



May 1, 2023

Mayor London Breed  
City Hall Room 200  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mayor Breed:

On behalf of the Department of Building Inspection, I am pleased to submit to you DBI's Housing Delivery Performance Assessment and Improvement Plan, as required under your Executive Directive 23-01 – Housing for All. DBI is committed to doing our part to achieve the goals and actions set forth in ED 23-01 and San Francisco's 2023 Housing Element by taking concrete steps to accelerate the approval of new housing projects.

At this critical time for DBI, as we build on the momentum of new leadership and public integrity reforms, we recognize our important role in housing production as well as the overall economic recovery of San Francisco.

Articulated within this report is an assessment of DBI's current housing permit approval performance which sets a baseline to reduce our permit processing times by at least 50 percent by February 2024. To that end, this report presents process improvements consistent with the guidance of ED 23-01. While no one improvement is enough to solve all permitting challenges, this plan provides a roadmap of ongoing and new initiatives which, taken together, will eliminate backlog, streamline our processes and create additional capacity.

We look forward to working with you, the Director of Housing Delivery and our partner agencies to achieve the goal of the 2023 Housing Element to build more housing in San Francisco.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick O'Riordan".

Patrick O'Riordan  
Director

## Background on DBI

The Department of Building Inspection (DBI) is the regulatory building safety agency responsible for overseeing the effective and efficient enforcement of building, electrical, plumbing, disability access and housing codes for the City and County of San Francisco's more than 200,000 commercial and residential buildings. In the last full fiscal year (FY 21-22), DBI issued more than 54,000 building, plumbing and electrical permits and conducted nearly 137,000 inspections. DBI issued building permits with a combined construction valuation of more than \$3.5 billion.

FY 21-22 permit-issuance numbers are an 8% increase over the FY 20-21 numbers. This reflects the increase in permit activity and the improvements that DBI has been making in the past three years.

DBI is in a period of unprecedented reform. Three years ago, as the City's Shelter-in-Place order went into effect, the department's director resigned abruptly. At the time, DBI's services were almost completely based on in-person services (in permitting and inspections), and the COVID shut-down had profound impacts on the department. Compounding these challenges, the department moved its offices to the Permit Center in summer 2020 and during that time, the City launched electronic plan review (EPR), which was not ready for the demands placed on it. The permit backlog grew rapidly to more than 3,000 permit applications by the end of 2020.

To tackle these challenges, DBI's new leadership reorganized its Permit Services team to address the backlog and launched several initiatives to increase permit processing, including expanding online instant permitting to include roofing and kitchen/bath remodels, partnering with fellow permitting departments to share administrative tasks, and developing an appointment-based drop-off system to facilitate faster permit processing. Once the Permit Center reopened to the public in July 2021 and resumed its normal Over-the-Counter operations, the department was able to focus on reducing the backlog to a manageable level, which took several months.

In addition to these process improvements and other changes, the department began an audit to ensure that there were no life-safety concerns at properties inspected by a former senior building inspector indicted in August 2021. The department worked extensively with the City Attorney's office on this and related investigations. In addition to launching the extensive code-compliance audit, the department developed and launched a reforms initiative to protect the integrity of its services and hired a compliance manager to manage the reforms and develop new safeguards for the public integrity of the department.

In September 2021, the department brought in a new Permit Services Deputy Director who has implemented several initiatives to streamline the Permit Services Division, standardize processes, set new policies and implement new strategies to speed up permit processing that will be discussed in this report.

The department's leadership believes that the initiatives outlined in this report will significantly speed up permit processing in the City, especially for housing projects.

## DBI's Role in Housing Production

DBI is the lead agency for post-entitlement development review, permitting, and inspection for housing development. DBI's operations and mission have a direct correlation to the safety and the economic vitality of San Francisco.

