



# ANNUAL REPORT



THE CITY OF HOUSTON

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# INTRODUCTION



On behalf of the Houston Permitting Center's Leadership Committee and staff, I am pleased to introduce the 2013 Annual Report for the Houston Permitting Center. The annual report provides us with an opportunity to provide our stakeholders with notable information concerning the Houston Permitting Center's operation between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013, the City of Houston's fiscal year—a memorial of the organization's performance. We also hope to set expectations for the upcoming year and provide some information about future improvements.

The overarching focus at HPC over the past year has been improving the customer's experience. Our Leadership Committee and staff have invested a great deal of energy to deliver real improvements in the way our core services are delivered, which are highlighted throughout the report. Many of the improvements have already produced tangible benefits for our customers that we hope will continue for years to come. We hope to see similar results soon from several other improvements that were rolled out during the last quarter of 2013.

Our mission remains the same. We are dedicated to helping customers achieve their goals while complying with the City's regulations. In order to more thoroughly accomplish the mission, our Leadership Committee has adopted a service philosophy fortified by the following customer service principles. It is our priority to:

- Serve our customers in the most polite and knowledgeable way possible.
- Provide our customers with the most consistent and accurate information possible.
- Empower our employees to solve customer problems.
- Measure our customers' satisfaction and continuously strive for improvement.

Steadfastly advancing these principles is essential for meeting the growing demands of our community. Houston's regional economy is one of the strongest in the country and is showing no signs of slowing down. Data suggests that business creation, land development and construction (residential and commercial) will continue trending upward over the next 12 months. Consequently, we expect to serve more than 350,000 customers at the HPC in 2014—a significant increase over the number served in 2012 and 2013. Serving them well requires continuous improvement and building on the successes of the previous year.

As in the prior year, the improvements achieved in 2013 were made possible through the dedication and hard work of the HPC staff, Leadership Committee, Advisory Board and our customers. 2013 was a momentous year at the HPC. I look forward to even greater successes in 2014.

Thank you,

Executive Director, Houston Permitting Center

# ABOUT US



The Houston Permitting Center's (HPC's) mission is to help customers achieve their goals while complying with the City's regulations.

HPC opened its doors on June 20, 2011, with limited staff and services and became fully operational a month later, as the last business unit relocated to the Center. At full service capacity, HPC offers customers access to over 600 different permits, licenses, and registrations required by the City at one convenient location. This represents close to 90 percent of all required permits, and we are working to increase this percentage in future years to truly become a one-stop shop.

Although the concept of consolidating permitting services into a single location is not a new one, HPC represents the first successful consolidation by a major municipality in the United States. The Center represents a partnership of eight city departments working to form a unified approach to service delivery and customer engagement, which makes it a thoroughly unique service center.

# OUR LEADERSHIP

The HPC Leadership Committee is responsible for evaluating operational performance, improving business processes, and developing strategic plans. Each member of the Leadership Committee represents one or more of the business units operating at HPC. Its members are:

- Mark McAvoy – Executive Director, HPC
- Mark Loethen, P.E. – Public Works and Engineering (PWE)
- Ogilvie Gericke – Public Works and Engineering (PWE)
- Tim Lincoln, P.E. – Public Works and Engineering (PWE)
- Thomas Hosey – Public Works and Engineering (PWE)
- Kathryn Bruning – Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA)
- David McCoy – Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Lt. Dana Hitzman – Police (HPD)
- Lt. J'Marcus Adams – Police (HPD)
- Chief Richard Galvan – Fire (HFD)
- Sonya Ellis – Parks and Recreation (PARD)
- Jennifer Ostlind – Planning and Development (PDD)

An Advisory Board was established in September 2012 to identify, communicate, and provide solutions to customer service related issues. Participation on the Board is voluntary and is comprised of customers of the HPC. Each major customer segment is represented on the Board:

<b>ARA Business Units</b>	
Position 1- Engaged in the business of vehicles for hire	Ricky Kamins <i>Houston Transportation Services, LLC.</i>
Position 2- Engaged in the operations of restaurants	Gerald Franklin <i>Gerald Franklin Agency</i>
Position 3- Engaged in the business of retail sales	Ahmed Hasora <i>Greater Houston Retailers Association</i>
<b>HFD Business Units</b>	
Position 4- Engaged in sales or installation of fire protection and/or detection equipment	Chris Skopik <i>CLS Technology</i>
<b>HPD</b>	
Position 5- Engaged in the business of auto repair, body shops, parts sales, or auto sales	Deborah Hernandez <i>Able Auto Glass</i>
Position 6- Engaged in the business of wreckers, storage lots, or parking lots	Ken W. Ulmer (Ombudsman) <i>Safetow</i>
<b>PARD</b>	
Position 7- Engaged in community parks and recreation activity	Javier Cuellar <i>La Unidad Soccer Club</i>
<b>PWE</b>	
Position 8- A Texas professional engineer engaged in practice as a structural, mechanical, or civil engineer, or a Texas registered architect	Clayton Black (Board Chair) <i>Jones &amp; Carter</i>
Position 9- Engaged in the business of sign sales or installation	Gregg Hollenberg <i>National Signs</i>
Position 10- Engaged in the structural, mechanical, plumbing, or electrical trade	Monica Ryan <i>Village Plumbing &amp; Home Services</i>
Position 11- Engaged in the management or operation of commercial or industrial properties or facilities	Andy Teas <i>Houston Apartment Association</i>
<b>Non-Specific Business Units</b>	
Position 12- Engaged in the business of permit services or consulting	Joyce Owens <i>Owens Management Systems</i>
Position 13- Engaged in the business of customer service	Hal Caton <i>Caton Consulting</i>

# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE



Business units at HPC derive their operating budgets separate from and independent of their relationship with the Center. However, HPC is responsible for providing customer assistance, payment processing, accounting, IT support, and facility management services to its tenants. Business units pay for these services on a prorated basis throughout the year.

HPC incurred expenditures totaling \$12.1 million to provide these services in fiscal year 2013 (FY13). This represents a 60% increase over the FY12 expenditure total. However, the entire increase is attributable to a change in strategy as it relates to debt service financing. An additional \$6.2 million was transferred to the City's debt service fund to cover future debt service payments- in effect pre-paying debt service for the next two fiscal years. Notwithstanding the transfer, the actual year-to-year operating expenditures decreased by 20%.

HPC collected \$1.4 million in revenues from the prorated payments, a 20% decrease over the FY12 revenue total. This change in revenue is directly related to the change in actual operating expenditures.

HPC's budget resides within the Building Inspection Special Revenue Fund (2301). Accordingly, HPC did not collect payments for service from other business units within Fund 2301. As a result, the large difference between revenues and expenditures is solely attributable to the uncollected payments.

**Figure 1. Financial Statement, FY13**

	<b>FY12 Actual</b>	<b>FY13 Budget</b>	<b>FY13 Actual<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Variance</b>
Charges for Services	\$1,742,578	\$1,694,400	\$1,395,647	
Other Fines & Forfeits	\$9,816	\$9,400	\$7,776	
Non-Operating	\$910	\$0	\$1,399	
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,753,304</b>	<b>\$1,703,800</b>	<b>\$1,404,822</b>	<b>-21.3%</b>
Personnel Services	\$678,161	\$725,110	\$705,308	
Supplies	\$56,959	\$112,300	\$102,064	
Other Services & Charges	\$1,272,209	\$2,107,527	\$2,106,549	
Debt Service & Other Uses	\$5,619,739	\$9,220,096	\$9,220,096	
Non-Capital Purchases	\$2,598	\$37,687	\$14,808	
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$7,629,666</b>	<b>\$12,202,720</b>	<b>\$12,148,825</b>	<b>-0.4%</b>
<b>2301 Fund Contribution</b>	<b>\$5,876,418</b>		<b>\$10,744,003</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Note: Year-end reconciliation has not closed. Numbers are subject to change.

