



CITY OF BALTIMORE  
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

<b>TO</b>	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
<b>FROM</b>	Alice Kennedy, Commissioner, Housing and Community Development
<b>CC</b>	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
<b>DATE</b>	March 4, 2025
<b>SUBJECT</b>	25-0003R Informational Hearing – Permit Reforms – Questions and Answers for Hearing on March 11, 2025

**1. Please provide the total number of permits by available categories issued in each of the last three years, disaggregated by year and category, and indicate (to the extent possible) how these prior categories will align with the new permit categories under the new streamlined system.**

Permit Categories are remaining the same in the new E-Permits system.

Permits Issued by CY				
Type	2021	2022	2023	2024
COM	33,434	34,328	34,728	36,064
DEM	493	424	305	214
TMP	39	120	65	60
USE	3,221	3,330	3,445	3,605
Total	37,187	38,202	38,543	39,943

**2.A. We understand that the new E-Permits system will issue 5 different types of permits. Will there also be distinct sub-permit types in each category (such as One/Two Family Combo-mechanical, or One/Two Family Combo-painting)?**

The permit categories in the new system are:

- Combination 1-2 family
- Combination Commercial and multi-family
- Use permits
- Razing/moving permits
- Special event permits.

The system is not designed to have “sub-categories”, but applicants do select the type of work when applying. Types of work include:

- Addition Only – Adding square footage to an existing building, including related site, exterior, and trade work.
- Annual Inspections – Annual Backflow Test Submissions only.
- Construction Trailer – Placement of a trailer for construction business use.
- Exterior Trades and Site Utilities Only – Electrical, Fire, Gas, Sewer, or Water main service work between the utility connection and the property's main shut-off valve or breaker, including utility cap-off and termination.
- Exterior Work Only – Includes construction, modification, or relocation of detached garages, sheds, waterfront structures, gazebos, greenhouses, pool houses, outdoor kitchens, decks, porches, patios, fences, awnings, canopies, chimneys, swimming pools, grading, paving, ramps, balconies, or fire escapes.
- Interior Alterations Only – Structural and non-structural modifications within a building, excluding Interior Demo Only or Underpinning Only.
- Interior Demo Only – Removal of structural and non-structural elements without demolishing the entire structure.
- Interior Trades Only – Installation or modification of fire protection systems, elevators, backflow devices, solar electrical, lawn irrigation, electrical service equipment, wiring, fixtures, plumbing, gas systems, or mechanical equipment.
- New Construction – Building a new one- or two-family structure, including site, exterior, and trade work.
- Tenant Demising Walls & Shell Alterations Only – Partitioning or consolidating commercial shell spaces.
- Underpinning Only – Foundation restoration due to settlement, erosion, or basement/crawl space depth expansion.
- Exterior & Interior Alterations – Any combination of interior and exterior work not classified as Annual Inspections, Underpinning Only, New Construction, or Addition Only.
- Addition & Alteration of Existing – Interior and exterior work with added attached square footage, excluding Annual Inspections or new primary structures.

**2.B. On average, how long did it take to issue permits under the previous system, disaggregated by permit type, and what are the projected timeframes for issuance under the new streamlined system (ideally by sub-types, if possible)?**

Permit processing time varies based on many different factors including the type of work, size of the jobs, and reviews required. Some factors are under the control of DHCD and our partner agencies; others are outside of our control. Some examples of items outside of our control include applicants providing complete information and timely responses.

