



**Calgary**



# 2017 myHome myBusiness Focus Group Research

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**Ipsos Public Affairs**

**Prepared for The City of Calgary by:**

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# Background and Methodology

## Background

Planning and Development conducted a review in 2016 which identified some gaps in customer experiences. As a result, some changes have been made to make information and processes more customer-centric.

Now building upon the information gleaned in the 2016 review, Calgary Building Services sought to delve further into customer experiences.

The objectives of the research entail:

- Understanding general perceptions and knowledge about the permitting, approval, licencing, and inspection processes;
- Review of the myHome and myBusiness web pages;
- Identification of challenges in the process;
- Evaluating what is particularly helpful to customers during the process; and,
- Assessing information needs and preferences for online applications.

## Methodology

Ipsos conducted a series of 8 focus group workshops between August 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The focus groups were stratified as follows:

- 4 focus groups with business owners who have obtained a licence, renewed a licence, or pulled a permit within the past year;
- 2 focus groups with residential customers who have required a permit for a home improvement project within the past year; and,
- 2 focus groups with residential non-customers who have not interacted with Calgary Building Services within the past year, with some contemplating home improvement projects within the next 2 years.

All focus groups were held in a professional focus group facility in downtown Calgary and City representatives anonymously observed all 8 sessions from behind a one-way mirror.

All participants were provided with a standard cash honorarium for their time and participation.

## Summary of Focus Group Findings

### Awareness and Information Needs

Awareness of permitting and licencing is not widespread until customers are faced with going through the process.

Non-compliance is occurring largely as a result of a lack of familiarity with The City's requirements and the greatest challenges throughout the processes are also associated with a lack of awareness.

Residential customers greatly appreciate the checklists provided by The City for home improvement projects, yet very few are aware of their existence or how to find them online. There is no need to brand the checklists with CARL, as the current titles of the checklists are specific and clear to customers.

While some citizens defer to The City for information, many are speaking with non-City sources for information which may or may not be correct. As such, The City does not have control over all information being shared.

Business and residential customers consistently express a desire for an overview of the processes involved, wanting The City to proactively make them aware of City requirements for permitting and licencing. Social media can play an important role as an outreach tool in disseminating such information.

### The Permitting and Licencing Journey

The processes involved with permitting and licencing are generally perceived as fairly straight-forward, and certain customers have observed positive service improvements this past year. Understanding City requirements, however, does not always occur at the onset of home improvement projects or business endeavours.

As a result, non-compliance can occur and timelines and costs can be adversely impacted. Customers would appreciate a "road map" of the overall process to ensure that they are taking the right steps at the right time.

Customers appreciate customer-centric approaches to service provision by The City, including the proactive provision of information, flexibility, consistency with inspectors, and timeliness.

### Website Review

Customers very much appreciate the information provided on the myHome and myBusiness main pages, but are bypassing these important resources due to the keyword search engine routing.

Customers want to have the ability to do everything online, including some who would use a live chat feature; however customers also want to ensure that City staff are available to discuss matters when required.

## Observations for Consideration

### **Building awareness will build willing compliance.**

Customers want information about The City's requirements for permitting and licencing. Many are currently somewhat lost in their home improvement and business journeys and require assistance in order to adhere to what is required. Like with other City services and processes, the tendency is to expect The City to proactively provide the information versus customers actively seeking it out. Social media can be a valuable and inexpensive channel in which to provide such information. Customers would also like The City to consider a public service announcement style awareness campaign (i.e. Did you know...) much like is undertaken for raising awareness of recreation options, recycling and waste diversion. Partnerships with home improvement retailers could also be used, including posters and using retail staff to increase awareness.

### **Drive customers to the main myHome and myBusiness web pages.**

Alert citizens to the plethora of valuable information The City has developed on its website, much like Assessment has done with its assessment.ca website. Consider channels such as having 311 operators promote the websites when taking calls regarding permitting and licencing, social media channels, earned media, retailers, and/or purchased public service announcements.

### **Review alternative search engine routing from The City's main home page.**

Customers are completely bypassing a great deal of information with the current routing from keywords entered on The City's home page. While routing is attempting to be as efficient as possible, much needed information is being concealed.

### **Provide ongoing refresher training for inspectors.**

Business and residential customers alike cite inconsistencies with inspections. When inspectors proactively explain situations and offer advice on how to solve issues, customers are very grateful and more satisfied with the service.

### **Upload Alberta Building Code changes as quickly as possible.**

A common source of customer frustration lies with constant updates to codes. Although the provincial government is responsible for these updates, The City should provide timely alerts as to the changes, also educating customers that the information was just received from the Government of Alberta.

### **Continue efforts to improve customer service.**

Customers participating in the focus groups greatly appreciated that The City was seeking feedback to make improvements to service provisions. Efforts related to usability testing for the updated website, improvements at the municipal building Planning and Development office, website content and applications, and consistency of service will result in even greater customer satisfaction.





## Awareness of Permitting and Licencing



## Awareness: Permitting and Licencing

**Awareness of permitting and licencing is not widespread until citizens are faced with going through the processes.**

### myHome

Citizens are unaware of City requirements when undertaking home improvement projects. Their primary focus is on getting their project started, often prior to confirming what permits, if any, The City requires. Non-customers believe that the process would take approximately 2-6 weeks, depending on the project. Customers know it can take much faster.

Several residential customers also make reference to being aware of the “call before you dig” campaign when undertaking outdoor home improvement projects.

Some residential customers rely on hired contractors to take care of “paperwork” required, although certain homeowners have experienced contractors not following through on obtaining the permits needed for their project.

Non-compliance is occurring largely due to a lack of awareness of requirements, *“My deck is 3 feet above ground so I don’t need a permit.”* A few non-customer homeowners mention having started projects without a permit, incorrectly thinking that they do not need one for their home improvement project. Others, however, properly do their due diligence in contacting The City to identify what is required.

### myBusiness

Businesses involved with general contracting tend to know more about pulling permits as their frequency of involvement with such processes is greater than businesses who tend to just renew their licences each year.

Some home-based businesses are aware of the two categories of home-based businesses, yet are not entirely familiar with the criteria used to define each category. Some correctly identify parking and the number and frequency of client visits as being involved in the criteria, and certain individuals are aware of the requirement to post notices in the community and newspaper for home-based business licence applications.