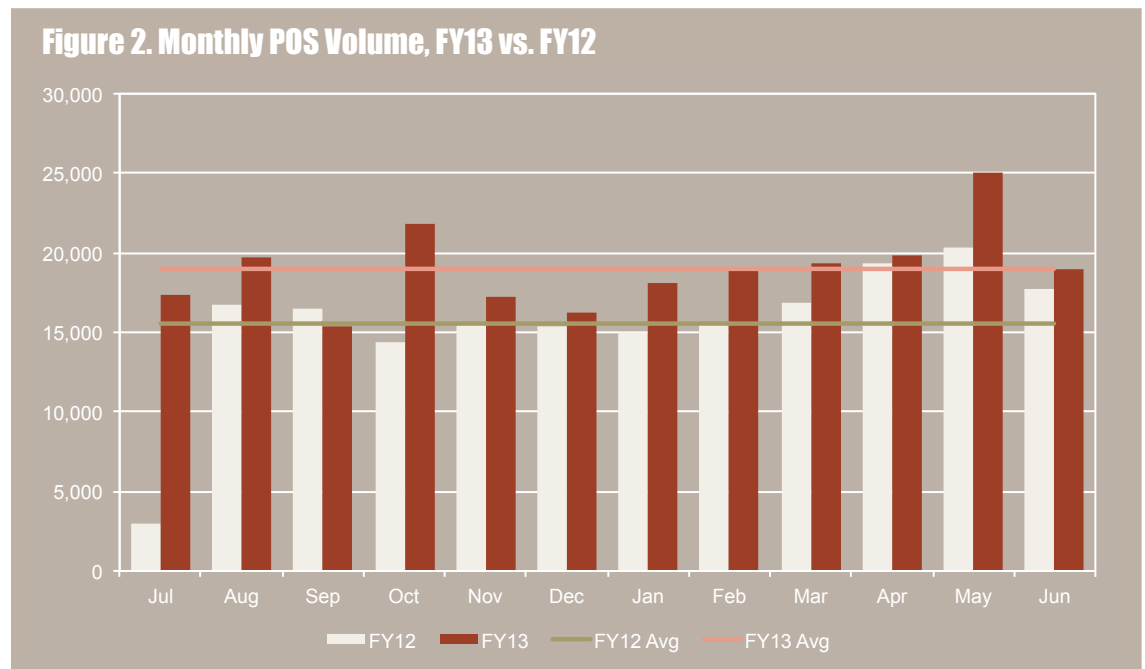
# OPERATING PERFORMANCE



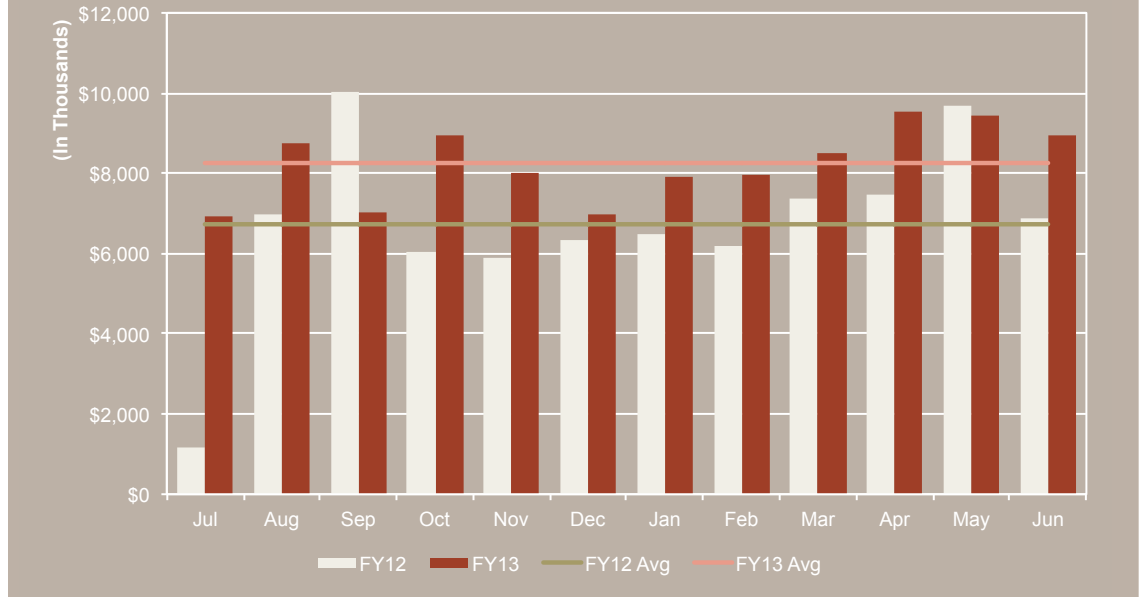
The HPC uses a single point of sales (POS) system to streamline the payment process for our customers. The POS is interfaced with several permit information systems and allows customers to consolidate charges for multiple permits from multiple systems into a single transaction. It also provides customers with the flexibility to choose their preferred payment method from a variety of options.

The cashiers are responsible for efficiently processing walk-in transactions and mailed payments. During FY13, they processed close to 228,000 sales transactions totaling nearly \$99 million in revenue. On average, the cashiers collected \$8.2 million per month and processed about 19,000 transactions per month. Compared to FY12, this represents a 23% increase in POS revenue collected and a 22% increase in POS transaction volume.

However, the HPC was not yet fully staffed in July of FY12. Excluding the month of July from the comparison reveals an increase of 16% in POS revenue collected and an increase of 15% in POS transaction volume.

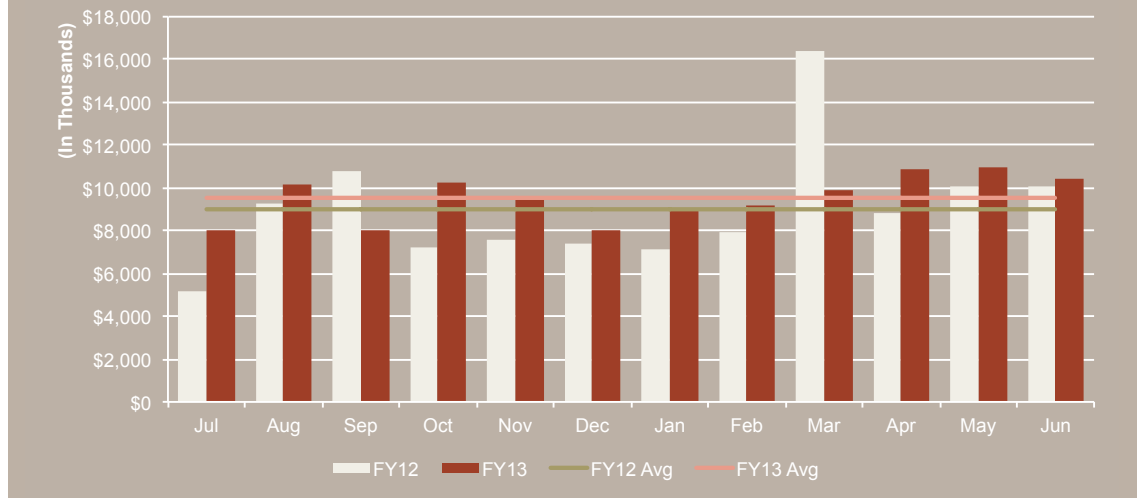


**Figure 3. Monthly POS Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**



Not all sales transactions are processed through the POS. A limited number of permits, licenses, and registrations are available for purchase through online portals or satellite locations. Additionally, some customers have the option to pay for permits through an advanced pay account (APA), which is not processed by the cashier. When sales from other means are combined with POS sales, total cash bookings reconciled through the HPC exceeded \$115 million in FY13, up about 6% from \$108 million in FY12.

**Figure 4. Total Cash Bookings, FY13 vs. FY12**





# ONLINE PERMITS

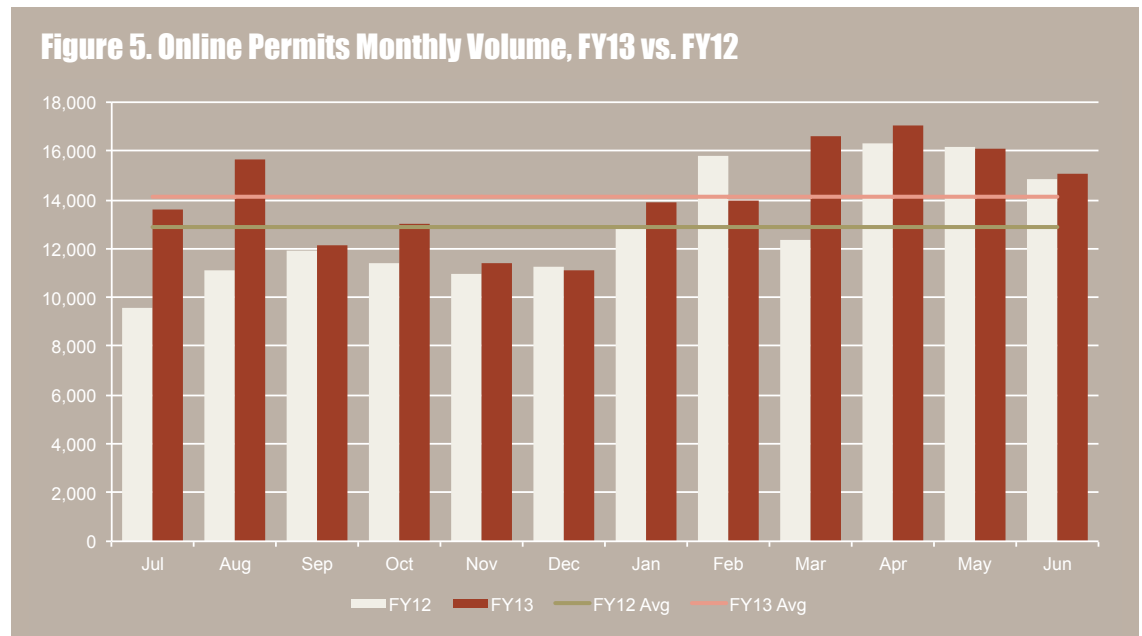


Three departments—ARA, PARD, and PWE—now offer permits for purchase online. ARA has two online portals—one for commercial permits and the other for burglar alarms. Purchase and receipt of commercial permits is limited to alcohol and noise permits. Other permits may be applied for but cannot be completed without a trip to the HPC. The burglar alarm site is fully functional and allows customers to apply for and renew burglar alarm permits, as well as pay for false alarm fines.