DBI establishes and maintains minimum standards of habitability and occupancy for residents, commercial enterprise, manufacturing, and most institutions in the City. Fulfilling this role includes a responsibility to:

1. Provide clear and concise information to constituents, developers, design professionals, contractors and other interested parties on the application requirements, processes, fees, and timelines.
2. Distribute and monitor review documents to other development review agencies during the plan review process and maintain a transparent view of the status of review.
3. Review applications for construction of new buildings, additions, alterations, changes of use, demolitions, and relocations and related work.
4. Enforce state and local regulations, codes, and standards relating to construction, accessibility, and sustainable development of the built environment.
5. Respond to complaints about zoning, housing, and building code violations and liaise between the property owner and other city agencies to enforce code compliance.
6. Perform periodic inspections of multi-family housing and other types of occupancies to establish minimum standards of occupancy.
7. Perform safety assessments for critical infrastructure, housing, and businesses in times of emergency, and promote the re-occupancy of buildings after natural and human-made disasters.
8. Monitor the inventory of existing building stock for health and public safety concerns and administer mitigating programs to repair or demolish affected buildings.

With respect to housing production specifically, the process begins when a building permit application for a project is filed with DBI. DBI's Permit Services division is responsible for all plan review and permit processing from when a permit application is submitted until a building permit is issued. This includes screening, routing permits and plans for review, coordination of building permit review, approval and issuance of construction permits including electrical, plumbing, and mechanical permits for public and private buildings within the City and County of San Francisco.

The building permit application is typically first reviewed by the Planning Department for compliance with the Planning Code, zoning, and other applicable policies. Following Planning Department approval and entitlements, DBI reviews the project for compliance with the Building Code.

If DBI approves the project following its review, DBI issues building permits authorizing construction. Projects with approved building permits generally start construction within 90 days from the date the permit is issued. Start of construction, however, may be delayed for up to a year for a variety of reasons.

Projects are inspected by DBI at various stages throughout the construction process. At the end of the process, inspectors issue Certificates of Final Completions (CFCs) for projects that are deemed 100% complete. Units certified complete are an indicator of changes to the City's

housing supply and include units gained or lost from new construction, alterations, and demolitions.

Under Administrative Bulletin 004 and in accordance with the City’s “Permit Application Processing” regulations, DBI provides priority permit review and issuance for new housing. Specifically, permits meeting the criteria below or otherwise prioritized by law may be prioritized at the request of the permit applicant:

- Permit applications for projects that provide new affordable housing (meeting the affordability levels defined in Planning Code Section 415 and in the Procedures Manual adopted by the Mayor’s Office of Housing) in 100% of the on-site dwelling units;
- Permit applications for housing projects (1) which are seeking approval under the HOME-SF program, as provided for in Planning Code Section 206.3 or (2) where at least 30 percent of the total number of on-site dwelling units are affordable for a term of no less than 55-years to households with an income no higher than for middle-income households, as defined in Planning Code Section 401;
- Applications for creation of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) or Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (JADU).

**See page 8 for a flow chart of DBI’s permitting process and Appendix A for DBI’s organizational chart.**

## Performance Assessment

The data in this section are from DBI’s Permit Tracking System (PTS) and include full permits, site permits, and site permit addenda that meet the following criteria:

1. The proposed number of units on the permit is greater than the existing units (1+ net units)
2. The proposed occupancy includes a residential code (‘R’)
3. The valuation is more than \$1 (\$1 permits are administrative)
4. The permit has been submitted for in-house review (forms 1, 2, 3)
5. They are not “fire only” permits where SFFD is the only reviewing agency

We will refer to these permits as “housing-producing permits/addenda.”

## Permitting Timelines

We selected calendar year 2022 as a baseline from which to measure improvements. The journey from filing to issuance for a building permit/addendum is comprised of review time with multiple city departments, as well as time spent waiting for the customer to respond to comments or revise plans. DBI does not currently have a way to account for customer time, so the numbers below are inclusive of any delays on the customer side. DBI is currently working on an initiative to improve data tracking to account for the time a permit spends with the customer during the revision process.

In 2022, 609 housing-producing permits/addenda were issued. The table below illustrates that all housing-producing full and site permits were reviewed by DBI plan check stations and over 90% were also reviewed by Planning, DPW, and SFPUC. This will help contextualize why the time permits spend with DBI plan check stations is less than the entire time it takes to issue a housing-producing permit.