Not all businesses are aware that renewals can be completed online, but many appreciate the ability to do so.

Non-compliance is occurring with certain businesses indicating that they have witnessed others operating an unlicensed business, noting that *“Clients ask for copies of your insurance or WCB, but not often for a copy of your business licence.”*

## Sources of Awareness

**While some citizens defer to The City for information, many are speaking with non-City sources for information which may or may not be correct.**

### myHome

Residential customers have become aware of permits associated with home improvement projects through various channels:

- Calling 311;
- Searching The City's website/Googling;
- Calling City inspectors;
- Speaking with neighbours who have completed similar home improvement projects;
- Trial and error;
- Contractors;
- Speaking with employees at home improvement retail stores (Home Depot, Rona, Lowe's, Tiger Town, Cedar House, Canadian Tire);
- Watching YouTube videos; and,
- Reviewing Alberta building codes.

Among those who search Alberta building codes, most are unaware that municipal governments do not have control over how and when updates are provided by the provincial government. The City, therefore, is inadvertently blamed for a lack of timely information related to building code updates.

### myBusiness

Awareness of business licencing and permits stems from:

- Personal experience;
- Calling 311;
- Real estate agents;
- Lawyers;
- Others in the industry; and,
- Contractors.

Some business owners mention that they are fairly unaware of what is required as their staff, accountants or lawyers handle City licencing and permitting on their behalf. Yet others have identified preferred "go-to" City staff at the municipal building to smooth the process.

*"I pick up the phone to find out what I need and then I go down to City Hall."*

*"Our girl goes to get them [permits] and she has certain people she uses because they expedite the process. Others will ask for extra materials and it slows things down, so she avoids them."*

*"I find 311 really good. They direct you to the right department and you can always call them back."*





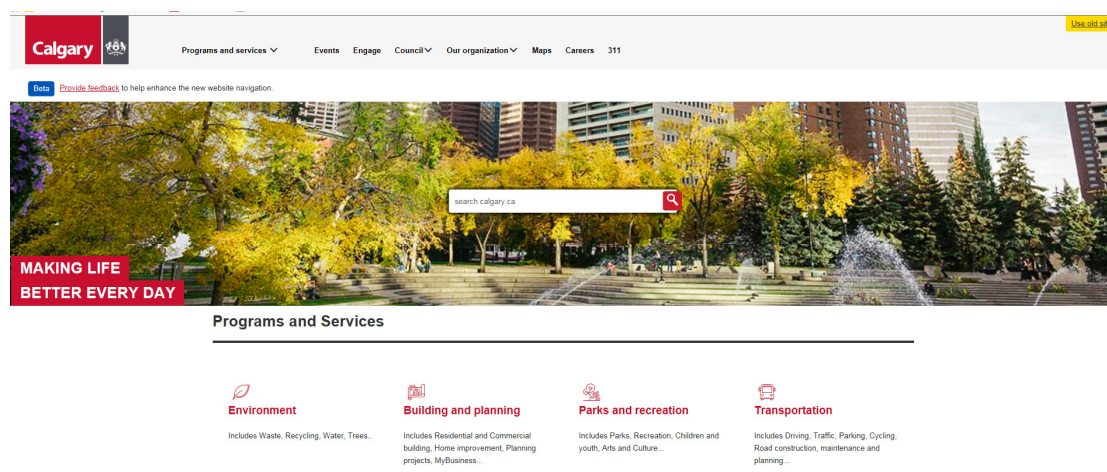
## Information Sources and Needs

# Information Sources

**Customers seek information from multiple sources; The City does not have control over all information being shared.**

Prior to embarking on a business venture or change, or on a home improvement project, customers are seeking information from the following **sources**:

- Googling key word searches;
- Going to The City in-person;
- Going to The City's website;
- Calling 311;
- Speaking with friends, neighbours, family, and/or colleagues;
- Reading blogs;
- Reading online Yelp and other reviews; and,
- Exploring the Alberta Building Code.



## Information Needs

**Customers desire an overview of the processes involved and want The City to proactively make them aware of requirements.**

Customers express a **need** for the following types of information:

- Most commonly, customers want to understand the overall process and steps required, like a checklist “a step-by-step guide of what needs to be done”;
- What does not need a permit (particularly for home improvement projects);
- Code changes, why they changed and when they changed;
- Why some things are grandfathered and others are not;
- Knowledge about permits and licencing, “They do commercials on TV for stuff for the environment; they should also have them to inform people that they need to understand what regulations to follow.”;
- Methods of payment; and,
- Processing timing.

In all focus groups, customers feel that The City should be proactively disseminating information related to licencing and permitting, much like The City does for recreation, recycling and most recently with green carts.

### myHome

*“There’s no comprehensive manual that the average person can use, no checklist. We need a quick tip guide.”*

*“I need to know what I need to know BEFORE I get started.”*

*“I’d like more information about trees and shrubs. We just took down a big tree and I am thinking that we should have called The City. We did not know it was a City thing.”*

*“I’d like to know more about fence sharing, height issues.”*

*“I’d like access to a list of reliable contractors.”*

*“It would be helpful to explain why changes happened, when they happened and why some things are grandfathered and others are not.”*

*“The homeowner is not a lawyer. They don’t understand contracts and codes. You need to make it simple.”*

*“I would have wanted to know that you can book an appointment downtown so you don’t have to wait in line.”*

### myBusiness

*“I want to know how to get through the application process.”*

*“Permitting has always been controversial. There are many things like electrical that need a permit, but changing a light bulb does not. At what point do you need a permit and what does NOT need a permit?”*

*“I’d like a manual or guidelines of how the process works.”*

## Using Social Media to Share Information

**Social media can be used as an outreach tool to raise awareness of requirements.**

Customers are not sharing or seeking information related to licencing and permitting on **social media**; it is not considered an authoritative source of information.

The exception is that some customers turn to YouTube for “how-to” home improvement videos, and some share photos (before and after) of home improvement projects on social media channels (Facebook, Instagram).

Customers feel, however, that The City should be sharing information on social media to encourage citizens to explore what The City requires for business licences and home improvement permits.

With 230,000 followers on Twitter alone, social media could be used to increase awareness of requirements, provide helpful tips, and drive customers to the website.