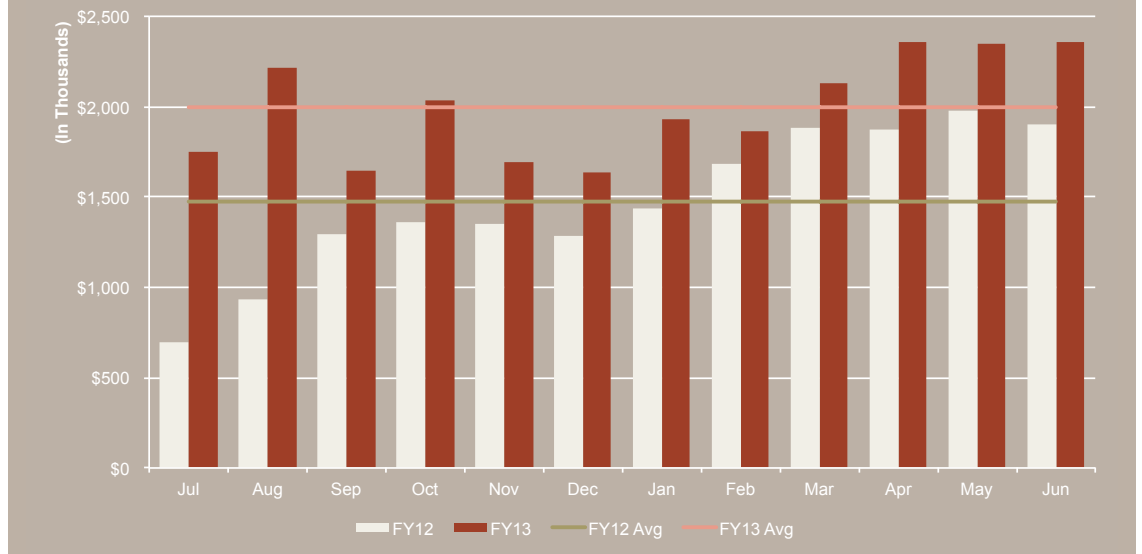
The most recent addition is PARD’s online permit and reservation system which was launched in September 2012. The online system allows customers to reserve park space for private events or reserve sports fields for league tournaments or practices.

PWE sells a portion of their permits through the contractor web portal called iPermits. Licensed contractors and trade workers may purchase and receive trade, re-roofing, and temporary gas permits online. Other permits may be applied for but cannot be completed without review from PWE. Non-licensed users may use the portal to pay for an invoice, statement, or fee.

During FY13 over 169,000 sales transactions were made online totaling almost \$24 million in revenue. Compared to FY12, this represents a 10% increase in online sales volume and 36% increase in revenue. Overall, online sales accounted for almost 20% of total revenue generated by permit sales, up from 15% in FY12.



**Figure 6. Online Permits Monthly Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**

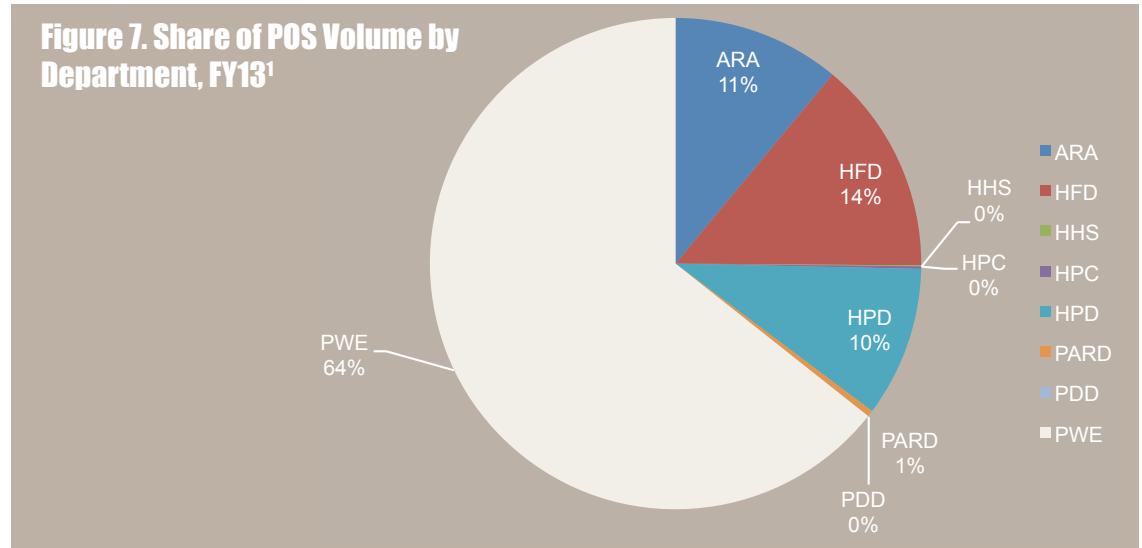


# DEPARTMENT PROFILES



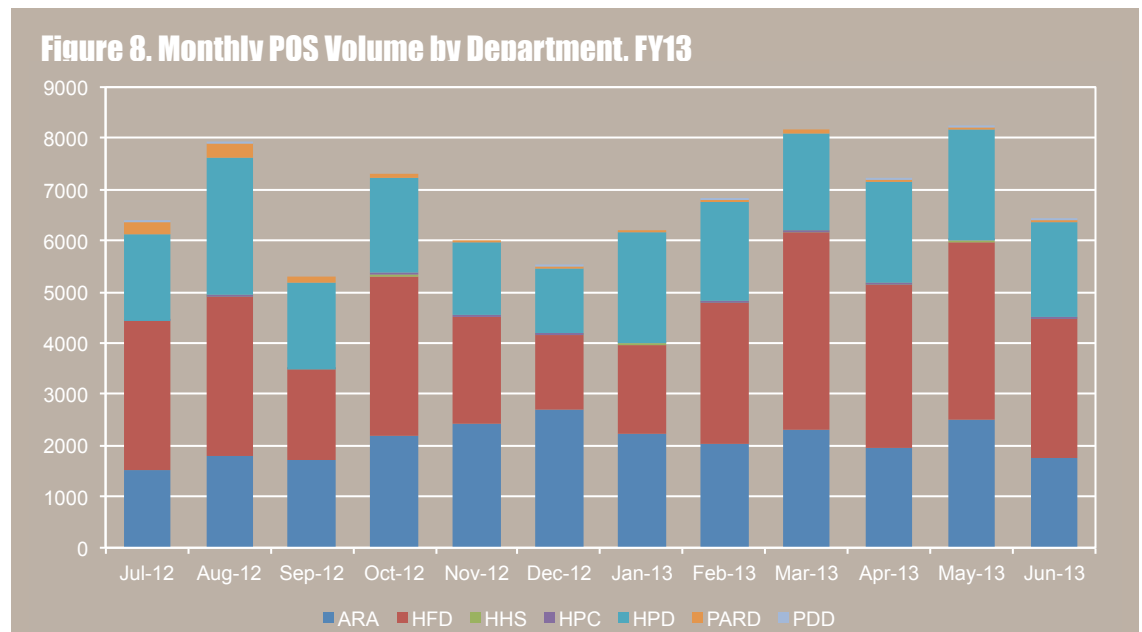
There are almost 40 business units from eight City departments that operate at the HPC. These units perform a diverse range of activities and serve a wide range of customer segments- from architects to antique dealers, and from mechanical engineers to missionary workers.

Although the majority of permitting activity is conducted by PWE, a significant percentage of activity is conducted by the other departments. The share of POS volume in FY13 changed slightly when compared to last fiscal year. ARA's share increased from 9% to 11%, while both PWE's and PARD's share dropped by one percent to 64% and 1% respectively.

