

Update on the Modern Permitting Initiative

An interdepartmental team was formed in 2024 to evaluate the City's permit process and to identify how to make improvements and streamline it. This evaluation included customer and stakeholder engagement to receive feedback and improvement ideas. After completing the evaluation of the permit process in late 2024, the team transitioned immediately to implementation and is focusing on the following key areas:

- Improved permit structure
- Improved customer permitting experience
- Improved staff permitting process
- Clear customer communication

The Permitting Process Improvement Team will be implementing large and small process improvements over the next couple years and have branded this effort the *Modern Permitting Initiative: A More Efficient Process from Application Through Inspection*.

To date, the team has implemented countless improvements. Some of the highlights are below.

Improvements Accomplished

- Introducing target review timeframes and establishing active monitoring of review performance
- Streamlining online account registrations
- Going fully paperless and transitioning to a fully digital process
- Implementing a self-service kiosk in the third floor Permit Center to help customers in-person
- Going cashless and updating our credit card processing
- Reorganizing the permit library and standardizing permit file structure
- Launching the Permitting Knowledge Center as the go-to place for internal permitting resources for staff
- Formalizing policies and procedures and creating a standardized process
- Strengthening intake and revision routing procedures by establishing a clearer, standardized process
- Updating correction letter template, job aids, and data entry standards to improve clarity and consistency

- Improving internal communication and consistency through regular staff trainings, monthly staff newsletters, and work group feedback
- Conducting developer stakeholder meetings and customer satisfaction surveys to gather feedback and guide improvements

These improvements have contributed to a more predictable and transparent experience for applicants.

Permit Review Times

We are beginning to see improvements in review times, particularly with single-reviewer and standard permit types. Improvements such as introducing target review timeframes have helped calibrate workloads and support more efficient prioritization. The percentage of applications approved within the 65-day target improved each of the four quarters in 2025, from 71% in Q1 to 96% in Q4. We anticipate these results to fluctuate depending on the volume and complexity of permit applications.

However, our timelines for complex projects continue to exceed the targets and generally are similar to many of our peer jurisdictions in the region. Infill development in urban areas is challenging, requiring navigation of complex obstacles and coordination with multiple agencies while ensuring compliance with all code requirements. The Modern Permitting Initiative will continue to implement improvements with a focus on improving review timelines, particularly for complex projects.

Backup Systems for Reviewers

We continue to maintain a roster of on-call professional services to provide depth and support in the event there is not staff capacity to perform permit reviews during periods of a high volumes of work, extended absences, a job vacancy, etc.

Developer Response to Changes

Feedback from the development community and our customers has been a focal point since launching this work. We have provided regular updates to our Developer Stakeholder Group, the Master Builders Association, and the Shoreline Chamber of Commerce. Feedback has been generally positive. Many have expressed appreciation for:

- Increased clarity and predictability
- More consistent communication
- Opportunities to provide input through stakeholder meetings and surveys
- Continued progress and embracing a culture of continuous improvement

Looking Forward to 2026

While significant progress has been made, several projects are already underway for 2026 that will further advance improvements to the permitting process:

- Implementing a new customer permitting portal, mybuildingpermit.com
- Conducting an audit of different areas of our permitting software to identify opportunities for improvement
- Permit consolidation to simplify the application process and reduce the number of separate permits customers must navigate, particularly on larger developments
- Continuing to refine performance monitoring tools to ensure consistent adherence to target timeframes
- Continuing to develop and update policies, procedures, job aids, and other training tools to reinforce standardization
- Updating communication materials to improve clarity, reflect a modernized process, and align with federal accessibility standards