### myHome

*“I shared pictures of my renovations on Facebook and Instagram.”*

*“Hardly”*

*“No, but The City could share this information on social media.”*

*“I’ve only shared before and after pictures, not talking about the process.”*

*“The company we used asked us to say something nice on social media and they posted pictures of our place on Facebook.”*

### myBusiness

*“It’s not reliable information.”*

*“I use social media for marketing purposes, but not to share information about City licences or permits.”*



## Information from Community Associations

**Residential customers are not seeking assistance from Community Associations related to requirements for home improvement projects.**

Only one residential customer has approached their **community association** for information and/or help with their home improvement project. Most explain that they would not even think to use their community association as a resource as they have no authority over the requirements. If anything, certain customers indicate that community associations have acted as lobbyist groups to oppose potential home improvement projects and/or developments in their neighbourhoods.

Should The City partner with community associations to hold information sessions regarding City requirements for home improvement projects, some customers would attend, depending on the impending need for improvements to their residence. Non-customers who have not recently done any home improvement projects are more likely to be interested in such sessions for the sake of educating themselves for when the need arises.

Others caution that such sessions could become frustrating because every project “depends on the specifics” resulting in questions which may not be able to be answered by City officials facilitating the sessions.

### myHome

*“I have gone to Bowness Community Association. That is where our rental property is and it was suggested that we go there and meet community members.”*

*“Why would you go to a community association for help?”*

*“I’d go to one of those sessions if I was working on my home at the time.”*

*“If they had an information session in a community like Mahogany about secondary suites, I’d probably go.”*

*“I’d go to them particularly about strange neighbours.”*

*“If you went to an open house, it really depends on X, Y and Z. You would not get a straight answer. You might as well visit the main office.”*



## Journey Mapping

## Journey Mapping: myHome

Understanding City requirements does not always occur at the onset of home improvement projects, but should.

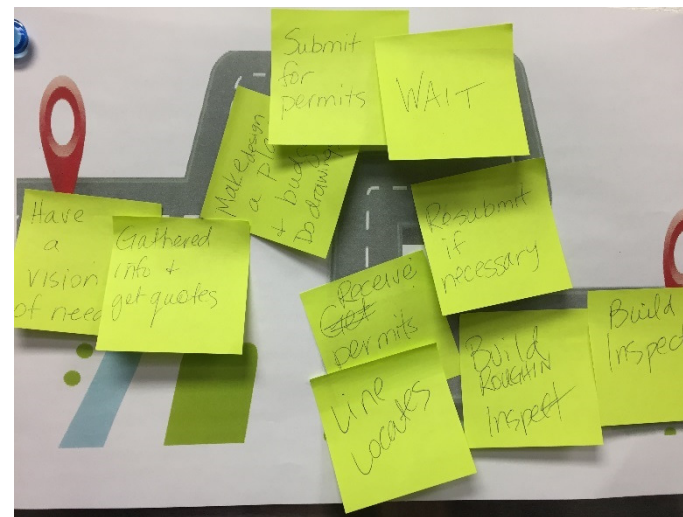
### myHome

Residential property owners were asked to plot their home improvement project “journey”, identifying every step in the process from the idea stage to the completion of the project.

While some are keenly aware of permits and inspections involved, others remain unaware of when to consult The City regarding required permits, if at all.

As a result, certain residential property owners have been in non-compliance or would need to “back-track” in the process, often negatively impacting timelines and project costs.

Residential customers’ lack of awareness with their first home improvement project inhibits their ability to navigate the system and its processes.



## Journey Mapping Examples: myHome

Residential customers consulting The City, pulling permits and perceiving the timing of inspections occur inconsistently throughout home improvement project journeys, and are also omitted at times.

| Building a Deck  | Renovating a Kitchen   | Developing a Basement  |
|--|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plan the deck</li> <li>2. Develop budget and get quotes</li> <li>3. <b>Consult 311 and the City's website regarding requirements</b></li> <li>4. Complete drawings and permit process</li> <li>5. <b>Wait for approval and resubmit if necessary</b></li> <li>6. <b>Receive permit</b></li> <li>7. Line locates</li> <li>8. Visit home improvement stores for information and supplies and tools</li> <li>9. Build rough-ins</li> <li>10. <b>Inspection</b></li> <li>11. <b>Get permit finalized</b></li> <li>12. Build the deck</li> <li>13. <b>Final inspection</b></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Design the kitchen, including going to show rooms</li> <li>2. Consult with professionals</li> <li>3. Budget how much to spend and how much materials and labour will cost</li> <li>4. <b>Research permits required and timelines</b></li> <li>5. Make a plan, including how to prepare food during the renovation</li> <li>6. Interview contractors and get referrals</li> <li>7. Complete the project</li> </ol> <p><i>"We would have to first do research to find out what permits we need for the renovation and how long it will take to get those permits."</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do some research on designing the basement</li> <li>2. Develop a plan</li> <li>3. Develop a budget, including installments and final payment</li> <li>4. <b>Go to City Hall for permits</b></li> <li>5. Hire contractors</li> <li>6. <b>Get approvals, permits, look into zoning</b></li> <li>7. Arrange insurance required</li> <li>8. Develop a timeframe/schedule</li> <li>9. Get supplies, taps, lights, fixtures</li> <li>10. <b>Preliminary inspections and fix any issues</b></li> <li>11. Do the work</li> <li>12. <b>Inspections</b></li> </ol> |