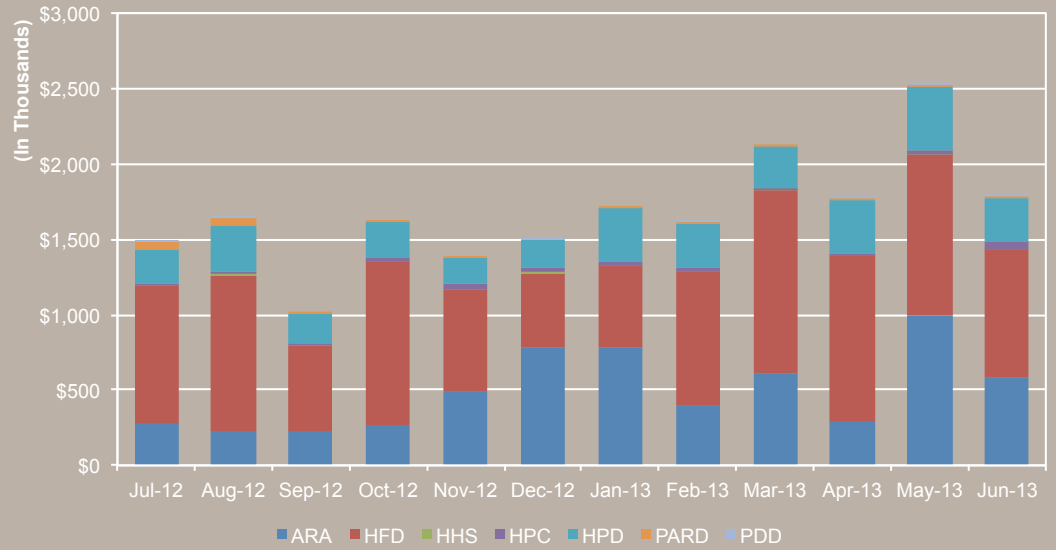


<sup>1</sup>HPC is listed in this figure because deposits into APA accounts, reconciliation of Xerox coin box, and refunds are processed through the POS system. These are not permit sales. The Houston Airport System is not included in this figure as it does not change any fees for.

Throughout the fiscal year, some departments experience high seasonal demands.



**Figure 9. Monthly POS Revenue by Department, FY13**

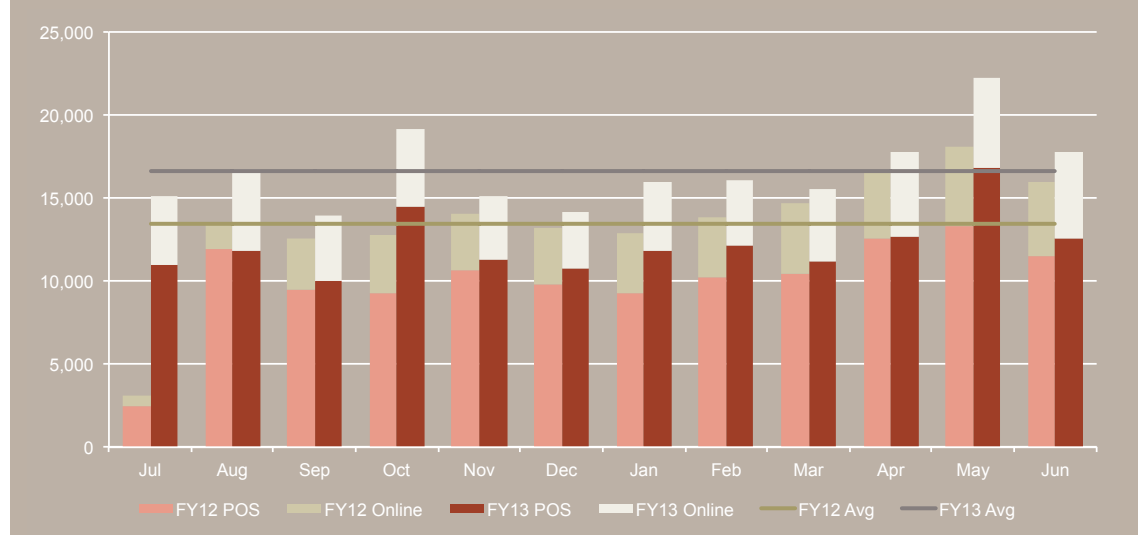


# PUBLIC WORKS & ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

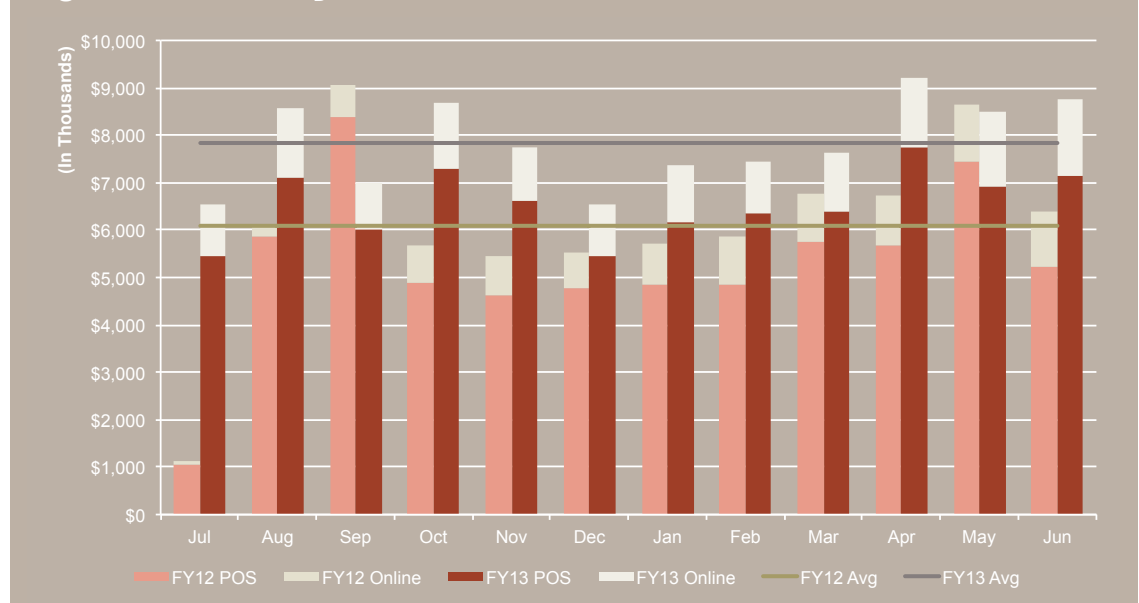
PWE oversees the permitting and regulation of residential and commercial building construction, commercial signs, construction in the City's rights of way, and connection to the City's water and waste water utilities.

PWE collected approximately \$94 million in revenue from over 199,000 online and POS transactions in FY13. On average, PWE collected just under \$8 million in revenue and conducted almost 17,000 transactions per month. This represents a 29% increase in revenue and a 24% increase in volume compared to FY12. Excluding the month of July, there was a 22% increase in revenue and a 16% increase in volume of transactions. The proportion of online transactions remained roughly the same in FY13 as compared to FY12, 27% and 25% respectively.

