BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The Honorable James Torrence
Chairperson

PUBLIC HEARING

Tuesday July 22, 2025
4:30 PM
CLARENCE "DU" BURNS COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Bill #25-0003R
Informational Hearing – Permit Reforms

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100 N. HOLIDAY STREET
BALTIMORE MD, 21202

Meeting: Resolution Hearing
Committee: Housing & Economic Development
Bill # 25-0003R

Title: Informational Hearing – Permit Reforms

Purpose: FOR the purpose of inviting representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Office of the City Administrator, the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Office of the Fire Marshal, and other relevant parties to provide information on reforms to the Department of Housing and Community Development's permit process.

REPORTING AGENCIES

Agency	Report
Fire Dept (BDCF)	
City Administrator	
Dept of Finance	
Dept of Public Works	
BCIT	
Dept of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)	

BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2025, the Housing & Economic Development Committee held a hearing on Resolution *25-0003R Informational Hearing – Permit Reform.* This hearing focused on several points of how the permit process in Baltimore has been working and what improvements and updates the Administration has been working on. Topics included:

The Office of the Fire Marshal
Several questions in the hearing covered the plan review process and permitting process under the Fire Marshal. Noting that:

1. The department at the time of the hearing was understaffed both in terms of plan reviewers and inspectors
   a. In March, the office had 4 plan reviewers, whereas other jurisdictions had 6
   b. In the FY26 budget hearings, the Fire Dept noted that:
      i. Pins were being moved from sworn staff to civilian
      ii. The Fire Dept was looking to increase the number of actual inspectors from 28-33 (ideally 35 inspectors needed)

           iii.   500K was being requested for 2 new plan review positions

           iv.   BCFD was offering inspector 1 & 2 training programs

  2. In the hearing, it was noted that while not implemented fully, the BCFD was hoping that up to 25% of the case load could be shifted to the 3rd party review process. At the time of the hearing, though, only 4 projects had met the threshold for a 3rd party review.

New permit system, utilizing the Accela software & the BMORE FAST initiative.

The rollout of this new permitting system and an initiative by the Mayor's office to improve permitting was noted in the March 11th meeting, but at the time, the rollout of the new system was still being worked on. The new Accela system rolled out after the hearing but almost immediately experienced issues, and the DHCD office noted a 200% uptick in applicants coming to the office physically to get help with the online system[1]

At the FY26 budget hearing for DHCD, the agency noted:
1. They were pressing for fast-track permitting to be back up and running by the end of June (this has not been done as of this analysis)
2. DHCD was hiring additional staff to help with the backlog
3. They were moving staff to help with the increased traffic in the office of applicants seeking help with the system.
4. A team from the Chief Administrator's Office was sent to help address issues with the permitting process.
5. The CAO committed to a meeting with the Council President and the Committee Chair by July 1.

The BMORE FAST initiative was announced on the same day as the committee hearing on March 11, 2025, and noted a goal of rehabilitating a minimum of 37,500 properties over 15 years. An interim "Permit Czar," Deputy Mayor Justin Williams, was appointed by the Mayor to help make the process more efficient.

In the March 11th hearing, Deputy Mayor Williams noted the following goals of the initiative:
1. Recruit director
2. Recruit advisory board
3. Legislative priorities, including (but not limited to):
    a. Single stair building code provisions
    b. Moving the Zoning Administrator to the Planning Department (Council bill 25-0063)

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[1] Baltimore Banner Article.

c. Trade Licensure Reform Initiative (would require state action)
d. Historic Preservation Review Reform (bill passed by Council - bill 25-0003)

The problems with the roll out of the new Accela system for permits was noted during both the DHCD & BCIT budget hearings for the FY 26 budget. Councilwoman Ramos asked for a list of priorities that was being address by the agencies. BCIT responded with a number of items including fast track permitting & workflow updates (see response from BCIT in Additional Materials Section)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fiscal Note:

At the time of this analysis, the City of Baltimore, via DHCD, has paid the Accela company, which is the vendor for the new permitting system, over 2.6 million dollars for professional services.[2]

Records indicate that DHCD paid to Accela over $181,000 for testing and support prior to the system going live in March 2025. During that phase of the implementation of the Accela system a list of priorities was developed for Accela to help remediate – though what was on that list of priorities and their status was not indicated in the invoice materials (See spreadsheet listing invoice information in Additional Materials section)

