Permitting & Development Reform

Hearing on City Council Bill 25-0003R
March 11, 2025

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Baltimore faces a housing crisis and commercial corridor challenges that require immediate action.

With a groundbreaking $3 billion investment plan to address vacant properties, we have an unprecedented opportunity to transform our city.

Now more than ever, we need a permitting process that is:

Accessible.
Efficient.
Accountable.

Facilitating Approvals and Streamlining Timelines

This comprehensive program of reforms, led by Deputy Mayor Justin Williams, will modernize and streamline Baltimore's development approval process, from acquisition to final inspection.

This plan consolidates initiatives already in progress (such as Housing's new permit software), opportunities to build on those successes, and much needed updates to all City processes that affect development.

Two Cornerstone Initiatives

➤ Director of Permitting and Development Services

Direct authority to coordinate across agencies, eliminate bottlenecks, and ensure accountability in our development processes.

➤ Bmore FAST Advisory Group

This diverse body will bring together developers, contractors, architects, lenders, community development experts, and small business representatives to provide practical insights and monitor progress.

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BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

Reforms in Four Key Areas

Public Engagement & Access

- Public Land Use & Liquor License Information Portal
- Enhanced Customer Service
- Bilingual Access Initiative
- Virtual Office Hours
- Permit Review Time Transparency

Developer & Builder Support

- Self-Certification and Third-Party Review
- Developer's Agreement Process Reform
- Utility Coordination Program
- Major Projects Coordination Committee
- PermitStat Implementation

Small Business & Emerging Developer Support

- Small and MWBE Developer Support Programs
- Pre-approved Plans and Documents
- Streamlined Minor Variance Process
- Trade Licensure Reform Initiative
- Business License Coordination

City Operations & Capacity

- Centralized Development Leadership
- Comprehensive Staffing Assessment
- Lien Release Process Reform
- Zoning Administrator Reorganization
- Real Estate Document Processing Assessment

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DHCD coordinates the building permitting process through its online E-Permits system.

The majority of permits only require review within DHCD.

Larger or more complex projects, or those in certain areas, require coordination with other agencies.

DHCD Permit Review

- Initial Plans Review
- Licensed Trades (Mech., Elec., HVAC, Engineering)

Other Agency Permit Review

- **Fire:** Plans Review and Inspection
- **DPW:** Environmental Review; Water & Wastewater
- **DOT:** Right of Way; Traffic Division; Conduits
- **Planning:** Design Review (UDAAP/CHAP); Subdivision (Planning Commission)
- **Health:** Food Facilities

Department of Housing and Community Development

WHERE WE ARE

37,187 | 38,202 | 38,543 | **39,943**

2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024
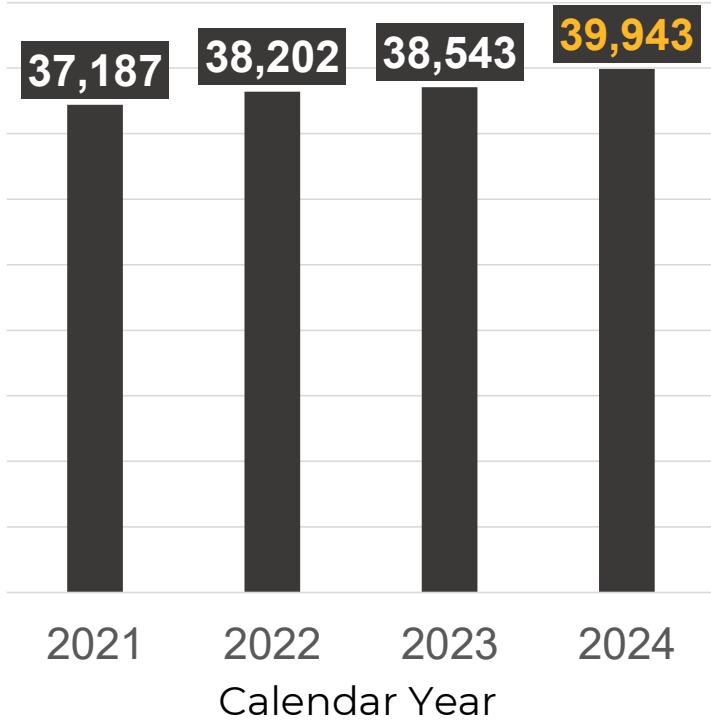
Calendar Year

Total Permits Issued
7.4% Increase from 2021 to 2024

		Calendar Year			
Permit Type	**aka**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Construction	COM	33,434	34,328	34,728	36,064
Use & Occupancy	USE	3,221	3,330	3,445	3,605
Demolition	DEM	493	424	305	214
Temporary Use	TMP	39	120	65	60