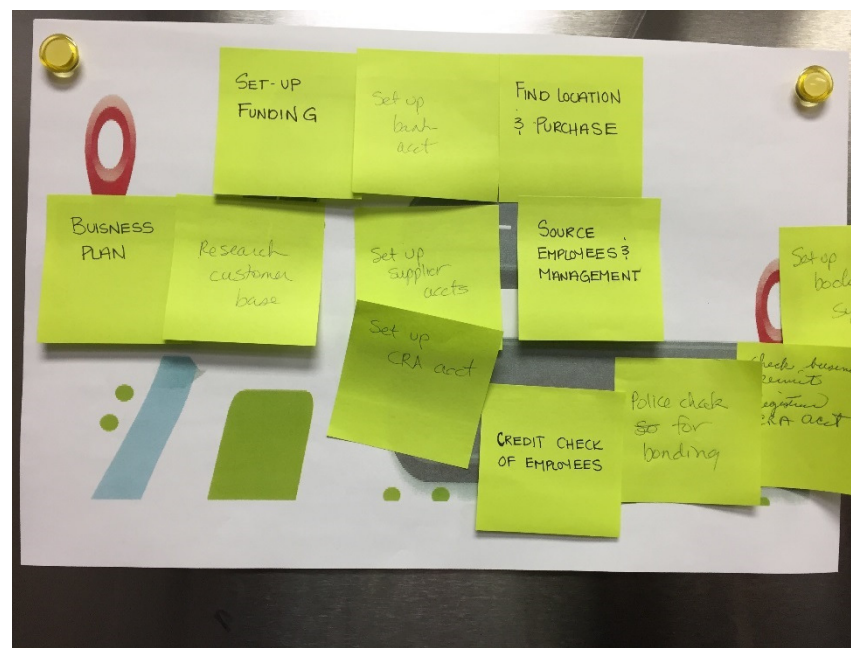
## Journey Mapping: myBusiness

While some businesses would initially consult The City prior to undertaking their initiative, others would first focus on their initiative over City requirements.

### myBusiness

Businesses were also asked to plot their “journeys” on opening home-based businesses, taking over restaurants, or changing existing businesses. They were asked to identify every step in the process from the idea stage to the completion of the project.

Certain smaller working groups in the sessions were adamant about consulting The City about their idea before any other steps took place, realizing that if they pursued the business without knowing about City requirements, they could be at a loss. Others focused on their business venture first, leaving learning about City requirements as a step that is further down the process.



## Journey Mapping Examples: myBusiness

Consulting The City occurs inconsistently at various stages of the business endeavor, and should occur earlier for many businesses.

| Home-Based Business  | Opening a Restaurant   | Home-Based Electrician   |
|--|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Contact The City</b> to determine zoning, capacity, requirements for advertising</li> <li>2. Choose a business name and register it</li> <li>3. Open a company bank account</li> <li>4. Obtain proper insurance</li> <li>5. Get a GST number</li> <li>6. <b>Obtain business licence</b></li> <li>7. Determine limitations</li> <li>8. Print business cards</li> <li>9. Open for business</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a business plan</li> <li>2. Conduct a feasibility study (i.e. will it be a profitable location)</li> <li>3. <b>Get a business licence</b> <i>"we think here, but we are not sure when it is required"</i></li> <li>4. Get financing and purchase it</li> <li>5. Look into health and safety regulations</li> <li>6. Hire designers/project managers</li> <li>7. <b>Get a building permit</b></li> <li>8. Have our drawings go into inspections</li> <li>9. <b>Conduct inspection</b></li> <li>10. Hire staff</li> <li>11. Develop a menu</li> <li>12. Marketing and grand opening</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have your electrician qualifications in order</li> <li>2. Create a business plan</li> <li>3. <b>Go to The City</b> to provide next steps/check online for next steps</li> <li>4. <b>Apply for a business licence</b></li> <li>5. Connect with suppliers</li> <li>6. Get to work</li> </ol> |

*"I'd contact The City right up front. If you don't check what the process is, you could get half-way through and The City could shut you down."*



## Customer Challenges and Helpfulness

## Customer Challenges

**A lack of awareness of licencing and permitting is the greatest challenge facing both business and residential customers.**

A number of challenges related to licencing and permits apply to both homeowners and business customers, as follows:

- Lack of awareness of the overall process of applying for permits and not having a guide or checklist to follow when navigating the process;
- Lack of awareness of changes to building codes and inconsistent interpretation of building codes;
- Timelines, including 3 weeks for community notices and various approval processes;
- Not understanding the order of the stages of the process and having to backtrack;
- Inconsistencies with the information and service provision by certain City staff, particularly with inspectors; and,
- Not having a contingency budget.

### myHome

*"I was downtown for 3 hours. It was busy and because we made our deck larger, I had to get a development permit and it had to go into the paper for 3 weeks."*

*"The electrical code changed 2 days before my application submission."*

*"There's inconsistency between different inspectors."*

*"I struggled to find specific code questions."*

*"Why is the Alberta Building Code such a secret? You should not have to buy the law."*

### myBusiness

*"If you're not familiar with business plans and City processes, it can take months!"*

*"Codes changing constantly. It seems like every new year, there are new codes."*

*"The 'fast' permit does not seem quicker than regular channels. Sometimes it seems to take longer."*

*"Speaking to the wrong person at The City and it may take a while to get to the right person."*

*"There is no standard for all inspectors; there is no consistency, different interpretations."*



## Customer Challenges

### myHome

For **home improvement projects**, additional challenges involved with permitting include:

- Lack of information about what you DON'T need a permit for when doing home improvement projects;
- Unreliable contractors;
- Contractors who use “fancy jargon” which homeowners do not understand;
- Changing plans;
- The City not approving homeowners' projects; and,
- Home improvement projects not passing inspection.



*“Contractors that fail to cooperate or walk away.”*

*“The work is not up to par and fails the inspection.”*

*“There is lingo the contractors know that you don't and you end up putting all of your faith in them.”*

*“It would be nice if they take the time to explain why you need a permit. It is pretty frustrating knowing that your neighbour didn't get a permit, so why should I get one? There should be a penalty in place.”*

*“I changed where I was putting my stairs and ran into problems.”*

*“My basement was roughed in by the builder and I had to have a gas inspection done. The City came and smelled gas and found the same pipe The City passed for the builder had been leaking, so there was no furnace installation until everything was fixed.”*

*“After the first inspection, there was an added to-do list of things that needed to be done to bring everything to code. They were helpful; I was anxious.”*

*“Project creep. While you are at it, you decide, ‘let's do this and that too’.”*

*“Your wife changes her mind about the design [kitchen].”*

## Customer Challenges

### myBusiness

For **businesses**, additional challenges involve:

- Funding;
- Acquiring equipment;
- Conforming to space requirements for home-based businesses (music lessons at home, bathrooms, exits, etc.);
- Learning that you can't operate the type of business you want to out of your home (i.e. excavation business with multiple pieces of equipment that would be stored at the home) AFTER starting to put the business together;
- Unreliable vendors;
- Understanding the limitations of home-based business licences; and,
- Building connections and clientele.