In FY 25, the budget included $655,950 for a new permitting system, including data migration. This was under service 751, Building Code Permitting, Inspections, and Compliance. In FY 26, the budget noted that the continuing cost for the subscription for this software would be $557,000.[3]

The budget for this service has increased from $8.6 million to $14 million from FY25 to FY26. This includes an additional 49 positions.[4]

Information Source(s):

- Baltimore Banner Article. "**Baltimore's permit backlog was bad. A new system made things worse.**" https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/politics-power/local-government/baltimore-permit-delays-housing-F4RBV5WLFVHR3GKQHYRS5UI264/
- Comptroller's Office invoice data (see attached file)
- FY 25 Agency Detail I Budget Book.
- FY 26 Agency Detail I Budget Book
- Hearing Notes – Housing & Economic Development Committee March 11, 2025 (see bill file 25-0003R)

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[2] Open Checkbook – Comptroller's Office
[3] FY 25 & FY 26 Agency Detail I Budget Book.
[4] FY 26 Agency Detail I Budget Book

- Hearing Notes Budget & Appropriations Committee May 30, 2025 (see bill file 25-00063)

Analysis by: Tony Leva   Direct Inquiries to:
Analysis Date:7/15/2025

A BILL ENTITLED

1   A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2   **Informational Hearing - Permit Reforms**

3   FOR the purpose of inviting representatives from the Department of Housing and Community
4   Development, the Office of the City Administrator, the Baltimore City Fire Department, the
5   Office of the Fire Marshal, and other relevant parties to provide information on reforms to the
6   Department of Housing and Community Development's permit process.

7   **Recitals**

8   One of the factors that will successfully lead Baltimore City toward its goal of removing
9   vacant and abandoned properties is an efficient and effective permit process to review
10   applications, conduct inspections, and issue permits in a timely manner for homeowners,
11   community development organizations, and developers. In the interest of expanding our Main
12   Street business corridors, the City needs a permit process that can meet challenging demands.

13   Contractors, homeowners, and small businesses across the City have reported difficulties
14   working with the Department of Housing and Community Development's "One-Stop Shop
15   Permit Center" (the "Center") including timely processing, approval of plans, scheduling
16   inspections, and treatment by inspectors, among additional complaints. Businesses along our
17   Main Street corridors also report difficulty navigating the permit process, citing instances where
18   they are told one thing by the Center and something different by the Fire Marshal or other
19   entities. Finally, there have also been examples of building plans being approved by the Center
20   and then inspections failing because the plans should not have been approved initially.

21   In addition, there has been a sharp increase in work completed without permits. When
22   contractors avoid the permits process they may end up doing substandard work in our
23   communities and put residents in danger. Certain contractors even refuse to do business in the
24   City, which leaves residents and businesses with fewer options to complete work.

1   These instances offer just a few examples of issues encountered with the Center and City
2   permit process overall. DHCD has been working on a new permitting system for the past year
3   and a half, with the promise of implementation by February of 2025. Public hearings to
4   understand the new system, and hear from the public on how it is working, is important to help
5   DHCD get the process right. It is the intent of the Baltimore City Council to hold hearings on
6   this topic periodically throughout the year.

7   **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE**, That the
8   Baltimore City Council invites representatives from the Department of Housing and Community
9   Development, the Office of the City Administrator, the Baltimore City Fire Department, Office
10   of the Fire Marshal, and other relevant parties to provide information on reforms to the
11   Department of Housing and Community Development's permit process.

12   **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Commissioner
13   of the Department of Housing and Community Development, the City Administrator, the Chief
14   of the Baltimore City Fire Department, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