82%

Construction (COM) Permits issued in 10 days or less

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Construction (COM) Permits by Processing Time

Days to Process

- 0-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 30-60
- 61-90
- 91-more

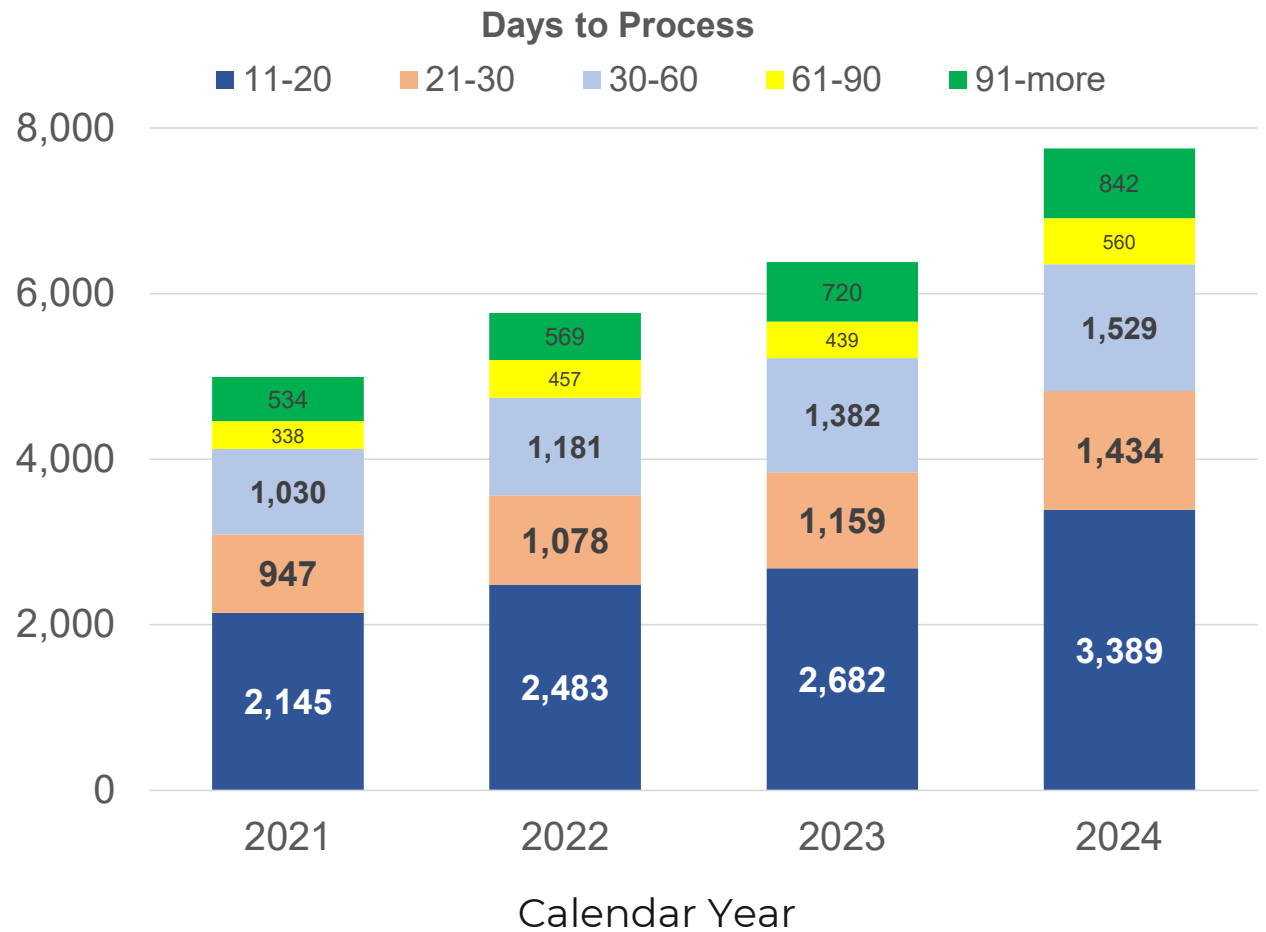| Calendar Year	0-10	11-20
2021	28,440	2,145
2022	28,560	2,483
2023	28,346	2,682
2024	28,310	3,389