*"I think it has really improved down there. I found that they used to be arrogant and there used to be huge line-ups. It's more of a business atmosphere now. You can even make an appointment now. The City used to sometimes forget that we are their customers, but it's better now."*

*"Credentials. When you start a business and you have not done a lot of work, it takes time to build them up."*

*"I have to earn money to finish my basement, so I cannot provide the proper pictures they need or the required bathroom in my basement until I make some money. So, I teach in my students' homes instead."*

*"Planning ahead is so important. It tells you whether you need a Type 1 or Type 2 licence. You may not be applying for the right type."*

*"It's not just going to land on your lap. You have to go through the process and there are approvals at play."*

*"You're at the mercy of others keeping their commitments."*

## Helpfulness for Customers

**Customers appreciate customer-centric approaches, including the proactive provision of information, flexibility and timeliness.**

Customers make many mentions of helpful items and services throughout their respective processes, including:

- When inspectors are friendly, knowledgeable, informative, and patient;
- When there is some leeway with inspections, including the “approved with conditions” format;
- Many would prefer to be able to submit applications and all related documents online;
- Consistency with staff/inspectors from beginning to end, *“I would like to see the same person dealing with the project whenever possible.”*;
- Improvements with service at City Hall;
- Ability to make an appointment at a certain time;
- Accessing information from The City’s website;
- Receiving assistance from 311; and,
- Knowing that they could book appointments online.

### myHome

When dealing with **home improvement projects**, customers (would) also appreciate:

- When inspectors explain how to fix any issues that arise;
- Counter staff downtown taking the time to explain things and help homeowners through the process;
- Having municipal energy efficiency incentives when applications are reviewed;
- *“The guy from Rona coming to my house to lend a hand to make sure I started my floors right”; and,*
- *“Online tools, such as having your kitchen in 3D like with Ikea.”*

### myBusiness

Some **business customers** also find it helpful to defer to hiring project management or architectural firms to investigate and handle requirements related to permits to save time and ensure that the process is handled in the right manner.

*“I’m happy to pay them \$2,000 to not have the hassle of dealing with everything.”*



## Website Review



## City Website: Overview

Customers very much appreciate the information provided on the myHome and myBusiness main pages, but are bypassing these important resources due to the keyword search engine routing.

The City's website is a commonly used resource for both businesses and homeowners alike. Most recall experiences using the main website page's key word search engine which routes them to various destinations. While some have been able to find what they were looking for, others express frustration in their attempts to seek information online, particularly among the older demographic.

When shown screenshots of the main pages, both businesses and residential homeowners like the array of information provided and the "simple" format in which the categories are presented. Most were unaware of the extent of information available on the website and wished they had been aware of this resource earlier. Some even took the screenshot handout with them after the session so that they could explore the content. Using a main search engine on The City's website is routing customers to sub-pages, bypassing the main myHome and myBusiness pages, resulting in a missed opportunity to expose customers to the extent of information The City has provided online.

Overall, some participants find it easier to call **311** who will then connect them with the right person versus spending time to try to find what they are looking for online.

### myHome

*"It does not look anything like the one I was at."*

*"It's also a matter of interpretation: I would rather talk to someone at The City and get their opinion. I would be worried about misinterpreting the information on the website."*

*"I like it! How do we know that this exists? You need to market this, promote this information."*

*"I really like this; I didn't see it when I was on the website."*

*"This is awesome! It is everything you need!"*

*"I'm going to check this out at home!"*

### myBusiness

*"I recall looking online and being lost in the jargon when trying to build my garage. ~Home-based business who was building a custom garage to practice his trade"*

*"It is very disorganized. You type in a search and try to find a link, but it has improved over the past 6 months."*

*"You try to use the search bar and nothing comes up."*

*"This [screen shot of main page] looks like it would be very helpful, but it is hidden."*

*"This is a good change. It puts you in the right direction, it's a clean layout and uses terminology anyone can understand."*

## myHome Main Page

### myHome

Residential customers very much like the **myHome main page**, its layout and categorization, *"It's all pretty clear."* However, very few customers have been exposed to the myHome main page.

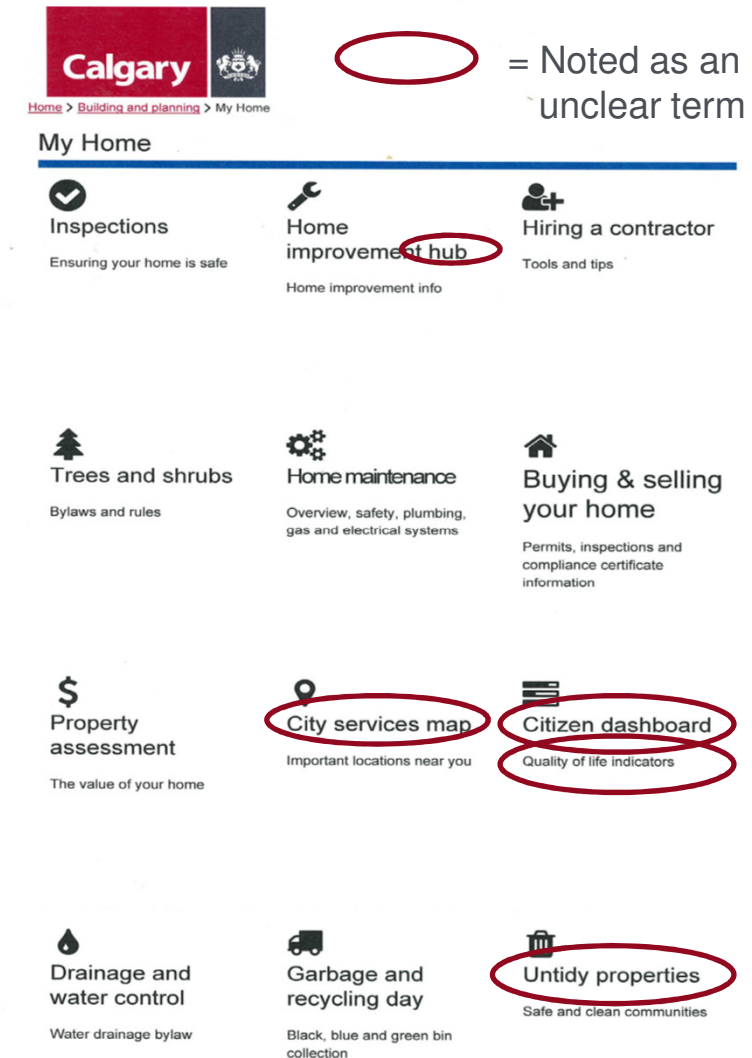
Residential customers are unsure of what content would be found in the "Citizen Dashboard" which may be a familiar term internally with City employees, but is not understood externally by citizens. The explanation of 'quality of life indicators' for the Citizen Dashboard is also not clearly understood.