We have included data on the number of days to process permits over the past three calendar years:

Days to Process Permit CY 2021						
Processing Days Range	COM	DEM	TMP	USE	Total	%
0-10	28440	149	0	674	29263	78.7%
11-20	2145	53	8	442	2648	7.1%
21-30	947	45	5	366	1363	3.7%
31-40	534	50	13	218	815	2.2%
41-50	303	59	3	202	567	1.5%
51-60	193	11	0	166	370	1.0%
61-70	158	14	1	115	288	0.8%
71-80	98	8	1	101	208	0.6%
81-90	82	3	0	92	177	0.5%
91-more	534	101	8	845	1488	4.0%
Total	33434	493	39	3221	37187	

Days to Process Permit CY 2022						
Processing Days Range	COM	DEM	TMP	USE	Total	%
0-10	28560	163	19	595	29337	76.8%
11-20	2483	50	35	420	2988	7.8%
21-30	1078	75	21	329	1503	3.9%
31-40	582	20	6	235	843	2.2%
41-50	374	13	7	211	605	1.6%
51-60	225	4	14	161	404	1.1%
61-70	204	4	1	129	338	0.9%
71-80	145	12	3	121	281	0.7%
81-90	108	2	6	104	220	0.6%
91-more	569	81	8	1025	1683	4.4%
Total	34328	424	120	3330	38202	

Days to Process Permit CY 2023						
Processing Days Range	COM	DEM	TMP	USE	Total	%
0-10	28346	49	7	558	28960	75.1%
11-20	2682	35	12	461	3190	8.3%
21-30	1159	45	14	339	1557	4.0%
31-40	631	58	10	209	908	2.4%
41-50	402	11	3	232	648	1.7%
51-60	349	10	3	197	559	1.5%
61-70	191	5	2	145	343	0.9%
71-80	144	2	1	91	238	0.6%
81-90	104	5	0	120	229	0.6%
91-more	720	85	13	1093	1911	5.0%
Total	34728	305	65	3445	38543	

Days to Process Permit CY 2024						
Processing Days Range	COM	DEM	TMP	USE	Total	%
0-10	28310	13	11	552	28886	72.3%
11-20	3389	48	7	532	3976	10.0%
21-30	1434	23	8	374	1839	4.6%
31-40	752	11	7	289	1059	2.7%
41-50	461	17	5	238	721	1.8%
51-60	316	12	3	155	486	1.2%
61-70	249	11	4	146	410	1.0%
71-80	182	4	2	142	330	0.8%
81-90	129	2	2	113	246	0.6%
91-more	842	73	11	1064	1990	5.0%
Total	36064	214	60	3605	39943	

**2.C. Looking more deeply, on average, how long did it take for projects to be completed from application to final approval?**

See 2B.

**2.D. What specific time savings or efficiency gains does DHCD anticipate for each of the 5 new permit categories (and sub-types?) as a result of the streamlined system and the introduction of the E-Permits platform?**

The permitting process is highly dependent on complete and accurate information being provided on the application. We expect the new system to assist customers in providing complete applications, which will result in more efficient reviews and faster issuance times.

Inspection results will be able to be entered from a mobile device in the field which will allow for fewer delays in receiving inspection results. Inspectors will also be able to log photos and document files in the field more efficiently.

Customers and the public have online access to permit information which should reduce calls and emails into the permits office and allow staff to focus on processing permits.

**2.E. What measures is DHCD implementing to ensure that the consolidation of permits does not create confusion or barriers to residents and businesses?**

DHCD held two in person trainings and several virtual trainings before and after launch. The trainings were recorded and are available online. The slide decks and other training aids are also available online to assist customers. The five permit categories should be familiar to existing customers and the type of work is used to further clarify what should be included on the permits.

[Permit Like A Pro - "How-To" Guides | Baltimore City Department of Housing & Community Development](#)

(<https://dhcd.baltimorecity.gov/permit-pro-workshop-series>)

**3.A Please identify the five types of permits that experienced the longest average issuance delays in each of the previous three years under the previous permitting system (disaggregated by type of permit, average delay, and year).**

See 2B.

**3.B. For each of these five types of permits, what specific time savings do you anticipate will result from implementation of the new permit system?**

The process is still dependent on complete and accurate information being provided on the application. We expect the new system to assist customers in providing complete applications and therefore improving processing times.