Calendar Year
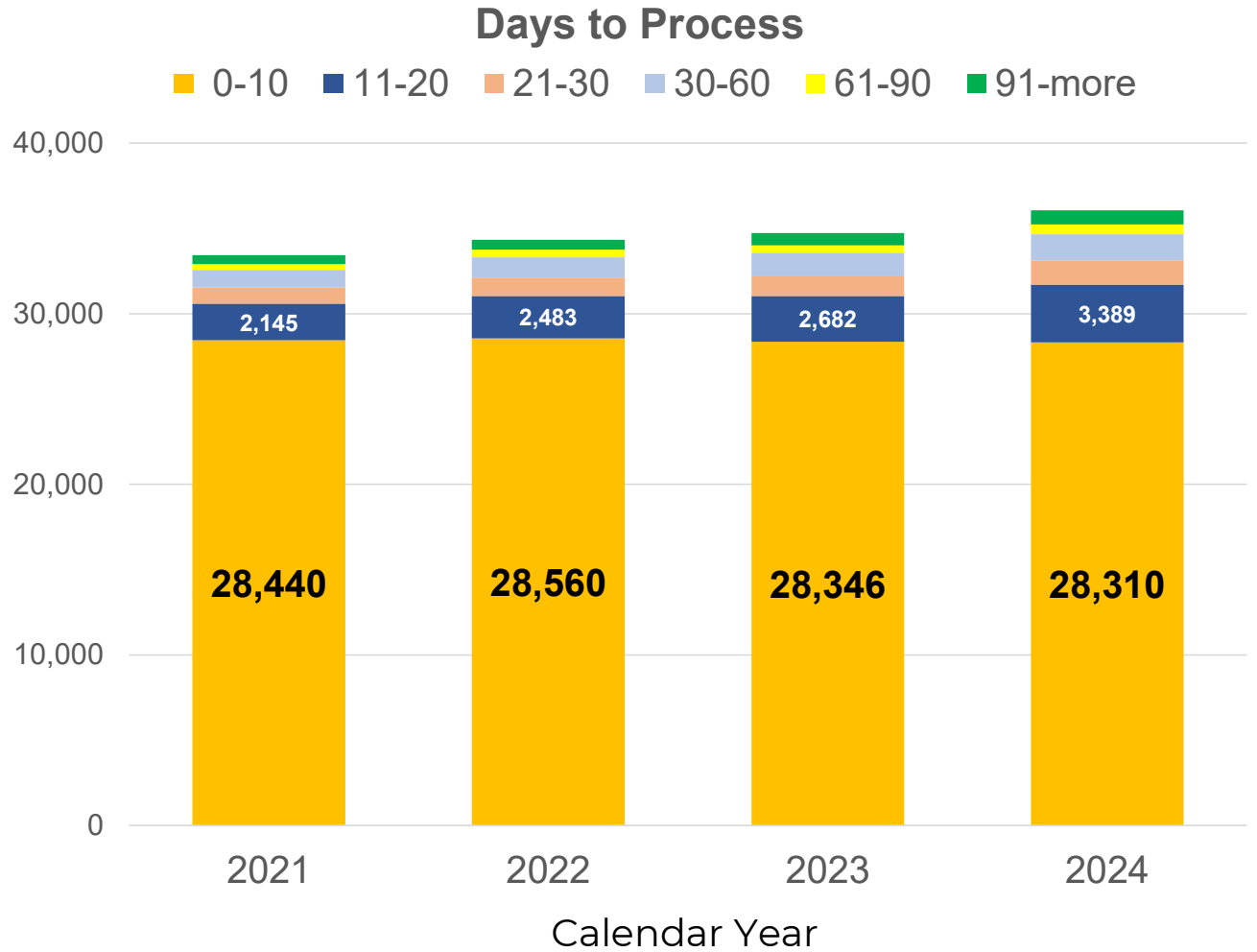
Incomplete or Incorrect Applications

&

Complex Review Requirements

=

Longer Processing Times

Construction (COM) Permits
Over 11 days Processing Time

Days to Process

- 11-20
- 21-30
- 30-60
- 61-90
- 91-more

	2021	2022	2023	2024
91-more	534	569	720	842
61-90	338	457	439	560
30-60	1,030	1,181	1,382	1,529
21-30	947	1,078	1,159	1,434
11-20	2,145	2,483	2,682	3,389

Calendar Year

Replacement of Prior ePermits Software

Old system was built by previous DHCD IT staff with unique code nearly <u>15 years ago</u>

1. **Could not keep pace with demand**
- Required constant updates to meet demands
- Unique code was difficult to update.
2. **Not user friendly**
- It was labor and time intensive for customers and City staff
3. **Data security risks**
- High susceptibility to data breach or loss

Accela Implementation: February 3, 2025

Permit applications, Zoning review, Plans review, and building & trades inspections moved to new system.

