

Development Services Follow-Up



Objective

The objective of this special report was to follow up on the Development Services Department's actions to implement recommendations from the 2017 Demolition Permits Audit and the 2019 Permitting Process Improvements Audit.

Background

The Development Services Department (DSD) is the City department responsible for managing the City's construction and demolition permitting process.

In 2017, we conducted the Demolition Permits Audit to determine if the City's demolition permitting process was effective and efficient. The audit found that the demolition permitting process was not designed to meet the needs of stakeholders or City departments effectively or efficiently. We issued two recommendations to the City.

In 2019, we undertook the Permitting Process Improvements Audit to determine if prior audit and consultant work led to improvements in the process. The audit found that while DSD implemented changes to the permitting process, timelines and cost remained an issue to customers. We issued four recommendations to the City.

What We Learned

Overall, DSD has implemented one of two recommendations from the 2017 Demolition Permits audit, and three out of four recommendations from the 2019 Permitting Process Improvements audit.

Recommendations for 2017 Demolition Permits Audit



Organize and hold meetings with stakeholders.



Redesign the demolition permitting process to ensure that all requirements are met.

Recommendations for 2019 Permitting Process Improvements Audit



Identify delay causes, engage with stakeholders, track timelines, and enhance cooperation.



Push to simplify development Code requirements.



Implement new technological solutions to reduce permitting-related visits to City offices.



Increase stakeholder education and outreach efforts

To fully implement Recommendation 2 from the 2017 Demolition Permits audit, DSD should:

- Consistently track all appropriate reviews, safety measures, and notifications to ensure they occur prior to demolition.

To fully implement Recommendation 1 from the 2019 Permitting Process Improvements audit, DSD should:

- Establish a comprehensive coalition agreement with Austin Energy. Coalition agreements are established between departments to coordinate operational details of a shared process.

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Issued Findings and Recommendation Statuses

Audit	Finding
Demolition Permits Audit 2017	Finding: Austin's demolition permitting process is not designed to efficiently and effectively meet City or stakeholder needs.
Permitting Process Improvements Audit 2019	Finding: The Development Services Department has implemented changes to the permitting process, but aspects of the process most important to customers, including timelines and cost, remain an issue.

Audit	Recommendation	Implementation Status
Demolition Permits Audit 2017	Recommendation #1: The Development Services Department Director should organize and hold meetings with stakeholders in the City's demolition process in order to identify what the demolition permitting process should accomplish.	Implemented
Demolition Permits Audit 2017	Recommendation #2: The Development Services Department Director should redesign the demolition permitting process based on outcomes of stakeholder meetings and ensure it is implemented and working as intended. At a minimum, the new process should ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate reviews take place prior to demolition activities. • Appropriate safety measures are in place prior to demolition activities. • Adequate and appropriate notice is given to interested parties. 	Underway
Permitting Process Improvements Audit 2019	Recommendation #1: The Director of the Development Services Department should identify specific causes for plan review processing delays and work with stakeholders to ensure services are delivered in a timely manner and meet customer expectations. These efforts should include, but not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with both repeat and occasional customers. • Ensuring that an electronic system is tracking timelines. • Finalizing or revising coalition agreements. 	Underway
Permitting Process Improvements Audit 2019	Recommendation #2: The Director of the Development Services Department should identify changes that would improve customer service outcomes without affecting health and safety. The Director should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure applicable changes are reflected in the new land development code. • Present all other changes to the City Council or other appropriate entity for their consideration. 	Implemented
Permitting Process Improvements Audit 2019	Recommendation #3: The Director of the Development Services Department should implement the use of key technology solutions as soon as possible to further reduce the number of physical interactions customers have with the City permitting process.	Implemented
Permitting Process Improvements Audit 2019	Recommendation #4: The Director of the Development Services Department should ensure that departmental outreach and education efforts target people that ignore or may not be aware of permitting process requirements. These efforts may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the process simpler to understand and follow. • Working with 311 and the Austin Code Department to identify targets for outreach and education. 	Implemented