<b>Percent of building permits/addenda issued in 2022 that were reviewed by different city agencies</b>						
<b>Type</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>DBI Plan Check</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>DPW</b>	<b>SFPUC</b>	<b>SFFD</b>
Full	274	100%	97%	95%	92%	62%
Site	99	100%	100%	100%	100%	79%
Addenda	236	76%	22%	61%	37%	61%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>64%</b>

The median number of calendar days between filing and issuance for housing-producing permits/addenda issued in 2022 was 475 days. The median days to issue for full permits was 587 days and for site permits was 913 days. On their issuance journeys, these permits/addenda spent a median of 204-259 days with DBI plan check stations (this includes time spent waiting for customer responses). On average, housing-producing site permits issued in 2022 spent 36% of their issuance journey with DBI plan check stations, and full permits spent 51% of their time with DBI plan check.

<b>Median days to issue housing-producing permits/addenda issued in 2022 and median days with DBI plan check stations</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Median Days to Issue</b>	<b>Median Days with DBI Plan Check Stations *</b>
Full	274	587	259
Site	99	913	253
Addenda	236	267	204
<b>ALL</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>237</b>

\* Median days with DBI plan check stations is measured by calculating the number of calendar days that plans are under review at DBI plan check stations while accounting for overlaps in review time.

While DBI does not control the entire issuance process for building permits/addenda, we are working hard to improve the timeliness of assigning plans to staff and getting feedback to the customer. At the beginning of Fiscal Year 22-23, DBI began assessing plans for the estimated time to complete a first review and now uses that information to assign plans to staff in a more equitable and efficient manner. We have used a benchmark of six (6) weeks for the data below.

In 2022, DBI plan check stations received 516 first reviews for housing-producing permits/addenda. DBI responded to the customer in 6 weeks or less 53% of the time. A greater proportion of full permits (60%) received responses in six (6) weeks or less, while 33% of site permits did.

<b>DBI plan check first reviews* for housing-producing permits/addenda received in 2022 that were completed in 6 weeks or less</b>		
<b>Type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent of first reviews done in 6 weeks or less</b>
Full	258	60%
Site	76	33%
Addenda	182	45%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>53%</b>

\* First reviews refer to the first time a permit comes to any of our DBI plan check stations, which include building, mechanical, mechanical/electrical, structural, or plumbing. A first review is completed when revisions are requested from the customer or the plans are approved.

### Timelines by Project Type

We also examined data for permits/addenda for three (3) categories of housing: 100% affordable projects, multi-family housing developments, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

<b>Median days to issue housing-producing permits/addenda issued in 2022 and median days with DBI plan check stations, by project type*</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Median Days to Issue</b>	<b>Median Days with DBI Plan Check Stations **</b>
100% Affordable	101	188	155
Multi-family*	99	473	270
ADU	214	542	251

\* Project types are mutually exclusive, so "multi-family" excludes projects with the 100% affordable flag and does not include ADU projects.

## Housing Coordinator Assessment

### Assessment of efficacy to date

James Zhan, DBI’s Housing Coordinator, was appointed on September 29, 2017, as part of Executive Directive 17-02. The Directive stipulated “a senior manager, reporting directly to the department head, who will be responsible for coordinating and streamlining the Department’s efforts to approve and permit new housing development. That manager is to be responsible for ensuring that housing approval functions are adequately staffed and for taking full advantage of developer-reimbursable opportunities to add staff where needed for expediting housing approvals.”

### DBI Project Coordination

The DBI Housing Coordinator functions as the contact person for housing delivery project managers, other permitting agencies’ housing coordinators, and priority housing permit project sponsors on permitting-related subjects. This role includes interagency permitting MOU negotiations and implementation, coordinating project inspections and special inspections, and certifying the permit readiness status of housing and DA projects. The Housing Coordinator also provides monthly updates on significant housing projects and completion statistics to DBI’s

executive team. The housing coordinator has been effective in helping to identify issues and assist in problem-solving.

### Areas to Improve

To maximize DBI's Housing Coordinator contribution and to further facilitate the permitting process for individual housing/DA projects, it would be beneficial to more clearly define the responsibilities of DBI's Housing Coordinator.