**Figure 10. PWE Monthly Transaction Volume, FY13 vs. FY12**



**Figure 11. PWE Monthly Revenue FY13 vs. FY12**

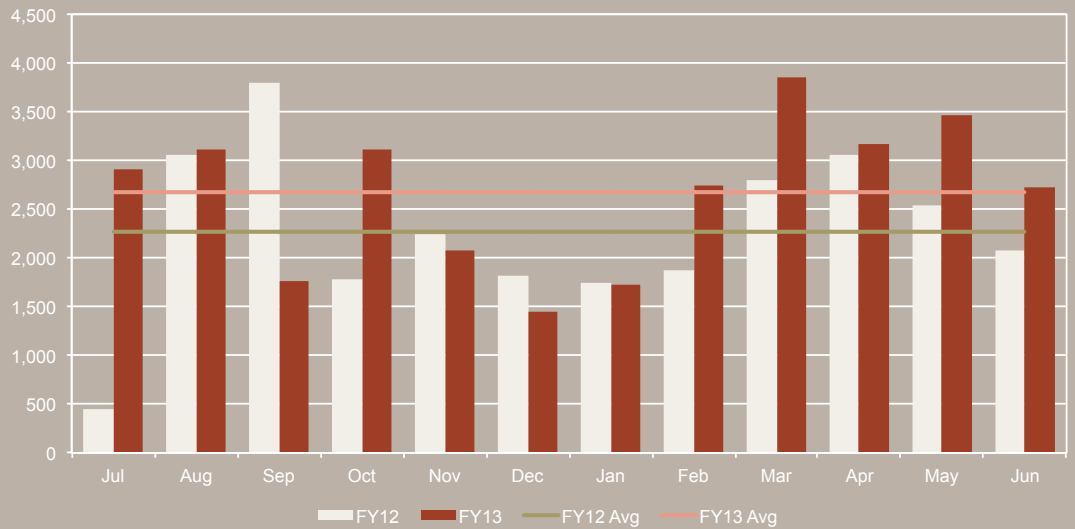


# HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

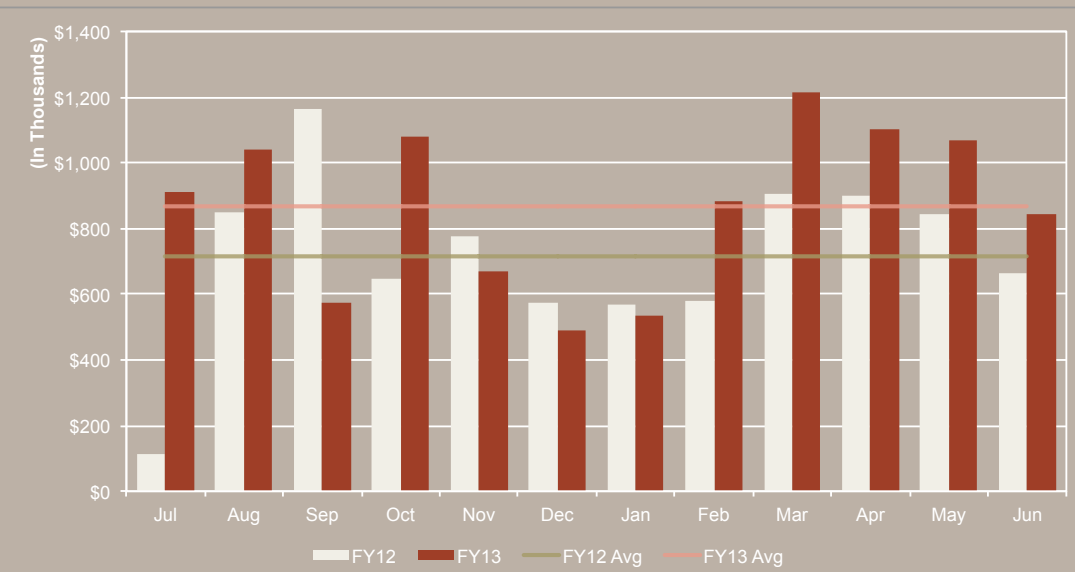
HFD oversees the permitting and regulation of fire prevention and suppression systems, fire alarms, special events requiring standby marshals, and the storage of hazardous and high-piled materials.

In FY13, HFD collected more than \$10 million in revenue from 32,000 transactions. On average, HFD conducted nearly 2,700 transactions and collected \$867,000 per month. This represents a 21% increase in revenue from FY12 to FY13, and an 18% increase in volume during the same time period. Excluding the month of July, there was a 12% increase in revenue collected from FY12 to FY13, and a 9% increase in volume.

**Figure 12. HFD Monthly POS Volume, FY13 vs. FY12**



**Figure 13. HFD Monthly POS Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**

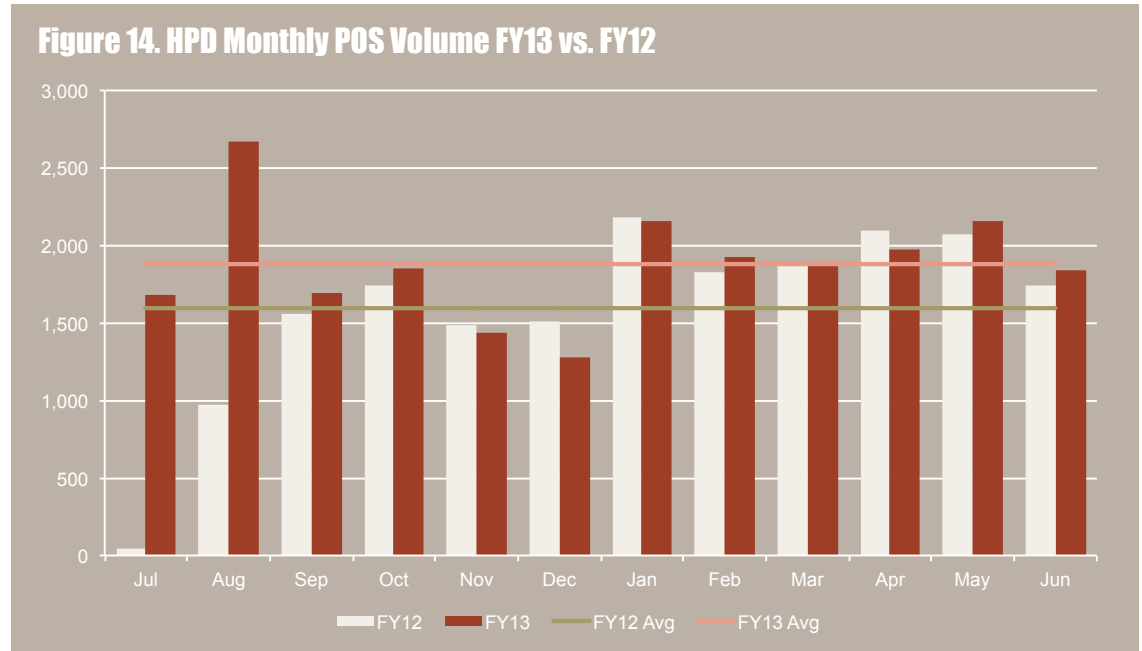


# HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

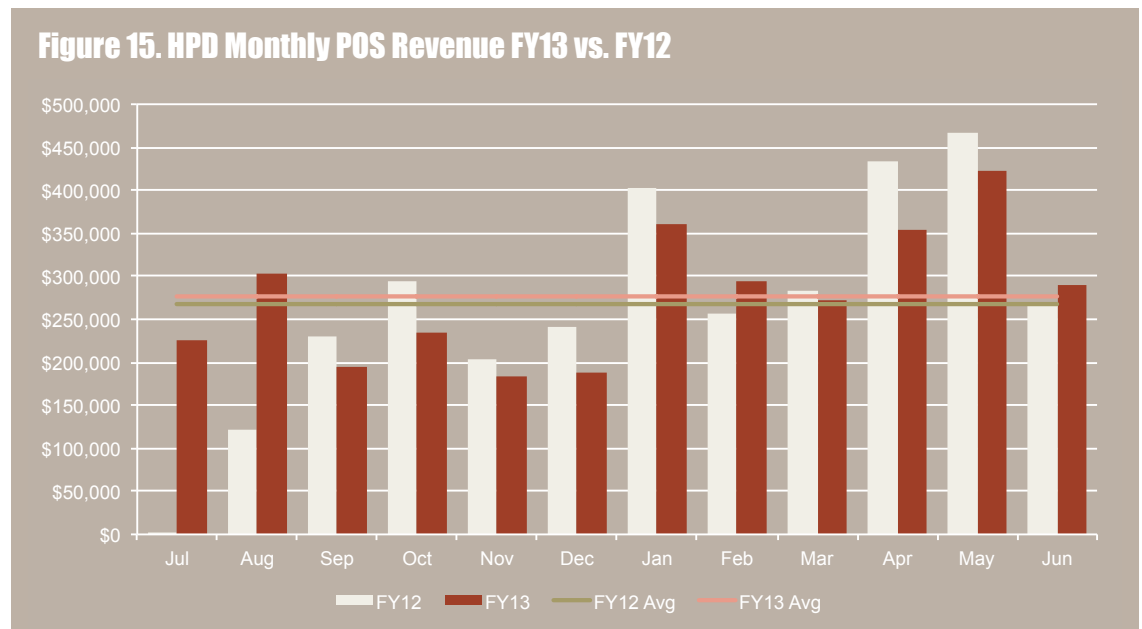
HPD oversees the permitting and regulation of automotive dealers, body shop operators, parking lot operators, wrecker drivers, and auto repair facilities. HPD also provides identification clearance letters and fingerprinting services.

HPD's permitting activities accounted for over \$3 million in revenue and 22,500 POS transactions in FY13. On average, HPC collected \$277,000 in revenue and conducted approximately 1,900 transactions per month. Compared to FY 12, this represents a 4% increase in revenue and an 18% increase in volume. However, excluding July from the comparison period reveals a decrease of 4% in revenue but an increase of 9% in transaction volume.

**Figure 14. HPD Monthly POS Volume FY13 vs. FY12**



**Figure 15. HPD Monthly POS Revenue FY13 vs. FY12**



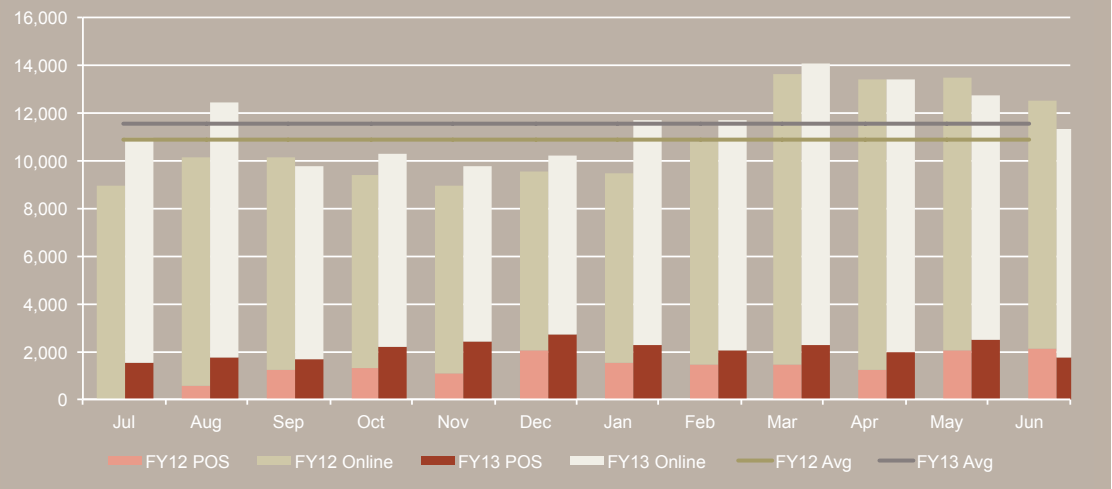
# ADMINISTRATION & REGULATORY AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

ARA oversees the permitting and regulation of certain commercial businesses, vehicles for hire, burglar and panic alarms, and sound amplifying equipment for special events.