**4.A Please provide the average time to complete inspections for each of the new 5 permit categories (ideally by sub-type, if possible) over the past three years, including projected inspection completion times under the new system (disaggregated by permit category, year, and average time).**

The process for requesting and completing inspections does not match up with this question. Inspection scheduling with DHCD is at the request of the applicant. Building and electrical permit inspections are normally available the next business day if scheduled before 1pm. Mechanical, gas and plumbing inspections are usually scheduled two to four days out, depending

on staffing and demand. These inspector positions require a Master License and are extremely challenging to fill. The job posting remains open so that applicants can apply at anytime.

**4.B. Under the previous permitting system, which types of inspections experienced the longest average delays for the 5 new permit categories in each of the past three years (disaggregated by permit type, inspection type, average delay, and year?)**

See 4A

**4.C. What improvements in inspection completion times do you expect under the new system?**

We expect to see efficiencies in the entry of completed inspections with the use of the new system in the mobile app. We will also be able to take photos in the field and enter them directly into the record, a feature we did not have in the old system.

**4.D. How does DHCD plan to address delays in both permit issuance and inspection processes for the consolidation permit categories to ensure the streamlined system delivers equitable and efficient service?**

We do not believe there will be any challenges here. Inspection requests will be very similar to the prior system.

**5. We were told that the new system would cost \$5,685,007.31 for the software and a 6-year subscription.**

**5.A. Have there been any cost increases to this point that are likely to raise total expenditures above the \$5,685,007.31 figure? If so, what are the increases and how much were they?**

There was a 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the Accela contract on 10/7/24. This is for \$354,038 over the remaining 5 years of the contract and covers the addition of Enhanced Reporting Database (ERD) to support real-time reporting needs.

From when the contract was negotiated to go-live, the number of individuals who needed log-in access increased. We will need to increase the number of subscriptions with Accela. We are still reviewing the current usage by users and are working to determine the exact number of additional subscriptions will need to be added to the contract.

**5.B. How much, per year, did it cost to operate the old permitting system, and once the new system is up and running, how much will it cost per year to operate?**

There is no comparison between the old system and the new system. The old system was built in house by City employees and maintained by those employees. Development of the old system did not include proper documentation, and the system was not able to be properly maintained and was not sustainable. A new system had to be purchased to ensure stability for the permitting and enforcement system and prevent a catastrophic failure.

**6. Will you establish key performance indicators to track the performance of the new EPermits system? If so, what are the key indicators you will be tracking, when will tracking begin, and how frequently will you report results to the Council?**

Yes, we are reviewing existing permit guarantees, metrics and developing new key performance indicators to track performance. With the new system we are able to build reports and dashboards to monitor the progress of permits through the review and approval process. Individual users are able to design their own reports and dashboards allowing each specific agency or section to monitor their specific tasks while leadership can track the overall process.

DHCD will be building out a “permits dashboard”, where the key performance indicators will be available to the Council and the public for review at anytime.

**7. What data security features does the new system have to protect sensitive data?**

Accela maintains security measures to protect Private Information (PI), Personally Identifiable Information (PII), or Sensitive Information (SI) against risks of unauthorized access, or improper destruction, use, modification, or disclosure. Accela conducts regular audits to ascertain that PI, PII, and SI are used and maintained consistent with their policy. In addition to encryption, all data such as SSN is also masked in the user interface using industry standards. Data access policies, procedures, and controls are reviewed annually as part of compliance audits, including SOC2 Type II, HIPAA, CCPA, etc.

**8.A What forms of communication will constituents be able to utilize to communicate with the permit office (i.e., phone calls, emails, message board?)?**

City staff are able to communicate with applicants using an email function within the software. These emails are logged in the permit record. Responses from customers must be made to specific shared email accounts. The Permits Office has staff assigned daily to their shared email box to review and respond or forward emails as appropriate. The vendor is working on a message board type function that is expected to be released in a future update. They do not currently have a timeline for this update.