Another area for improvement is for the DBI Housing Coordinator to develop a reporting system and to keep Permit Services Management and DBI's Executive team updated on progress and on the priorities of the citywide housing coordination group.

The Housing Coordinator could also play a role in developing strategies for all housing instead of only larger projects or Development Agreement projects, such as initiatives to streamline plan review and permitting for single-family dwellings, accessory dwelling units, tiny homes, replicable plans, and office-to-residential conversions. This "big-picture" perspective is important in facilitating ED 23-01 to help set the strategic direction of new initiatives or to learn from the best practices of other areas.

## Process Improvements

### Objective

The overall goal of this plan is to reduce DBI plan review and permit approval times by at least 50% by February 1, 2024. To produce this plan, DBI evaluated elements of its program and analyzed the following elements to produce the recommendations in this report. DBI's evaluation:

1. Analyzed data in its Permit Tracking System (PTS) over the past few years to establish a baseline from which to measure performance improvements. Analyzed average permitting timelines for housing-related approvals, including a list of the types of permits and approvals that each Department reviews and average current review times for each element, and propose reduced timelines.
2. Reviewed elements along the timeline between application intake and permit issuance to identify strategies for process streamlining and efficiency.
3. Prioritized and proposed process improvements needed to meet the performance goals, including specific steps and timeframes for completing each improvement.
4. Identified key performance indicators and developed metrics to contribute data for management reports and dashboards.

These objectives are in addition to improvements listed below which are already underway to streamline the approval and construction of housing in accordance with previous Executive Directives 18-01, 17-02 and 13-01.

## Parallel Plan Review Processing

In response to ED 17-02, DBI and the Planning Department jointly released a Parallel Processing Program to allow and encourage inter-department parallel processing for housing development applications. DBI subsequently released an updated Information Sheet G-02, Approvals of Various Plan Review Procedures, providing detailed parallel review requirements and procedures to applicants. Project sponsors entering this parallel process must designate a project coordinator to ensure any revision to the submitted plans will be provided to both agencies in a timely fashion. This opportunity is not widely utilized and DBI will explore with Planning whether the program should be continued.

## Priority Plan Review Processing

Building permit applications for housing production under Executive Directives are assigned the highest plan review and permit processing priority, above other priority permit applications identified in DBI Administrative Bulletin AB 004. In July of 2022, DBI implemented a new plan review assignment methodology using a newly developed Work-In-Progress (WIP) report which further requires priority housing projects be assigned to a DBI plan reviewer within 10 days of arrival at the DBI plan review stations. Under this work assignment process, the plan reviewer is expected to commence his/her review within a week of the assignment. Rechecks for these priority projects are also required to commence within 10 days of the receipt of the revision. Implementation of these general assignment practices have reduced the need for the Housing Coordinator intervention to move individual projects forward on a day-to-day and case-by-case basis.

## Tracking and Reporting

The Management Information Services (MIS) division of DBI flags housing permit applications under the Directive in the Permit Tracking System (PTS). This allows projects to be automatically identified for top priority assignment and review. This practice has allowed DBI staff to better identify and prioritize these housing projects.

## Overview of New Process Improvements

The permitting timeline spans the point of application intake and the point of permit issuance. The processing time between these two points is shared between City staff and the applicant and, to reduce this time by 50% or more, time savings need to be made by both parties.