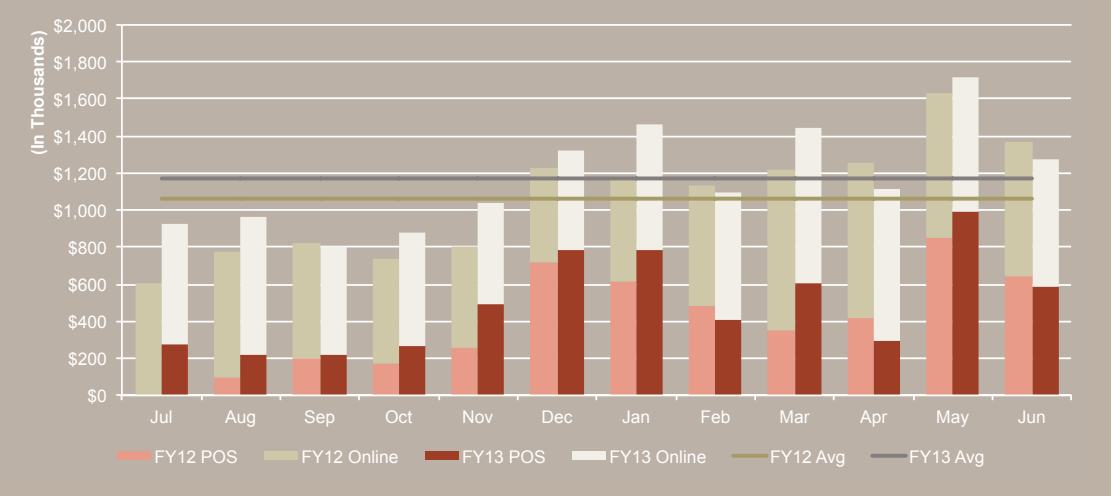
ARA collected approximately \$14 million in revenue from over 138,000 online and POS transactions in FY13. On average, ARA collected just under \$1.2 million in revenue and conducted over 11,500 transactions per month. This represents a 10% increase in revenue and a 6% increase in volume compared to FY12. Excluding the month of July, there was an 8% increase in revenue and a 5% increase in volume of transactions.

While online sales, especially burglar alarm permits, accounted for the majority of transactions made in FY13, 82%, their revenues accounted for only 58%.

**Figure 16. ARA Monthly Volume. FY13 vs. FY12**



**Figure 17. ARA Monthly Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**

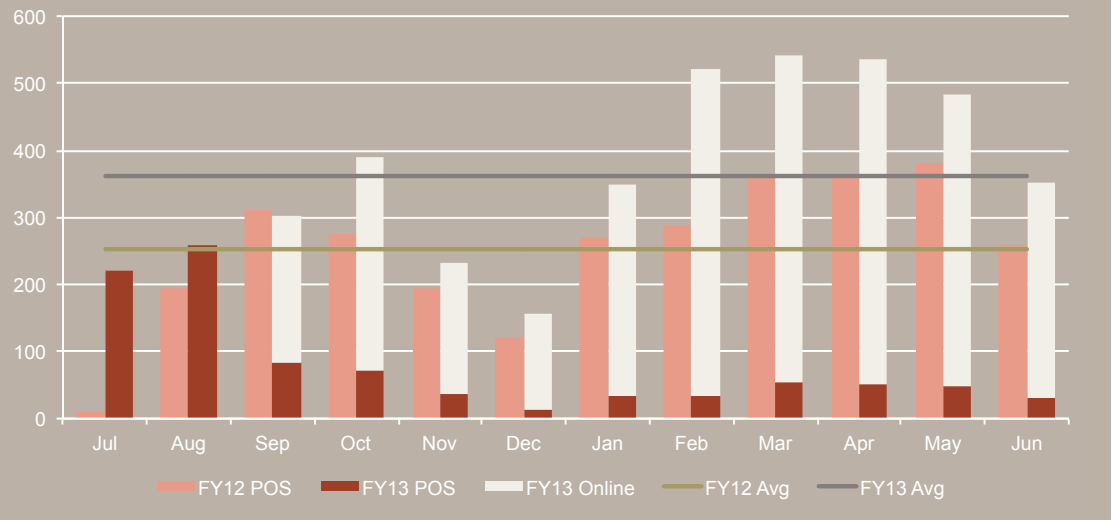




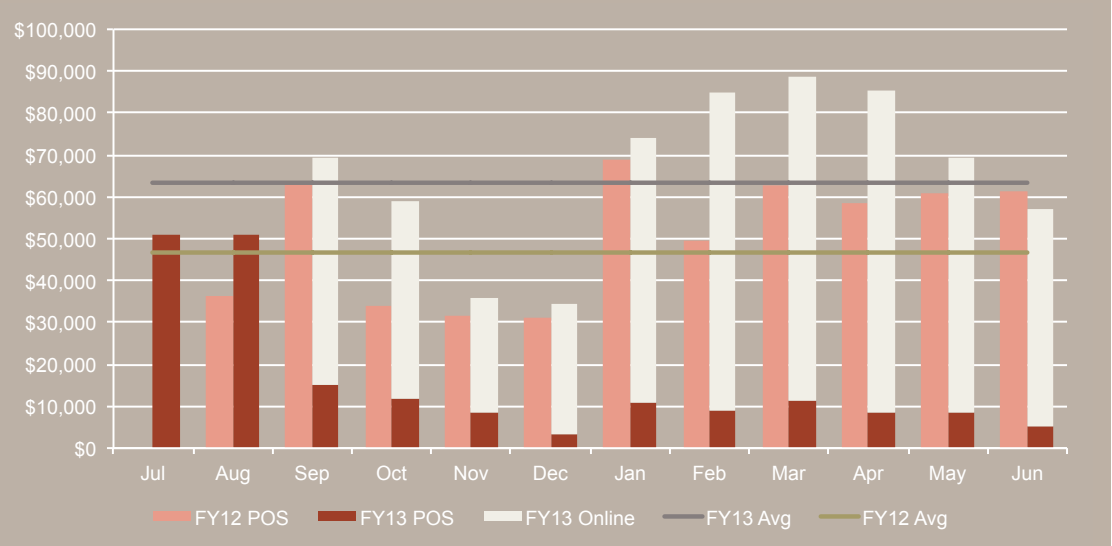
# HOUSTON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

PARD oversees the permitting and regulation of ball fields, concession stands, and community centers. PARD collected approximately \$760,500 from 4,300 POS and online transactions in FY13. This represents a 36% increase in revenue from FY12 and a 43% increase in transactions. PARD launched their online reservation and permitting site in September 2012. This proved to be a convenient and popular option as three-quarters of all revenue collected in FY13 was from online sales.

**Figure 18. PARD Monthly Transaction Volume, FY13 vs. FY12**



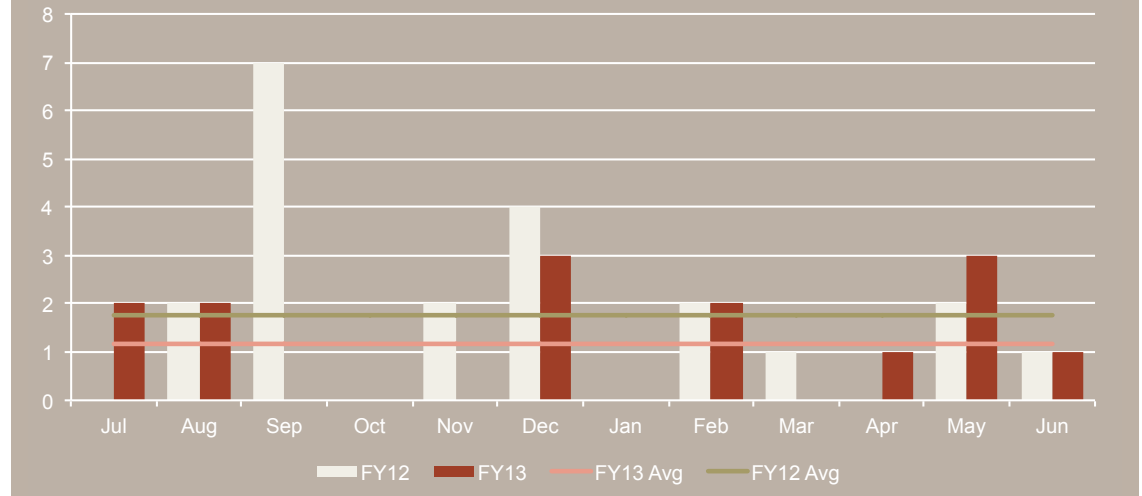
**Figure 19. PARD Monthly Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**