**8.B. Are there metrics set for response times to constituent concerns regarding permits? If so, what are the anticipated response timeframes for responding to constituents' questions?**

In March 2024, DHCD worked with BCIT and 311 to update the phone call process. This created a dedicated group of 311 agents who just answer calls to the Permits Office number. These agents are trained in the E-permits system and are able to assist callers with their questions. The implementation of this call process resulted in reducing both call volumes and wait times. In 2024, monthly answer rates have been over 95%, with three months having answer rates of 98%. This exceeds the goal, which is consistent with 311 standards, of 90% of calls answered within 60 seconds.

Customers will also be able to email specific mailboxes based on the status of their permit and receive a response within 2 business days.

**8.C. Is there a centralized call center for the new E-Permits system? When did/will it open, how many people are staffing it, what duties are these staffers being pulled from, and how long will the call center remain in operation? Is the call center staffed by DHCD or is it customer service provided by Accela?**

The Permits Office phone number is answered by a dedicated group of 311 agents who just answer calls to that line. This process has been in place since March 2024 and it will continue to be how the Permits phone line is answered. These agents are trained in the E-permits system and received training for the Accela system and are able to assist callers with their questions in a one call resolution. In mid-February, 311 added 3 additional staff members to assist with answering phone calls.

**8.D. Will the Permit department's phone number listed on the website still be active? If so, who will be monitoring the phone? Are there metrics or timeframes adhered to for a response to calls?**

The Permits Office phone number remains the same and will continue to be answered.

**9.A Please describe the steps that DHCD management takes to check the accuracy of permit actions, including the number of permit actions to be reviewed by management and/or the sample sizes reviewed for accuracy.**

We currently do not have a specified quality assurance program to review permits before issuance. Errors and omissions on a permit are usually caught through the multiple reviews that a permit goes through. Minor permits are reviewed by at least two different staff members before approval. More significant work can go through several layers of overlapping review. These reviews act as a check on the accuracy of the permit. The final check comes with the inspection where, on occasion, may require additional work be added due to an omission on the permit application on an expansion beyond what was approved.

**9.B. Will you implement a process to test the integrity of permits that have been issued?**

We will consider what is needed to improve the permitting process.

**10. How will permits issued by other city agencies—and/or reviews or other actions regarding permit applications handled by DHCD—be integrated into the new E-Permits system?**

Reviews needed by agency personnel outside of DHCD for DHCD permits are incorporated into the permitting workflows within Accela. Agencies have access to Accela to conduct those reviews. Over the next few years, BCIT is planning to work with agencies to migrate additional permit types to the Accela system.

***DOT Responses:***



**10. How will permits issued by other city agencies— and/or reviews or other actions regarding permit applications handled by DHCD—be integrated into the new E-Permits system?**

- Temporary ROW and Special Events permits are issued by the DOT Right of Way Services Division’s ROW Permits and Special Events groups respectively. Both groups now use the OpenGov permitting system.
- As part of DHCD’s process, members of the ROW Permits and Property Location groups have approval roles for DHCD permits that impact the Baltimore City ROW. Those staff members have been trained on Accela and are part of the new Accela process.

**10.B. Who will provide customer support for permits that do not fully integrate into Accela, such as DOT Right of Way permits and DPW permits?**

DOT ROW Permits and Special Events staff members provide front line support for users of the OpenGov permitting system. If a problem arises that cannot be resolved by staff, the issue is escalated to managers and BCIT. If the issue cannot be resolved by city staff, vendor support will be engaged.

**10.C. What will communication look like for these permits?**

Communication about permit statuses, payment, and the need for additional clarification is handled primarily through the OpenGov public portal. The system also sends out automated email notifications at key steps in the application process.

**10.D. What do you anticipate will be the average length of time required to issue such permits, and will implementation of the new E-Permits system result in time savings for the issuance of these permits?**

There is a 15-day turnaround time for Temporary ROW Permits. The implementation of E-Permits will not result in any time savings for permits issued by DOT.

