



December 23, 2020

Dear DBI customers:

Happy holidays to all of you, and I hope this finds you safe and healthy. I'm writing today to give you an end-of-year update on DBI's permitting and inspection services during the continuing health crisis. While it's been a tough year for all of us, I'm proud of DBI staff for continuing to provide essential services to our customers and for all of their hard work the past nine months. Since the pandemic shutdown, DBI has issued more than 34,000 permits and conducted more than 80,000 field inspections to ensure building safety and habitable conditions. While we still have work to do and improvements to make, I'm incredibly proud of what we've been able to accomplish.

We continue to be open to the public on a limited basis, which has significantly affected our ability to issue permits and lengthens the process because we can't interact with customers as quickly and efficiently as we did before. However, over the past few months, we've made great progress in increasing the number of permits we issue daily. Pre-COVID, DBI issued approximately 110 permits per day. During the summer, we were issuing approximately 50 permits a day. In the last three months, DBI has brought that number up to an average of 92 permits a day, plus approximately 138 trades permits a day (electrical, plumbing, mechanical, boiler). We've been able to get much closer to our pre-pandemic numbers through a detailed plan to increase permit issuance, which I summarize below.

Plan to Increase Permit Issuance

To decrease wait times for permits and increase the number of permits we issue, DBI developed a plan in September and has completed many of the initiatives outlined in it:

- Staffing
 - We hired Sam Shahrouri as Chief Administrative Officer for Permit Services to streamline and modernize our services. Sam started last week and brings 30 years of permitting experience and has been a leader in implementing new technologies to improve permitting processes
 - We hired nine new permit technicians to process permits and four new engineers for plan review
 - We reassigned staff from other divisions to help with permit processing and continue to encourage permit processing staff to work overtime
- 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 partnered with the Planning Department for Planning staff to take over intake/issuance of Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) permits
 - DBI is working with staff at the Permit Center on improving our customer service
- Technology
 - We are working to integrate our Permit Tracking System (PTS) and Bluebeam (electronic plan review software) to streamline the digital permit submission process

- To improve the digital permitting system, we are making workflow and process improvements to electronic plan review
- DBI has been automating selected Over-the-Counter without plans permits. We launched online reroofing permits in October and are working on moving simple kitchen/bath remodels online
- Customer and stakeholder engagement
 - We hosted several customer webinars and Q&As to update customers on changes to the permitting process in response to Shelter-in-Place
 - DBI launched a new forum, the Public Advisory Forum, to get feedback from customers and stakeholders. We will host these quarterly, and the next one will be January 27, 2021
 - We have been meeting with stakeholder groups to share ideas and information—get in touch if you would like to meet with us to share your feedback.

I'm proud that we've been able to address wait times for Over-the-Counter (OTC) permits—since we introduced the waitlist in November, we've been able to offer OTC with plans customers drop-off appointments within three weeks. Over the next month, we'll be focused on making improvements to our in-house review permit intake and issuance to speed up that process.

My values are accountability, transparency, efficiency and great customer service, and I know the department will continue to make progress in the coming year in realizing those values. Looking forward, my focus in the new year will be on (1) streamlining the permitting process and implementing more technology solutions for digital permitting, (2) improving the customer experience and (3) ensuring transparency and accountability in everything we do.

On behalf of all DBI employees, we wish you a healthy and happy holiday season, and we thank you, again, for your patience and understanding as we adjusted and adapted to our new reality. I am hopeful that we will emerge better and stronger in 2021 as the department continues to make important improvements to our services.

Sincerely,



Patrick O'Riordan
Interim Director
Department of Building Inspection