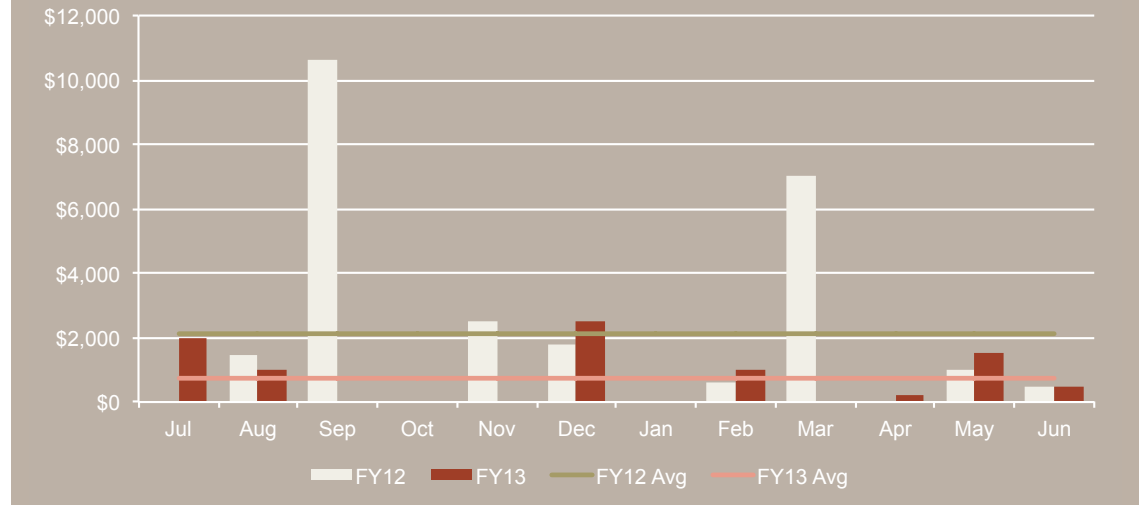
# PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

PDD oversees the permitting and regulation of land development in Houston and in the extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Their permitting activities accounted for \$8,700 in revenue and 14 POS transactions in FY13. This represents a two-thirds decline in revenue from FY12 and a third decline in POS volume.

**Figure 20. PDD Monthly POS Transactions, FY13 vs. FY12**



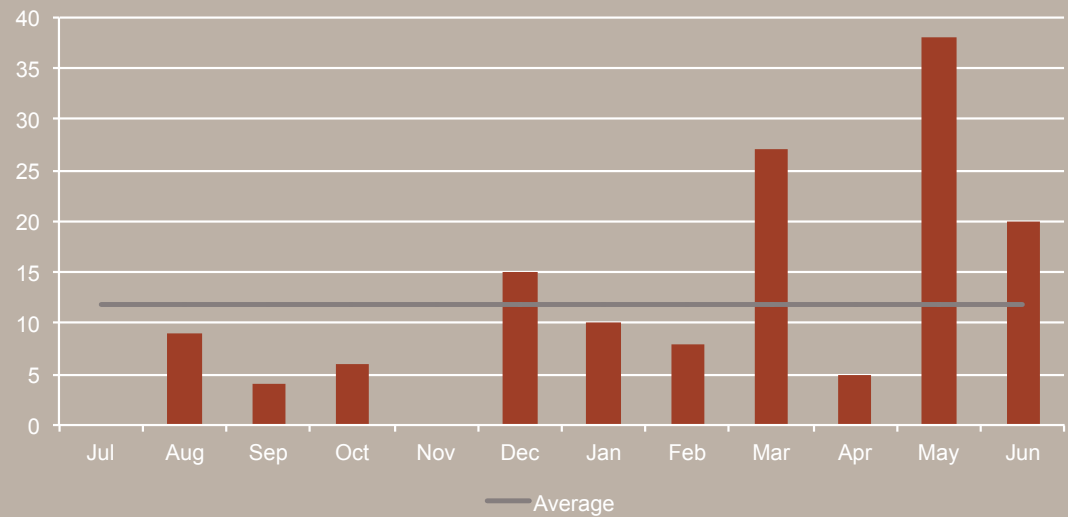
**Figure 21. PDD Monthly POS Revenue, FY13 vs. FY12**



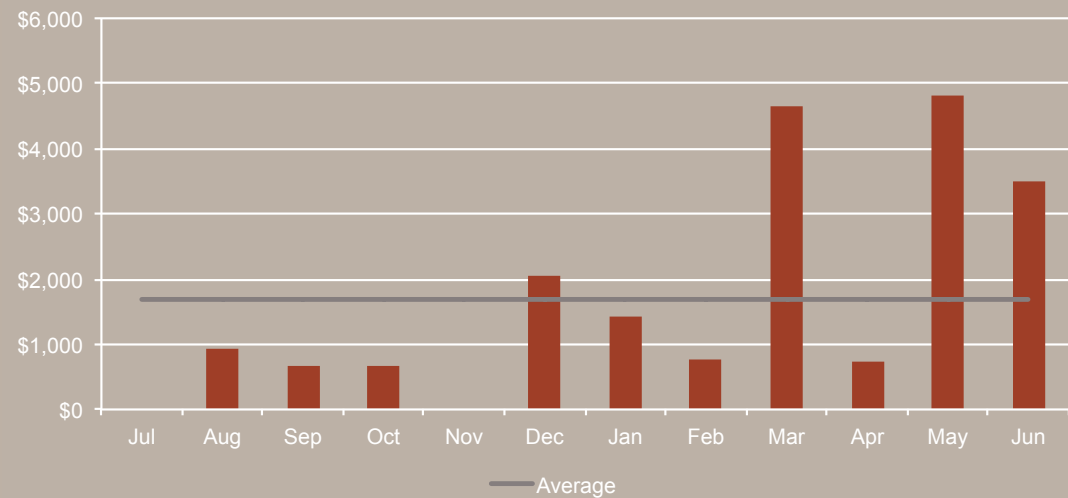
# HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

HHS oversees the plan review of food establishments, and the review of commercial and residential swimming pools. HHS began collecting a separate plan review fee in January 2013. The Center also became a satellite location for HHS customers to purchase food-handling permits and certification classes. In FY13, HHS' permitting activities accounted \$3,500 in revenue and 20 POS transactions.

**Figure 22. HHS Monthly POS Transaction Volume, FY13**



**Figure 23. HHS Monthly POS Revenue, FY13**



# CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

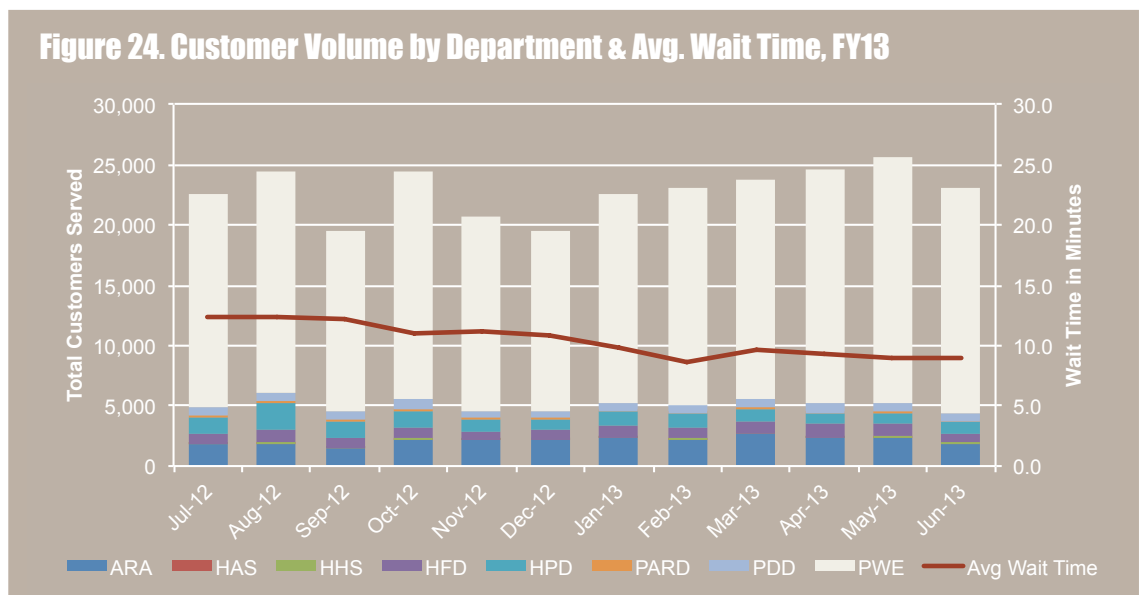



During the HPC’s initial year of operation we established a philosophy of continuous improvement that was focused on providing our customers with exceptional service. During FY13 we invested heavily in several initiatives aimed at improving the overall customer experience at the HPC. By the end of FY13 many of the initiatives were resulting in significant improvements and paying major dividends.