Baltimore City Council


Housing & Economic Development Committee

25-0003R

Informational Hearing - Permit Reforms

Additional Materials

Date	Acella #	Amount	Description	Notes
10/24/2023	INV-ACC58817	211,244.50	Multi Solution User (ACCELA Building, Planning,& Service Request Management, SaaS)	
12/31/2023	INV-ACC59141	140,590.73	fixed fee services	services not defined in invoice
1/17/2024	INV-ACC59199	42,939.99	fixed fee services	services not defined in invoice
3/8/2024	INV-ACC59421	351,477.10	Del.04 Tailoring Sessions Group 1 (70,295.42), Del.05 Tailoring Sessions Group 2 (70,295.42), Del.06 Tailoring Sessions Group 3 (70,295.42), Del.07 Tailoring Sessions Group 4 (70,295.42), Del.08 Tailoring Sessions Group 5 (70,295.42)	
3/29/2024	INV-ACC59510	42,939.99	Del.20 Data Conversion Kickoff and Training	
3/31/2024	INV-ACC59527	1,042.34	Travel expenses (Jan 20, 2024 & Feb 26-29, 2024	
5/29/2024	INV-ACC59812	70,295.42	Delivery of configuration report for each record type, serving as a snapshot of each of the tailored configuration for Group 1. Complete confrence room checkpoint	
8/20/2024	INV-ACC60239	530,225.05	Multi Solution User (ACCELA Building, Planning,& Service Request Management, SaaS)	
11/19/2024	INV-ACC60701	63,627.01	Enhanced Reporting Data Base	
12/9/2024	INV-ACC60780	140,590.84	Del.14 Report Specifications Group 1 (70,295.42), Del.16 Intergration Specification Group 1 (70, 295.42)	
12/9/2024	INV-ACC60784	124,216.88	Del.23 Develop Stage Conference Room Checkpoints Group 1	
1/6/2025	INV-ACC60904	517,844.57	fixed fee services	services not defined in invoice
1/31/2025	INV-ACC61025	354.63	travel & expenses (feb 7 2024 & feb 27-29 2024)	

2/27/2025	INV-ACC61122	181,952.02	Del.22 Data Conversion Mock Run 2 (42,939.99) Del.30 UAT - Initial Test Support (68,716.61) Del.31 UAT – Remediation and Remediation Testing Support (70,295.42)	additional notes indicate that these charges were for moving material into a testing environment,support for testing, and completion of critical & high punch list (though the sign off of city officals was not dependent on the resolution of product defects)
3/31/2025	INV-ACC61278	42,939.99	Del.33 Production Go Live	Production system is available for daily use by the Agency
4/8/2025	INV-ACC60780-D	140,590.84	Del.14 Report Specifications Group 1 (70,295.42), Del.16 Intergration Specification Group 1 (70, 295.42)	delivery of final report for each report accela will develop in group 1
4/28/2025	INV-ACC61393	70,295.42	Del.34 Transition to Customer Support	Execution of Post Go Live Support & Transfer from Accela Project Services team to Accela Customer Support

2,673,167.32 Total allocation
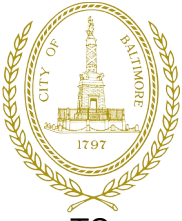
BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

100 Holliday Street, Room 250
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

TO	Chairwoman Danielle McCray, Budget and Appropriations
FROM	Leyla Layman, Interim Chief Information Officer *Leyla Layman*
DATE	June 16, 2025
SUBJECT	FY2025 Budget Hearing Information Request
REQUEST TOPIC	Request #117- Permitting Reforms

Background

At the Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology's (BCIT's) Budget Hearing on June 4, 2025, Councilwoman Ramos requested the list of the top ten items that are being addressed to repair the permit system immediately. Councilwoman Ramos also requested the anticipated timeline for repair.

Response

The following 10 key enhancements have been identified based on meetings with each of the agencies involved in the permitting process. We then worked with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to prioritize the list. Items are being worked on in parallel and will be deployed as they are ready. Item #4, has already been deployed and anticipate additional items being deployed over the next week.

#	Enhancements (prioritized)	Expected Outcome/Business Impact
1	New Fast Track Permit	Expedited permits, simplified processes, reduced staff and processing time, and faster customer responses.
2	Workflow updates for **all permit types**	Automated workflow steps, assignments, inspections, etc., for a streamlined review process and reduced review times.
3	Departmental Updates/Workflow Assignments	Department Structure Updates/User Referral Assignments.
4	Customer Portal update to Project Location Selection Criteria for Applications	Updated public user project location selection process, improved user experience, and reduced staff incomings calls and emails.
5	Auto Approve and Issue Use & Occupancy Permit at Fee Paid	Streamlined approval and permit issuance processes and reduced staff time for processing permits.

6	Auto Approve and Issue License Registration at Fee Paid	Streamlined approval and permit issuance processes and reduced staff time for processing permits.
7	Allow for Amendment on Use & Occupancy	Reduced processing and response times.
8	Use and Occupancy - Close Inspection Task after Building Inspection	Streamlined permit issuance process.
9	Additional Info/Fees Past X-Date Notification and Batch	System-generated reminder notifications to the applicant at determined time periods (i.e., 60, 90 days) to address outstanding permits that are stalled due to missing information or unpaid fees.
10	DOT ADA Update to ProjectDox (PDox) Record(s) Workflows and Groups.	Create a new review team in PDOX for DOT's ADA Compliance Team