Certain residential customers also question what would be included with 'Untidy properties', indicating that it is likely *"how to complain about your neighbours."*

Residential customers would also like a link to code updates on the main page and certain individuals question why the word 'hub' follows the 'home improvement' category, preferring to either omit it or replace it with 'projects'.

Additionally, certain customers would like a category for inspections, to be able to inform The City that they are ready for inspections and to have the ability to book inspections online.

Other desired categories include codes, permitting, pets, parking, and how to be a good neighbour.



## Home Improvement Hub Main Page

### myHome

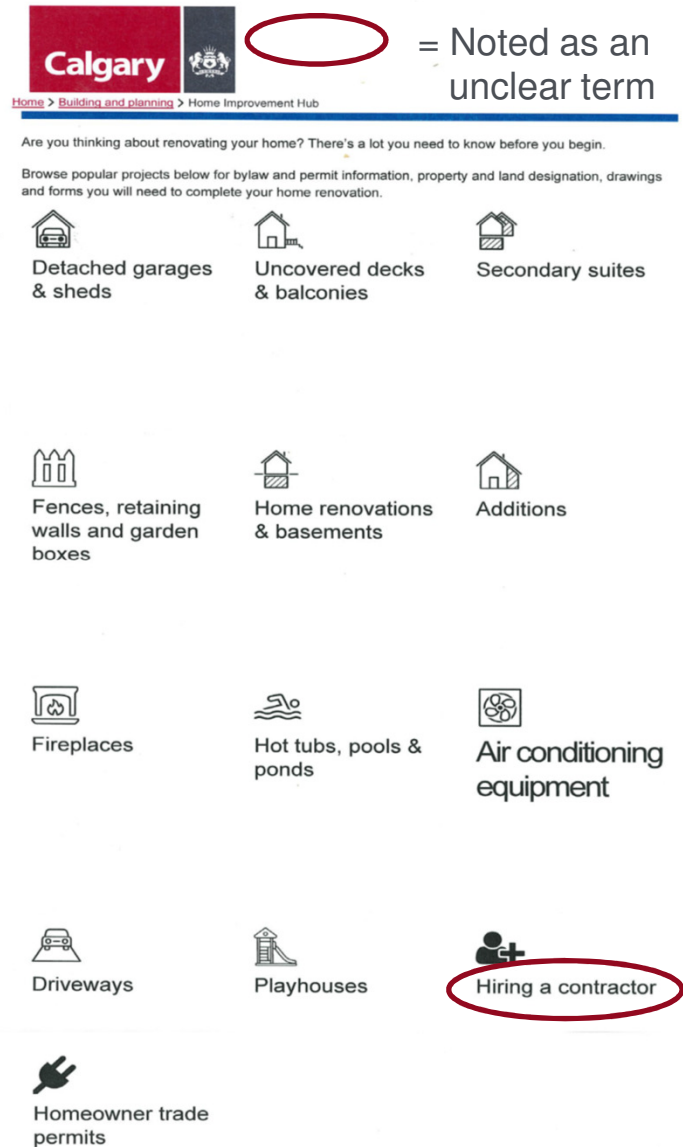
With respect to the “**Home Improvement Hub**” main page, residential customers very much like the content and layout.

Certain individuals question where to find requirements related to patios, why ‘hiring a contractor’ is on both pages, and some would prefer a category for bylaws.

Residential customers appreciate the descriptors of the categories on the myHome main page and suggest including category descriptors on this page as well.

Some customers would also like to see categories for heating, furnaces and vents, utilities, roofs, windows and doors, and energy efficiency.

Search engines are bypassing this page which is important to residential customers, “*Everyone googles; no one sees this page.*” Customers suggest informing citizens of this website, “*Just show people where to look.*”



## myBusiness Main Page

### myBusiness

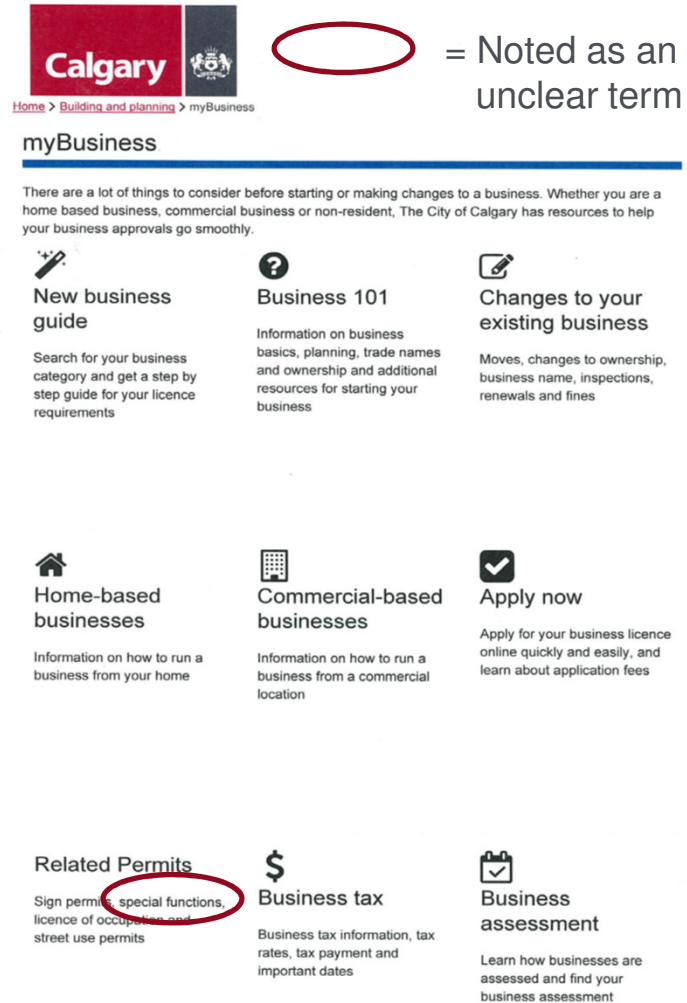
Comments related to the myBusiness main page are overwhelmingly positive, although certain customers recommend clarifying 'special functions' noted on the right. Certain businesses prefer alphabetical lists, and others would like to see methods of payment and processing time as drop-down categories.