We began by concentrating on building a culture of exceptional customer service throughout the organization. The defining outcome of this exercise was the creation of a customer service training program tailored specifically for the needs of HPC customers. The program was designed to infuse our customer service principles into each and every individual in the organization. By the end of FY13 every supervisor, manager and executive at the HPC had completed the program and a training schedule for all employees had been established.

We also commissioned a comprehensive review of business processes throughout the organization with the goal of streamlining as many as possible. The review was partially completed in FY13 and resulted in several business units unveiling improved processes, particularly ARA, PARD and PWE. We also established a systematic method for reviewing business processes, recommending improvements, implementing changes and evaluating results. Beyond the review we realized some streamlining simply by relocating several customer contact points to the first floor permit counter, which resulted in customers completing a greater number of transactions without traveling to other floors.

A significant portion of the FY13 investment was aimed at enhancing existing technologies or introducing new ones for the purpose of improving service delivery and customer experience. Changeable digital signs were installed throughout the HPC for broadcasting news and event information. The customer routing system (known as Q-flow) received several noteworthy enhancements that improved ease of use and significantly reduced customer wait times throughout the center.





Meaningful amenities are an important piece of the customer's overall experience. Another significant portion of the FY13 investment was directed toward improving the amenities our customers value most. We added customer parking capacity, expanded seating and table space in the reception areas, and increased the number of vending machine options.

Proactive customer engagement leads to better communication between the HPC staff and our customers, which ultimately results in a better customer experience. We made several changes in FY13 designed to strengthen our ability to engage customers and identify and resolve their problems and concerns. We added customer assistance staff and empowered them to solve problems. We moved the primary check-in point closer to the Information Desk and placed roving agents throughout the HPC. We conducted a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey and used the results to inform our decision making for FY14 improvements. We chartered an Advisory Board of key stakeholder representatives and work closely with board members to meet service delivery challenges.

Although the changes highlighted in this section had a considerable impact in FY13 there are still milestones to reach when it comes to our service delivery. Therefore, it is our priority in FY14 to strive for additional improvement.

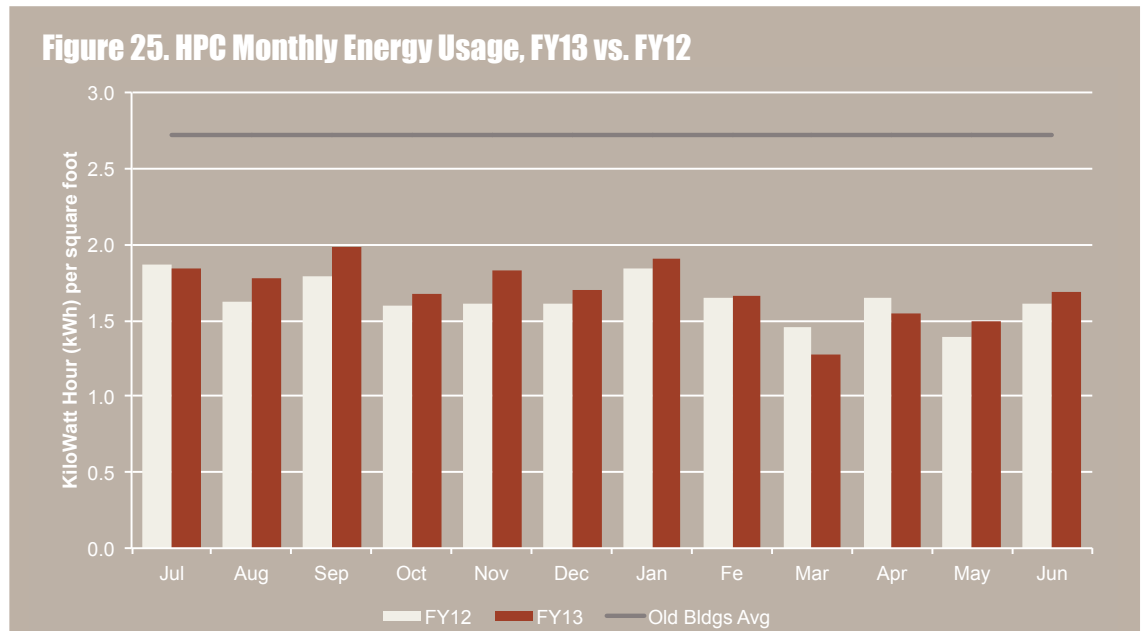
# SUSTAINABILITY



The HPC typifies the sustainability vision that Mayor Annise Parker created for the City of Houston. The building itself is a showpiece of green technologies and construction. In November 2012, the US Green Building Council (USGBC) awarded the HPC building Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification for new construction. The LEED rating system measures the energy-efficiency and environmental stewardship of the built environment, including commercial and residential buildings, homes, offices, schools, and neighborhoods. Points are awarded in five key areas: energy efficiency, indoor environmental development, material selection, sustainable site development, and water savings. In February 2013, the HPC unveiled a plaque commemorating its certification. The plaque is located at the south entrance next to the Green Building Resource Center (GBRC), an apropos location.

In April 2012, the City of Houston was awarded \$900,000 grant from Texas Comptroller of Public Account’s State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) program. With this funding, three new types of solar voltaic systems and four urban wind turbines were installed on the roof of HPC in August 2012. In addition, older solar panels from PWE’s prior location at 3300 Main were salvaged and re-installed at the HPC. An interactive display was added to the GBRC which allows visitors to discuss the building’s energy and water use, building control systems, energy saved, and energy produced.

During FY13, the HPC consumed 20.4 kilowatt-hours (kWh)<sup>2</sup> of electricity per square foot. Energy consumption increased by 3% in FY13 from 19.7 kWh of electricity per square foot in FY12. Compared to the old Code Enforcement buildings which used an average 2.72 kWh per square foot per month, energy consumption at the HPC is 38% less, averaging 1.7 kWh per square foot per month in FY13. For further perspective, office buildings in the West South Central census region (Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas) consumed an average of 19.9 kWh of electricity per square foot annually.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> A kilowatt-hour is a unit of energy equivalent to one kilowatt (1 kW) of power expended for one hour (1 h) of time. For example, a 100-watt light bulb run for 1 hour would consume 0.1 kWh of energy. This same amount of energy would light a 40-watt bulb for 2.5 hours, or a 10-watt low-energy bulb for 10 hours.

<sup>3</sup>Source: 2003 Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey, U.S. Energy Information Administration, last accessed on August 8, 2013 at <http://www.eia.gov/consumption/commercial/index.cfm>

# FUTURE INITIATIVES



FY13 was a successful year. We are committed to building on that success by investing in more initiatives that increase our ability to deliver exceptional service in FY14—our combined efforts will again be focused on making the customer experience better. The future is bright for the HPC.

Each year we develop a list of improvement initiatives based on feedback from our stakeholders, our employees, our Leadership Team and our Advisory Board. Working in conjunction with these groups we have developed an ambitious list of initiatives for FY14. At the very top of the list are two projects expected to completely overhaul our web presence and major permitting processing system. The HPC website will be updated to provide users with more useful information, organized in a more logical way, tailored for online commerce, and equipped with search and support tools that make complex permitting processes easier to navigate. We will also begin planning the migration to the next generation of permitting processing systems, which will redefine the way permitting and enforcement activities are conducted and will introduce major process improvement opportunities for years to come.

Additional upgrades are planned for improving the HPC's customer check-in and routing process. We expect to launch an appointment setting feature for a limited number of services early in FY14, which will give customers more flexibility and greater control over their time spent at the HPC. We also expect to launch a text alert feature early in FY14 that will send text messages to customers as they advance in line. Following an initial testing phase we expect to roll out both features for a wider number of services throughout FY14. We are also planning to reformat the displays in each waiting area to improve the amount and quality of available information.

We have several initiatives planned in FY14 to improve our amenities and make our customers' visits more productive and enjoyable. First, we are planning to increase the number and upgrade the quality of the directional signs our customer rely on to find and navigate the HPC. Next, we expect to complete the construction of an on-site cafe early in FY14 that will expand the food and drink choices beyond the current vending machine options. Next, we are planning to rehabilitate the overflow parking lot to improve access to parking, circulation through the lot, connectivity between lots and availability of spaces. Finally, we are planning to introduce more business service amenities to help customers optimize their time visiting the HPC.