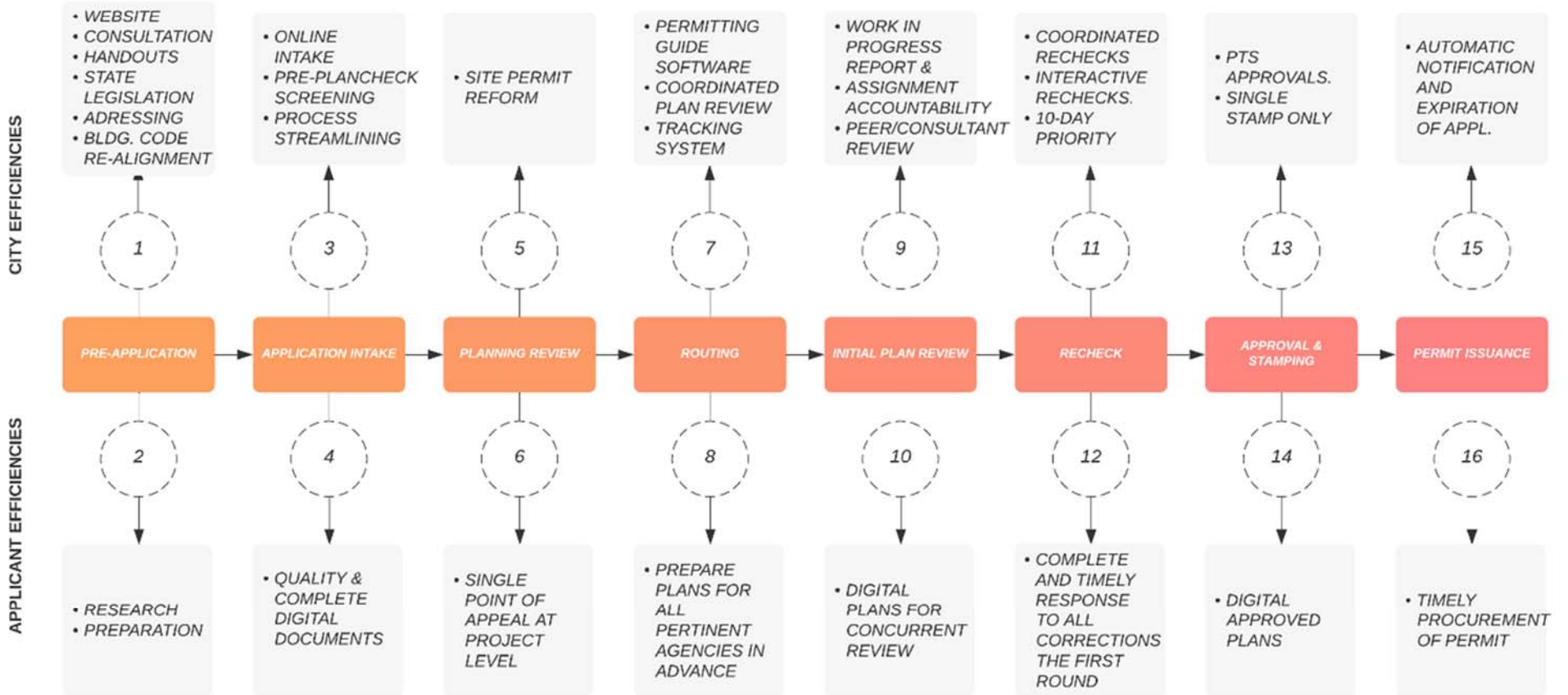
The graphic below illustrates this permitting timeline using the orange process rectangles and identifies efficiencies that can be achieved by City staff above this process line (odd number references) and those that can be made by the project sponsor below the process line (even number references).

No one improvement is expected to make a transformative impact on the overall processing time. However, the combination of efficiencies from both City staff and the project sponsor are expected to reduce the overall processing time.



## Permitting Timeline Index

Neville Pereira | March 31, 2023



## Pre-application Phase

The pre-application phase includes the time before the project sponsor submits an application or otherwise formally initiates action with the City. This stage is when most of the research gets done, the sponsor engages their project development teams to understand the feasibility of their project with regard to design possibilities, property rights and restrictions, requirements from the authorities having jurisdiction, fees and taxes, design costs, and financing. To assist applicants at this stage, the City must have all pertinent information available in our office and on our website clearly, simply, and comprehensively. The project sponsor benefits from this information first by using it to guide their project and their decisions, and second by being better prepared to navigate the City's processes. We aspire towards a more informed public, prepared design professionals, and a more predictable outcome for plan review timelines and plan review comments.

Late in 2022, DBI joined many other City agencies in converting their legacy website to the SF.gov platform. This initiative was to standardize the City's website overall look and feel regardless of which department's home page the user visits, and to require all departments to comply with disabled access and language mandates for public information and programs. In doing so, DBI greatly improved the usability of its website, provided clear step-by-step guidelines for permit applicants and built the website's navigation around the various customer journeys.