**11.A. What extra customer service support will be in place at the beginning of the rollout of the new permit system?**

DHCD held the following trainings on how to use the new system:

- 1/18 - In-person
- 1/25 - In-person and in Spanish
- 1/28 - Virtual from 7-9pm
- 1/29 - Virtual from 7-9pm
- 2/12 - Virtual from 12-2pm
- 2/20 - Virtual from 12-2pm
- Currently scheduling 2 more trainings for March

All trainings were recorded, and the recordings are posted on DHCD's Permit Like A Pro resource page. We also created 20 different step-by-step user guides in both English and Spanish. DHCD has sent out eblasts with these resources and highlighting when new user guides have been created. (<https://dhcd.baltimorecity.gov/permit-pro-workshop-series>)

**11.B. If Accela is providing extra customer support for staff, how long will they be available? Are they available in person?**

DHCD, BCIT and Accela have been in constant communication since 2/3/25 (and well before the go-live date), usually meeting multiple times a day. The contract included 4 weeks of post go-live support. Accela has been and continues working hand-in-hand with the City to respond to all technical questions and address challenges as they arise. Accela staff are not in person.

**12.A How many staff will be available to provide customer service inquiries?**

All Permits Office staff have been assisting customers. Staff have also been working overtime to respond to customer's emails. Additional DHCD staff have also been assisting in answering emails. We are currently in the process of hiring 3 temp staff through Robert Half for the Permits Office to assist with helping customers and processing permits. Additionally, 311 added 3 additional agents to support Permitting phone inquiries.

**12.B. Will staff need to be in person to provide customer support?**

Permits Office staff have been in-person since August 2021 serving customers and processing permits. We serve customers through email, phones and in person.

**13. One of the features of the old system is that the developer had to inform the permit office that they were ready for inspections. In instances, however, the developer/rehabber did not wait for inspections and continued with the project. We have instances where residents complain about bad work in their homes which did receive permits but were never inspected. This also caused the problem where residents bought rehabbed homes with VBNs on them because the rehabber didn't wait to get that final inspection and get a U and O. The solution is for the system to alert the inspectors that inspections should be done and be more proactive to ensure timely inspections and following the laws. Has the system changed in this way? If so please explain. If not, please explain why not and how the problem described above is going to be addressed.**

We share in the Council's concern regarding uninformed or ill-informed buyers that purchase properties that have had work performed without proper permits or inspections. We have worked with Counsel on some legislation to help prevent this from happening but more needs to be done. Unfortunately, random proactive inspections are not a practical solution. There is no way to know if a project is ready for an inspection and most of the work, we are concerned about is interior work requiring access be granted by the homeowner or contractor.

The new software has provided opportunity to have more information regarding permits and inspections available online to the public. A potential buyer or tenant can look up a property and see the permit and inspection history and make a more informed decision. We are open to working with the Council or other methods to reduce these situations.

**14. Work for older adults that is approved and paid for by DHCD (HUBS and LIGHT program recipients) can sometimes be held up at the permit office. These projects should indeed be expedited to ensure the health and safety of our older adults are prioritized. Does the system allow for such prioritization? In addition, some of the repairs for our older adults – like chairs for older adults to go up the stairs – don’t require a permit in the building code but are now suddenly needing a permit complete with certified drawings. This increases the costs. How is this reconciled?**

DHCD has met with the HUBS leadership team and shared the following information:

- Instructed HUBS leadership team to require their contractors to include HUBS organizations/staff on the permit. Contractors can add additional contact persons. This way, HUBS project managers will be copied on all notifications.
- Instructed HUBS leadership team to have their contractors include “HUBS” in the project name field. Ex: “HUBS 123 Main Street Ramp Project”
- Instructed HUBS leadership team to have their contractors include “HUBS” in the project description on first line. Ex: “HUBS Grant Project will install stair glide...”
- For stair glides, which do require a permit and have never required certified drawings, DHCD provided language to include in the project description which will replace the need for a general site plan drawing: SCOPE OF WORK: ----- INTERIOR ALTERATIONS TO INSTALL DISABILITY CHAIR LIFT ACCESS AND GLIDE RAILS PER MANUFACTURER’S SPECIFICATIONS, ATTACH LIFT RAIL SUPPORTS TO THE STRINGER/TREADS ALONG THE EXISTING STAIRWAY FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_ FLOOR LEVEL WITH \_\_\_\_\_ LANDING(S) (27 INCH MIN CLEARANCE WILL BE MAINTAINED ALONG THE STAIRWAY), PROVIDE POWER CONNECTION FOR EQUIPMENT AS PER PLANS AS PER CODE.
- HUBS Leadership team also has been provided contact information for Deputy Commissioner Hessler, Assistant Commissioner Paluzzi, and Permits Liaison Lewis.

