



October 15, 2020

Dear DBI customers:

I'm writing to you today to update you on DBI's permitting services during the continuing health crisis. As construction activity continues to pick up, we understand how important it is for you to know what to expect when you apply for the building permits you need to perform work.

As we adapt to our "new normal" and our department strives to return to our pre-COVID permit issuance rates, I want to again apologize to you for the delays many of you have been experiencing in getting your permits and for the confusion around the permitting process. We have heard from many of you regarding your frustrations with the longer wait times for scheduling appointments for Over-the-Counter with plans permits and the difficulty in getting an Eventbrite ticket for the Over-the-Counter without plans permit processing. In this letter, I outline what we are doing to address your concerns.

Please know that we continue to balance the safety of our employees and customers with the need to return to our pre-COVID permit processing rates. Because of the health crisis, we moved our largely manual in-person permit issuance process to an electronic process. Unfortunately, the electronic process didn't work as intended and increased the workload exponentially on our remote-working and reduced staff. We now have a backlog as a result, which we are aggressively taking steps to reduce.

We continue to be partially closed to the public, but we are offering limited in-person services, and we've found that the paper process (which we heavily relied on pre-COVID 19) works better for most permits. You can get more information about how we accept permit applications here: <https://sfdbi.org/permitsubmissions>.

Plan to Address Backlog and Appointment Wait Times

To reduce wait times for permits, DBI has implemented a plan to increase the number of permits we issue per day. The plan includes several initiatives:

- Staffing
 - We are in the process of hiring an executive level manager to provide vision and leadership to improve and streamline the permitting process.
 - We recently hired three new permit technicians to process permits and two new engineers for plan review.
 - We reassigned staff from other divisions to help with permit processing.
 - DBI has offered overtime to our permit processing staff.

- Resources from other departments
 - DBI worked with our partners in the Fire Department to train their staff to take over intake/issuance for fire-only permits for the next several months.
 - We are in discussions with our partners in the Planning Department for Planning staff to help with intake/issuance of Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) permits. We will provide more details on a new process for ADU submissions in the next few weeks.
 - DBI is working with Permit Center staff on improvements to the appointment system.

- Technology improvements
 - We are working to integrate our Permit Tracking System (PTS) and Bluebeam (electronic plan review software) into our digital permit submission process so we can expand digital permitting for specific types of projects.
 - To expand digital permitting options, we are making workflow and process improvements to electronic plan review.
 - DBI is in the process of automating selected Over-the-Counter without plans permits (similar to the automated system for our existing online trades permits)—and plan to launch an automated permitting process for re-roofing permits on Monday, October 19.
- Permit Day Event
 - DBI and our partners hosted a special Saturday permit processing event on October 3 to provide an additional opportunity for customers to file for permits.

With these initiatives underway, we are seeing a significant increase in the number of permits we're issuing, from approximately 50/day in June to around 100/day over the past two weeks. Pre-COVID, we issued an average of 110 permits/day, so we are getting closer to our previous issuance numbers.

Our next step is to improve the customer experience for applying for permits and dropping off permit applications. Starting next week, **we will eliminate the Eventbrite ticket systems** for Over-the-Counter without plans permits and permits that require only Fire Department review. For the past several weeks, we have been experiencing a high no-show rate with the Eventbrite ticket system, so we will change to a first-come, first-served system.

- For the Over-the-Counter without plans permits (7:30 to 9:30 a.m. M-F), we can accommodate 35 customers per day.
- For fire-only permits (9:30-11:30 a.m. M-Th), the Fire Department can accommodate 25 customers per day.

We are also acutely aware of the long wait times for scheduling an appointment to drop off Over-the-Counter with plans permit applications. By the end of this month, we are planning to increase the number of appointments available to customers and are working on a process for allocating the new appointments in an equitable manner.

DBI is experiencing one of the most challenging times in its history, but I want you to know that our staff is working long hours and weekends to get you the permits you need. With their hard work and the concrete steps outlined above, we will return to and even exceed our previous permit issuance numbers in the coming weeks so we can decrease the current wait times for permits. Thank you for your patience as we make these improvements, and stay tuned as we roll out the changes.

Sincerely,



Patrick O'Riordan
Interim Director
Department of Building Inspection