**Goal:** We strive for 100% digital document submittal for review that are well-researched, high quality, and complete at initial submission so that staff can perform a complete plan review the first time.

**Strategy:** DBI will continue to refresh its website with the intent on making navigation more intuitive, as well as adding new information to passively assist our customers. In addition to the information we already provide, new information examples include:

1. Online records research
2. Online Interactive Permitting Guide
3. Access to the Enterprise Addressing System to initiate an address change request.
4. Informational handouts.
5. Sample plans.
6. Standard plan notes.
7. Standard correction lists.

**Measuring Success:** We can measure the success of these initiatives by monitoring the traffic on our website and performing data analytics on the number of downloaded documents and page hits.

## Site Permit Reform

The Site Permit process is currently voluntary. Applicants for development permits can opt in to the Site Permit process, which allows a construction project to receive approvals in discrete stages.

- **Stage 1:** Site Permit (a conceptual development plan). The approval of a Site Permit does not authorize any construction, but does "entitle" a project from a land use, zoning,

and architectural design review perspective; it also clears the project from CEQA, when applicable.

- **Stage 2:** Addenda permits, which authorize discrete elements of construction (e.g., foundation, building superstructure, mechanical, electrical, etc.). Construction can only occur after submittal and approval of the appropriate addenda permits.

This phasing of review is appropriate and desirable for large, complex projects, such as construction of a high-rise development.

San Francisco's Charter establishes that the Planning Commission has discretion over all building permits in the City. A development project subject to the City's discretion is not legally allowed to begin construction until a Building Permit is approved authorizing the proposed scope of work.

For projects that are principally permitted under the Planning Code, a Building Permit is the only land use entitlement vehicle. Because this process is discretionary, approval of the applicant's initial proposal is not guaranteed; as such, applicants often opt into the Site Permit process to gain approval of land use and design prior to developing costly technical drawings, such as the structural plans.

For projects that are conditionally permitted under the Planning Code, these discretionary project modifications typically occur prior to the submittal of a Building Permit, as part of the land use entitlement process (e.g., Conditional Use Authorization, Downtown Project Authorization, etc.). As a result, most of these applicants choose the "full" Building Permit process instead of the Site Permit process.

This creates a disconnect between the San Francisco Planning and Building Codes.

- The Building Code establishes Site Permits as an option for new construction projects and for 'Major Alteration Projects', as defined by the Building Official.
- The Planning Code incentivizes the use of Site Permits for significantly smaller projects that do not want or need an addenda schedule parsing out portions of the project design into smaller permit sets.

**Goal:** The project envisions bifurcating the Planning entitlement and review process and establishing the Site Permit as an entitlement permit, with the principal function of completing environmental review and completing the City's exercise of discretion over proposed project's land use, massing, and design. The Site Permit should also serve as the vehicle for collecting and validating data for proposed land use and housing unit count changes, as part of development projects.

The Building Permit process should be amended to establish that projects subject to the Planning Department's review must complete Site Permit review and approval prior to obtaining Building Permits. This change would allow Building Permits to operate only as construction permits and not as entitlements. Building Permits would become an effectively ministerial process and would no longer be required for projects that only need a Planning entitlement (such as liquor license approvals, hours of operations extensions, etc.)

**Strategy:** The lead agencies for the project are Planning and DBI. The two agencies will be responsible for:

- Developing and implementing internal policies and procedures, with input from the public and oversight bodies.
- Preparing legislative text or developing other approval documents.

The San Francisco Permit Center, a division of the City Administrator's Office, is providing project management, project coordination, and subject matter consultation services.

Other reviewing agencies, such as the Department of Public Works, the Department of Public Health, and the Fire Department, will be consulted on the proposed changes. Implementation of proposed changes within each respective agency, including communication to internal staff and development of internal tools, will be the responsibility of each agency.

**Measuring Success:** Data analytics from the permit tracking systems will be able to separate the processing time needed by the city and that of the customer. This will provide a higher resolution of the picture for total time to get a construction permit.