**15. There is no question. They were numbered incorrectly.**

**16. We have received complaints about customer service from some inspectors and supervisors. Was this addressed in the re-do of the system?**

DHCD emphasizes quality customer services at all levels throughout the agency and has reviewed customer service standards at all-agency staff trainings. DHCD also takes seriously any customer service complaints. Anytime a complaint arises within the Permits section, it is investigated and addressed as appropriate. Supervisors hold regular meetings with their staff to address any issues, including customer service matters.

**17. What is the status of notifying the residents who accidentally bought rehabbed properties with VBNs on them and working with them to get the U and O? Can we have the list of those properties by City Council district so that we can assist in the notifications and make sure they are being helped by the permit office?**

Generally, DHCD is not responsible for tracking property sales in the City and does not know what properties are sold. We are generally made aware that a renovated property still has a VBN from the resident themselves, or through staff review of neighborhood CoDeMap data. DHCD has been using several datasets to identify possible properties that have been renovated but did not receive their Use & Occupancy permit. DHCD will be sending notices to each property, highlighting the existence of the VBN, and steps the owner can take to abate the VBN, and contact information for staff that will assist in this process. DHCD is finalizing the process, and the list – once we have finalized the list we can share with Councilmembers to assist with outreach.

The new system does make more information regarding permits and inspections available online to the public. We encourage potential buyers and tenants to look up a property and see the permit and inspection history.

**18. The Fire Marshall has increased staffing significantly to meet the needs for plans reviews and timely approvals for fire safety. We are hearing that this process with the Fire Marshall's office is much improved, and we are grateful to the Fire Marshall to make these improvements. What are the other initiatives—and support—they need to continue this trend?**

**19. What were some of the challenges with the roll out the first and second week of the new system and how are they being addressed?**

- Wrong phone number and email ID – **RESOLVED**– follow up email with correct phone number was sent to affected users, support packages were updated with correct email ID, email content was corrected for remaining PIN process.
- Login issues- **RESOLVED** - worked with users to correct the links, names in the system or assign license as needed
- Inspection scheduling - **RESOLVED** - inspection 6 months and older were removed from the system; calendar feature was split to allow different groups to have different calendars to avoid maxing out.
- Inspections planning issues - **RESOLVED** - Script was run to fix the issue

- Unable to connect permits from old system to new using PIN; customers not receiving PIN or receiving too many PIN numbers – **RESOLVED** - Backoffice users were able to help users who called in or came into the office; BCIT worked with Accela to automate the process of matching records and PINs to a user's new account.
- Customer login issues – **RESOLVED** - worked with users to correct the links, names in the system or assign licenses as needed
- Cannot complete PLANS review – **RESOLVED** - Integration was fixed
- Permits issued not showing expiration date/status - **RESOLVED** - Script was run to fix the issue
- Licenses not showing up - **RESOLVED** - BCIT/Accela worked with DHCD to correct mapping, to ensure that licenses were connected to contractors
- Failed payment transactions; payment link not available when ready to pay **RESOLVED** - was corrected immediately

**20. What happens with residents and developers whose information was lost in the transfer to the new system? Will DHCD work directly with them to get their documents back in order?**

No information was deleted or lost. We migrated 4 years of data and continue to maintain archives of all data in the previous system. This was done to balance the cost of moving historic data with its anticipated benefit in the new system. Going forward we can retrieve all the data which was on the old system.