Trainings, Outreach, & Support

DHCD External Trainings on New Permit System	
January 18th	Saturday In Person
January 25th	Saturday In Person (Spanish)
January 28th & 29th	Virtual 7-9 p.m.
February 12th & 20th	Virtual 12-2 p.m.
March 20th	Virtual 12-2 p.m.
March 27th	Virtual 7-9 p.m.

Full Slide Deck Presentation

"How-To" Session - January 18, 2025   "How-To" Session - Español - January 25, 2025

"How-To" Session - February 12, 2025

Step-By-Step Guides

Account Creation	Account Creation - Español
Add a Contact	Add a Contact - Español
Add a Document	Add a Document - Español (document in production)
Approve Deny Use of Professional License	Approve Deny Use of Professional License - Español
Amendment - Extension/Reinstatement	Amendment - Extension/Reinstatement (document in prod
Commercial Combo Simple	Commercial Combo Simple - Español
General Search	General Search - Español (document in production)
Make a Payment	Make a Payment - Español (document in production)
One- and Two-Family Combo Interior Single Trade	One- and Two-Family Combo Interior Single Trade - Españo
One- and Two-Family Combo New Construction	One- and Two-Family Combo New Construction - Español
One- and Two-Family Combo Underpinning Permit	One- and Two-Family Combo Underpinning Permit - Españo
Check Permit Status	Check Permit Status - Español

Recordings of the trainings and all resource documents can be found at: https://dhcd.baltimorecity.gov/permit-pro-workshop-series

DHCD created **20 step-by-step user guides** in both English and Spanish

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Improve Public Engagement and Access

Increase City Operations Capacity

Accela Implementation: Phase I (in progress)

Improve customer service and relations through

- A user-friendly application process
- Live application status updates
- Auto-generated permits
- Web-based services for scheduling inspections
- Multilingual capability for users

Reduce Permit Application Cycle Time

- Reduce data entry time to 15 minutes per transaction
- Reduce review and approval time through integrated workflow
- Reduce staff preparation time through electronic mobile submission and centralized document storage

Increase City Operations Capacity

Accela Implementation: Phase II

Move DHCD's Code Enforcement System (in CHIP) to the Accela platform

- Manage all housing inspections, notices, citations, 311 generated requests and work orders.

- Create efficiencies for code enforcement staff to complete inspections and issue citations and violations in the field

- Digitize the BMZA Appeals process

Future Phases

- Continue integration of agency processes

- e.g. Fire inspection scheduling

Improve Public Engagement and Access

Increased Technical Assistance

Permit Office Phone Line

Complete: Created a dedicated team to answer the Permits Office Phone Number

- Improved answer rates from 10% to over 96%

Next Steps

- Add training on other permit matters (e.g. Fire Plans Review)

Website Improvements

Complete: Training materials on how to use the new system

Next Steps

- Provide model drawings for common small projects that can be pre-approved as is or used as a template

**Brandon M. Scott
Mayor**

		Calls Received	Calls Answered	Avg. Time (mm:ss)	Answer Rate
2024	March	2,565	2,153	4:25	83.90%
	April	2,659	2,623	4:15	98.60%
	May	2,807	2,766	4:22	98.50%
	June	2,527	2,474	4:01	97.90%
	July	2,913	2,817	3:43	96.70%
	August	3,172	3,097	3:44	97.60%
	September	2,551	2,506	3:48	98.20%
	October	3,363	3,303	3:41	98.20%
	November	2,830	2,760	3:52	97.50%
	December	2,879	2,764	3:32	96.00%
2025	January	3,059	2,984	3:28	96.40%
	February	5,588	3,726	6:14	66.70%
Totals		**36,913**	**33,937**		**93.85%**

Example Dashboard Mock-Up

WHERE WE ARE

The Fire Department reviews construction plans and inspects as-built structures to ensure compliance with health & safety requirements

Building Plans

- Review for fire safety, e.g., means of egress, fire walls and separations

Fire Alarm & Fire Suppression Systems

- Fire alarms and sprinklers require their own permits separate from a general construction permit

Use & Occupancy Modifications

- A property changing its use type may be subject to new fire safety standards

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Increase City Operations Capacity

1. Hire More Plans Reviewers

- **Current:** 4 FTEs doing plans review and inspection, and 1 Contractual Plans Reviewer

- **In Progress:** Three vacant EMS PINS reclassified for civilian FT plans review

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Developer and Builder Support

2. Offer Third Party Plans Review

In Progress: Allow expedited approval with certification from licensed professionals for certain projects:

- Kitchen Hoods
- Add/Relocate <50 sprinkler heads
- Add/Relocate <20 Fire Alarm Devices

These categories would account for **25%** of the plans review requests

Next Steps:

- Explore expedited Third Party Review for larger projects
- Modeled on the success of mandated third party review for "complex projects"

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Questions