## Digital Permitting

DBI currently reviews plans over-the-counter (OTC) or in-house plan review (IPR). While OTC plan review is an in-person review using paper plans and application, IPR offers the customer the option of paper or Electronic Plan Review (EPR) submissions. IPR on paper is a completely sequential review that allows only one department at a time to review the plans. This process is lengthy and resource-intensive during the plan review process. On the other hand, the EPR process allows for concurrent review by all agencies and is much easier for staff and the applicant to navigate. In addition to saving paper and storage resources, EPR allows the applicant to upload digital plans and receive comments via email, creating a more efficient and modern way of doing business. From a permit issuance and archival perspective, it is also easier for the contractor to have access to a digital copy of the approved plans to allow them to duplicate them as many times as needed for bid and sub-contractor sets of the approved plans. Also, when plans go missing, they can reproduce an approved set easily.

Records management is also easier and less resource-intensive because we are archiving records that are already in digital form. Resolution of imagery is preserved and scalable using vector graphic files without the overhead of manipulating physical files.

In addition to electronic plan review, DBI's Permit Tracking System (PTS) is in dire need of being replaced from the standpoint of software platform, technology, functionality, and maintenance. This software was originally implemented in the early 1990s and is based on a technology that is no longer supported. The lack of functionality and maintenance alone require more staff resources than modern systems. DBI, Planning and the Permit Center are poised to partner on the implementation of a replacement system that can provide a unified interface for the public and internal City users to submit new applications and documents, update dispositions and monitor status, communicate between project stakeholders, and navigate workloads that are clear and transparent for all users of the system.

**Goal:** All in-house review project intake, routing, and issuance to be 100% paperless by December 31, 2023. The City should implement a replacement case tracking system.

**Strategy:** Modify internal systems and practices to work better with digital files and correspondences for the interim until such time that a new case tracking system is implemented. Mandate EPR for in-house review projects.

**Measuring Success:** Success of this project is both qualitative and quantitative. From a qualitative perspective, DBI will garner input from customers via surveys, anecdotes, and the Public Advisory Forum. The expectation is that customers will embrace the professional administration of digital plans and comments. PDF comment letters will accommodate 100% of our customers since all systems (PC and MAC) can read .pdf files and customers will no longer require Bluebeam to access their comments.

Quantitatively, there should be a marked improvement for plan review turnaround from the paper IPR process since all reviews will be concurrent. This change, coupled with the revised Site Permit process described below, will achieve a significant improvement in time to issuance for the post-entitlement Building Permit.

### Plan Review Transformation and Modernization

The Plan Review Services Section has been undergoing a transformation since July 1, 2022 when the Pre-Plan Check Process went into effect. The goal of Pre-Plan Check is to quantify the work coming into IPR with an estimate by an experienced plan reviewer of time needed for first review. As a result, the project is now associated with a time expectation instead of a simple count or valuation; both of which do not quantify the level of effort associated with the project. With this metric, DBI can group projects by the level of effort, and thus set expectations for review for each tier.

Plan Review Services is moving toward a more dynamic performance review reporting system. The new reporting matrix will address the issues of managing staff's available time and the individual performance of each staff member. Currently, monthly reports do not address or analyze two important issues that affect staff's available time: 'estimated time' assigned to complete a plan check review versus the 'actual time' it took to accomplish the review. The number of 'recheck hours' it ultimately took to complete the full review of the permit is also an important metric.

By adding these elements to our management reports, leadership will be able to analyze each plan checker's performance in a more accurate and equitable fashion, thus being able to compare individual plan checker performance to each other. Also, leadership will now be able to compare performance within a team, as well as team performance across the board. This report will be an invaluable tool for the weekly permit assignments.

DBI is also prioritizing rechecks and ensuring these projects don't languish in individual queues longer than 10 business days. When a work product is quantified by the number of hours it takes to initially review that project, it becomes possible to project how much time it takes to review all the new projects that arrive at that section in a given week.

**Goal:** Reduce the time needed for DBI to assign and review projects for initial review and rechecks, and make for a more consistent, transparent, and reliable process for the permit applicant by December 31, 2023.