When compared with another main page prototype, most business customers prefer the existing main page with specific categories, citing it as *"more user friendly"*, *"highlighting everything you need"*, and *"simple"* in layout and design.

In one of the business focus groups, participants had an opportunity to use the website. They were able to quickly and easily apply for a business licence, understand the difference between the two categories of home-based businesses, and review fee schedules. These businesses prefer simple text, a contact number to call if needed, and suggest repeating the header on the fee schedule as it disappears as you scroll down the page.

In another business group, fees were further discussed. For building permits, businesses would prefer to pay all fees up front, but for development permits, they would prefer staggered payments.


Certain businesses were also confused as to what the term "business registration" entails.



Home > Building and planning > myBusiness


### myBusiness

There are a lot of things to consider before starting or making changes to a business. Whether you are a home based business, commercial business or non-resident, The City of Calgary has resources to help your business approvals go smoothly.




#### New business guide

Search for your business category and get a step by step guide for your licence requirements




#### Business 101

Information on business basics, planning, trade names and ownership and additional resources for starting your business




#### Changes to your existing business

Moves, changes to ownership, business name, inspections, renewals and fines




#### Home-based businesses

Information on how to run a business from your home




#### Commercial-based businesses

Information on how to run a business from a commercial location




#### Apply now

Apply for your business licence online quickly and easily, and learn about application fees




#### Related Permits

Sign permits, special functions, licence of occupation and street use permits



#### Business tax

Business tax information, tax rates, tax payment and important dates



#### Business assessment

Learn how businesses are assessed and find your business assessment

= Noted as an unclear term

## Desired Online Applications

Customers want to have the ability to do everything online; however, also want to ensure City staff are available to discuss matters when required.

Additional online tools and applications customers desire include:

- Development of an App to provide a checklist and notices, giving of a sense of accomplishment along the journey;
- The ability to print licences once online payment has been approved, avoiding the gap in wait time to receive the hard copy via mail;
- The ability to submit all applications for permits online;
- A tool to help with drawings online, including warning pop-ups when the drawings do not adhere to codes;
- The ability to submit drawings online and avoid printing multiple copies on paper;
- Direct email communication with inspectors;
- The ability to book appointments with inspectors;
- Show mock examples of completed application forms;
- Clearly identify permit expiry dates;
- Be mobile-friendly;
- Have access to all of the permits a business is currently involved with instead of having to pull them each up individually and a calendar of events;
- Provide automated alerts and email notices when things expire and are not approved; and,
- Tutorials and helpful links.

### myHome

*"I'd like an excel spreadsheet so I can do the diagrams without having to draw them out."*

*"Home permits. It would be nice to have a link to the permits so you can fill them out online."*

*"If you don't know what your property boundaries are, you can just click on a link and find out."*

*"It makes sense paper-wise to do things online. With 6-8 copies, they have to be wanting to go paperless."*

*"I want it to be interactive."*

*"What about a digital kiosk where you can go and look at the codes, at the municipal building."*

### myBusiness

*"The entire process should be digital, pdf drawings. Eight copies is very inefficient and expensive."*

*"It would be nice if inspection reports were available online in an account I could log into."*

*"Despite everything we say about digital, make sure there are still people to talk to; sometimes you need a person."*

*"Links to things outside of The City's website, like to WCB."*

*"Browser compatibility. Is it functional on a phone?"*

*"Why can't we print our licence from the computer? Why do we have to wait for it? If my payment goes through, why can't I print it – even a temporary version?"*





## Online Chat

Live chat would be a welcomed feature for some, but not for all.

Some customers would use live **online chat** if it was available. Others question whether the staff manning the online chat room were qualified to answer questions, and may prefer to call instead. Certain customers simply prefer to speak with a “real” person, associating online chat as speaking with “robots”.

Suggested hours of operation for online chat range from regular business hours to extended hours into the evening. One business would like online chat at any time. Other business customers warn, however, that there are costs associated with the provision of online chat, preferring to see The City be prudent with taxpayer dollars.



### myHome

*“I’d like live chat especially for inspections because you never get the right person.”*

*“That would be nice.”*

*“I’d like live chat if they would answer the code questions.”*

*“I would use it.”*

*“Maybe operate from 8:00am to 8:00pm.”*

*“Maybe even something like a forum where we can discuss improvements that we are making with each other.”*

*“I want a real person day or night.”*

### myBusiness

*“I’d like live chat where you could save the conversation.”*

*“I think they are robots.”*

*“If I want personal interaction, I want to call them directly and speak to a person.”*

*“It’s easier to speak about it than to type about it.”*

*“I’d like that. Sometimes you have to sit on hold forever when calling The City.”*

*“It would be nice, but only if the person on the other end was truly qualified.”*



## Checklists

# Application and Checklists

## myHome

Residential customers greatly appreciate the checklists provided by The City, yet few are aware of their existence.

Residential customers were presented with a copy of an application and examples of checklists associated with home improvement projects. As they had already spontaneously requested checklists, they find this tool extremely useful and wish they had been aware of it during their home improvement project.

*"I like the checklists. This is very helpful."*

*"I'd like to be able to submit this online."*

*"For decks, on drawings for plans, they could easily have it so you have your drawing and codes or other requirements pop up based on your inputs, warning alerts or pop-ups that say 'you can't do that'."*

*"You should be able to attach photos."*

*"I had one [checklist] and it was really helpful."*

*"I have seen the checklists but not with the example drawings before. I like that."*

*"With online applications, have hyperlinks for the various bullet points, like for smoke detectors, you need one in this room and one in this room."*

*"If applying online, pop-up on the new codes when they are implemented to draw attention to them."*



## Building Permit Checklist for Uncovered Decks

For information on building code and bylaw standards, visit [calgary.ca/decks](http://calgary.ca/decks).  
To determine your permit fee, visit [calgary.ca/alterationscalculator](http://calgary.ca/alterationscalculator).

