in place, short and long term goals, and allocating resources for greater efficiency. The number of employees has stayed relatively constant at 107, while the department has become much more efficient.

### **What are the goals for DCAP?**

Our primary goal is to continue to be as efficient as we can issuing permits without sacrificing any life safety issues. We need to manage customer expectations. When customers come to our office for a permit we should be able to anticipate how long it will take to issue a permit and tell the customer.

Technology is another huge initiative. We are working on plans to use technology to reduce the time to appointment below 2 weeks. We currently have a significant problem with customers putting in placeholder appointments and then not showing up. Our goal for next year is to have an online scheduling system where the customer can place their deposit and schedule their own appointments. This should reduce the 14-day scheduling period to perhaps half that time.

Another goal is to solidify our auditing process. As fast as we issue permits we need to ensure that we are properly auditing the process. We need to audit to ensure that we are calculating fees appropriately and reviewing appropriately.

As we partner with the Department of the Environment, another goal is to encourage building as green as

possible. Energy efficient building for the City of Chicago is going to benefit everyone. Our green permitting program allows us to provide a permit in a shorter period of time and perhaps reduce fees so that individuals are encouraged to build greener.

With Zoning as a separate entity, we ensure that it is a non-issue in the customer experience. Individuals are encouraged to

### ***Tid-Bits***

#### **Favorite quote:**

“Whatever you are be a good one” and  
“Whatever you’re going to be when you grow up, be good at it.”

#### **Favorite magazines**

“Highlights for Children” because I spend a lot of time reading to my boys.

#### **What do you do during your time off?**

Spend as much time as possible with my four boys. Advising one how to tie shoes and another how to handle calls from girls.

#### **Favorite News Source**

“Crain’s Chicago Business, Tribune and Sun-Times”

#### **Stay home to watch**

I’m not a big TV fan; there is always something else I would rather do.

get their zoning approved before their appointment time. But if they don't, we will call someone from Zoning to come and review on the spot or ensure that it is done prior to permit issuance and does not hold up the permit issuance on the back end.

Last year 75% of the permits were easy permits. We should be able to issue those permits online. By moving all easy permits online we could reallocate resources to be more efficient.

**What challenges is DCAP facing?**

Overcoming the Department's negative perception is the biggest challenge. We need to get the word out that it no longer takes forever to build in Chicago. We see the numbers of permits issued increasing without an increase in staff. We need to educate everyone about why you need a permit and the value of getting one. Residents often don't understand that a permit is required. We need to better educate everyone that the permit process involves significant hours of DCAP staff expertise to ensure that what gets built will be quality.

**What is your proudest moment on the job?**

When I leave the office at 6:30 or 7:00 in the evening and I see a dozen employees still working. They are committed to moving projects along, not letting them sit. I have received customer communications thanking us for a call at 6:30 at night informing them that their plans are ready for pickup.

I also am proud that I can respond in seconds to Alderman who call on behalf of a

resident asking about the status of a permit. We know whether our review is completed and that the additional time that is being tacked onto the customer experience is outside of DCAP's control; oftentimes it's the architect's corrections.

**What is your favorite thing about the job?**

Being able to work with the talented members of the executive team. I enjoy being part of a larger team. We have monthly meetings among the commissioners that helps ensure a common vision for the Mayor.

**What early lesson did you learn and how has it helped you since?**

Being familiar with the process is important, especially with the Aldermen. I try to follow the principle of treat others how you want to be treated. I tell my staff to provide the kind of service you would want to receive.

**Best advice for to people submitting and managing permits through your department?**

Given our efficiencies and that we market our average times, if your experience is less than the average times from DCAP, let us know. "Make an investment in the City of Chicago, because the City of Chicago is making an investment in you."