**Strategy:** Review all stages of the plan review process for modernization and efficiency. Remove all barriers possible that are not based on the number of plan reviewers.

**Measuring Success:** Create weekly and continuous trending reports to illustrate the effectiveness of new processes. These reports shall be distributed among the staff so they can see their contributions to the performance of the Plan Review Section. Create a comprehensive report to show time reported and plan review outcomes for all PRS staff.

### Addressing Transformation and Modernization

DBI is the lead agency for address changes in the City and County of San Francisco. This responsibility has not previously been prioritized within DBI and processes are not adequately documented, making it necessary to update policy documents and transform the process to make it simpler and more predictable for staff and the community.

An interagency group was convened in 2019 by the Chief Data Officer and the Mayor's Office to support housing-related address data and process collaboration between DBI, Department of Technology (DT), Department of Public Works (DPW), and the Assessor Recorder's Office. Since that time, significant progress has been made to coordinate and streamline housing-related address process and data, but additional resources, systems, policies, and training are necessary.

**Goal:** Systematize and transform addressing to make it simpler, easier and faster for the City and its constituents to conduct business by December 31, 2023.

**Strategy:** Define a comprehensive topology for an Address Reference System, define an end-to-end lifecycle for addresses, and change systems to maintain the new schema. Memorialize interdepartmental agreements to formalize these new streamlined concepts for implementation.

**Measuring Success:** Mostly qualitative analysis for the changes implemented. Quantitatively, there should be a marked improvement for housing-related address change turnaround timeframes, more transparency in the process, and a much better overall experience for staff and customers.

### Automatic Notification and Expiration of Applications

The California Building Code sets time limitations on applications in CBC Section 105.3.2. This is done deliberately to keep applications moving through review so that construction can start within a reasonable amount of time. The Code also recognizes the importance of building to a current code as opposed to a code that can be between three and nine years old. Also, from a performance metric perspective, DBI has many projects that have been approved for many years, but have done nothing to secure the permit or start construction. These projects may be obsolete before construction starts because they have been allowed to extend their permits indefinitely.

Once the Site Permit Process is reformed, as articulated earlier, the building permit process will proceed more predictably and expeditiously, as this stage is effectively ministerial. Thus, there is no need to extend permits unless there is just cause. DBI proposes to automatically notify the customer of the impending expiration within 60 days of the expiration date to prompt them to keep the review and issuance moving forward. If there is no response or justification for extending the expiration date, the project will be automatically cancelled and the documents purged from our system.

**Goal:** Encourage the applicant to follow through with project completion in a timely way.

**Strategy:** Automatically notify applicants when their applications are about to expire and automatically expire their permit applications if no response is received after due process.

**Measuring Success.** Measure the overall time from application intake to permit issuance. Enforcing automatic notification and cancellation of permit applications will get more projects built within a shorter timeframe, instead of languishing in DBI for years on end.

## Capacity Assessment & Plan

DBI is bound by Government Code 66016 to charge fees for services that cover only our costs to provide those services. The main sources of revenue come from plan review fees, permit fees, and to a lesser extent, fines and other fees.

In recent years, there has been a reduction of revenue due to the effects of the pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn. Coupled with a reduction in our reserves and fees in 2015, this reduction has left DBI vulnerable to staffing challenges today, especially since there have been no fee increases since then.

This year, DBI updated its Valuation Cost Schedule for the first time since 2017 and has initiated a fee study to adjust our fees after eight years. While fee increases in challenging economic times is not ideal, our financial stability is critical to achieving a high level of service. The improvements discussed above will help DBI improve its services.

DBI also intends to pursue developer-reimbursable opportunities to augment current staffing so that more resources are available when needed. Other jurisdictions are able to absorb the impacts of large projects and surges in volume with little impact on their service levels by utilizing as-needed professional consulting services. There are important labor considerations with this mode of operation, but the additional burdens placed on staff and increasing plan review wait times during increases in workload could be offset through developer reimbursement to pay for the use of consultants. DBI would like to initiate a process to enable the department to utilize those services.

Appendix A

Department of Building Inspection  
Organizational Chart