We've simplified this application for our customers.  
Tell us what you think - [Take our survey](#).

Please do not include personal information on plans

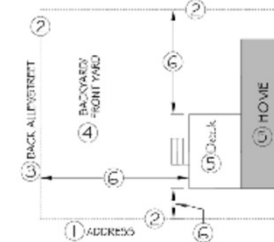
### A. Complete [application form](#)

### B. Provide 2 copies of a site plan

Your site plan should include the following:

- 1 Address ☐
- 2 Property Lines ☐
- 3 Label back alleys/streets ☐
- 4 Label backyard/front yard ☐
- 5 Outline of your home and deck ☐
- 6 Distance from property lines to deck ☐

Note: You can use a real property report as your site plan.



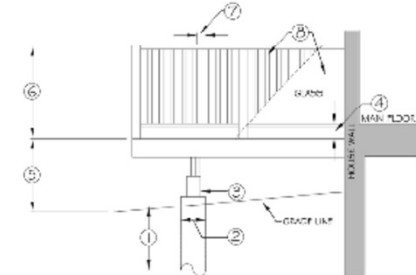
You can use the [Uncovered Deck Worksheet](#) to replace the drawings in C and D

### C. Provide 2 copies of a cross section

Your cross section should include the following:

- 1 Concrete pile depth ☐
- 2 Concrete pile diameter ☐
- 3 Post size ☐
- 4 Deck floor to main floor distance ☐
- 5 Ground to deck floor height (measured from lowest point) ☐
- 6 Railing height ☐
- 7 Railing opening size ☐
- 8 Railing material ☐

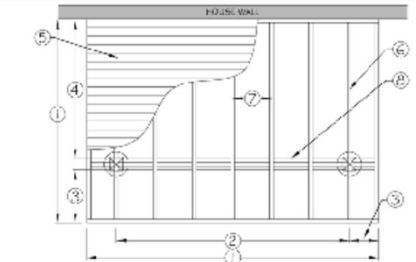
Note: If you are using anything other than concrete piles, replace items 1 and 2 with an engineering report.



### D. Provide 2 copies of a plan view

Your plan view should include the following:

- 1 Length and width of deck ☐
- 2 Distance between posts ☐
- 3 Size of cantilever ☐
- 4 Length of joist span ☐
- 5 Size and type of decking (provide [CCMCA](#) for composite decking) ☐
- 6 Size of joist ☐
- 7 Spacing between joists ☐
- 8 Size of beam ☐



# Complete Application Requirement List

## myHome

**There is no need to brand the requirement list with an acronym as the titles of the current lists are clear and specific.**

Residential customers had an opportunity to review the checklists provided for basement renovations and for decks. When reviewing the title of these checklists in comparison to the overarching title of “Complete Application Requirement List” (CARL), most prefer the current specific title of the document. Nonetheless, certain individuals comment that the word “complete” is appropriate because it implies that this is the final list with no surprises.

*“This name is clearer. CARL is gone.”*

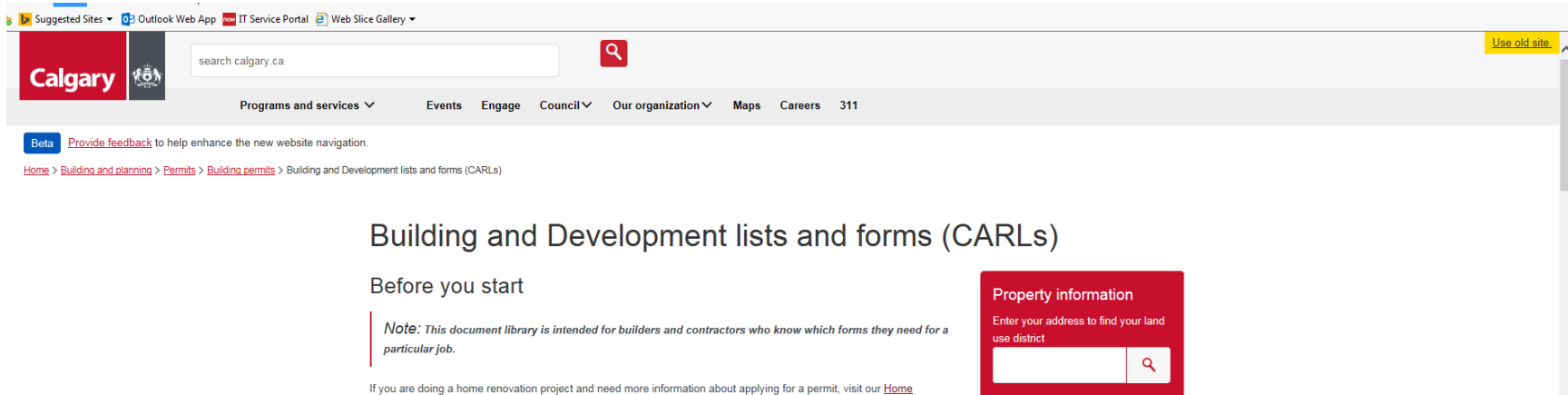
*“I’d like to have an actual City consultant at a set price, like \$30/hour, come to my home and work with me.”*

*“It’s more specific. You know exactly what it is for.”*

*“Anything that gets rid of an acronym is good.”*

*“The note saying ‘engineer may be required is vague. It would be better to state specifically when or where you need an engineer.’*

*“I was surprised by the process. I was expecting it to be hard and it wasn’t.”*



The screenshot shows the myHome website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Suggested Sites', 'Outlook Web App', 'IT Service Portal', and 'Web Slice Gallery'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'search calgary.ca'. The main content area is titled 'Building and Development lists and forms (CARLs)'. It includes a 'Before you start' section with a note: 'Note: This document library is intended for builders and contractors who know which forms they need for a particular job.' There's also a 'Property information' section with a search box and a magnifying glass icon.





## **myHome myBusiness Focus Group Research**