DHCD did get reports of residents who struggled to access the system due to entering PINs. We believe these are all resolved but may have contributed to the perception of lost data.

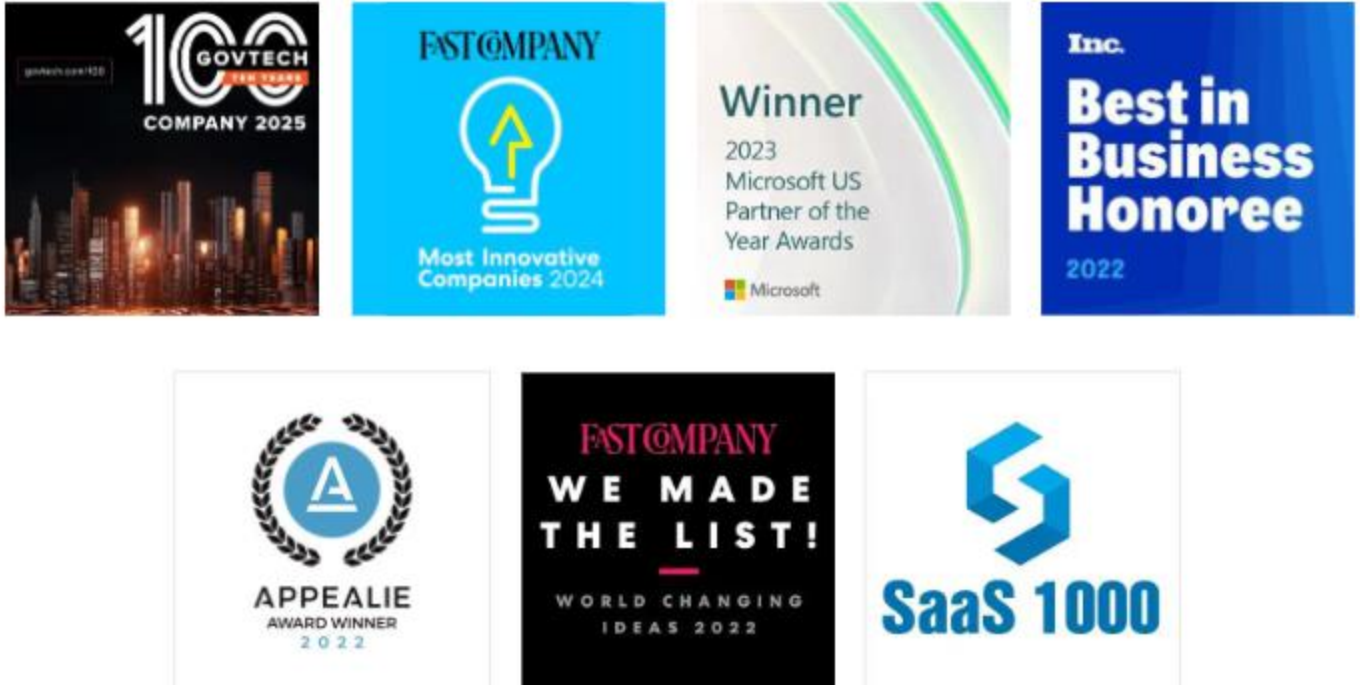
**Appendix: Accela Details**

Accela has more than 20 years of experience driving efficiency in cities, counties, and states serving thousands of government customers. Their software supports service delivery to approximately one quarter of U.S. citizens - including more than 80% of the top 100 American cities - and 275 million citizens worldwide. All combined, that makes them the leading global provider of government cloud solutions.

They are a recognized leader by several forums:

# Accele<sup>®</sup> Recognition and Results

## Industry Awards and Performance Metrics



They have a robust roadmap which includes the following new features for 2025:

- Improved user interface: Navigation, Home page, Account Management, Search results
- Public Comments on Service Requests/Complaints
- Accessibility improvements to meet increased WCAG standards
- Route Optimization

These features are part of the subscription and will be rolled out when they are available.