



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Robin Abad Ocubillo
Citywide Permit Ombuds

SUBJECT: Citywide Permit Reform: Fall 2025
Update

DATE: 18 November 2025

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Nov 13, 2025 17:33:49 PST)

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RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report Regarding Citywide Permit Reform: Fall 2025 Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City Permit processes and procedures can be time-consuming or confusing to navigate. *OAK Permits* includes recent and upcoming permit reforms that address these hardships directly.

Mayor Lee took office in 2025 with a clearly articulated 10-point plan “*to tackle Oakland’s most pressing challenges - including public safety, homelessness, economic revitalization - in the first 100 days.*” In July 2025, the City Administration prepared a plan of action for meeting Mayor goal number 6: “*Permitting reform to streamline city processes and reduce bureaucracy...*”

OAK Permits reforms build on recent expansions to the range of “by-right” (“principally permitted” or “ministerially approved”) ground-floor uses approvable without zoning administrator nor planning commission review. Other reforms include making applications available for easy online digital submittal. Some permits are also excellent candidates for same-day digital issuance.

Overall, *OAK Permits* is making steady strides towards permit streamlining and modernization; especially for small businesses. Notably, some essential functions already operate at optimal efficiency with quick turnarounds. Starting earlier this fiscal year, the majority of building permit types are now processed digitally and issued on the same day.

OAK Permits reforms are grouped into four *Key Action Areas*, as follows:

1. **Policy & Legislation**
2. **Customer Experience, Education, and Support**
3. **Expanded Digital Options**
4. **Systems, Data, and Analytics**

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

OAK Permits was initiated in late 2020 (then called “Re-Imagining One-Stop Permitting” or “ROSP”) and was spurred by the pandemic necessitating rapid provision of digital / remote city services, while in-person activities were suspended. These initial digitization efforts were necessary, but they resulted in uneven implementation of digital services, recordkeeping and tracking systems across departments. Inter-department operating silos and coordination inefficiencies persisted and required comprehensive integration at a systems level, as direct Development Services are provided in many different City departments, including Planning and Building (PBD), Oakland Fire Department (OFD), Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT), Oakland Public Works Department (OPW) and Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD). To facilitate this, in 2023 the City Administrator’s Office implemented two key structural changes:

1. Created and hired the Citywide Permits Ombuds position to helm *OAK Permits*. The Ombuds, part of the City Administrator’s Office, coordinates the integration of permitting systems across all departments (“direct service” PBD, OFD, OakDOT, OPW, and EWDD; “support” departments include the Office of the City Attorney, Finance Department, and the Information Technology Department). The Ombuds is not a permit case manager, but manages systems diagnosis of problems, develops recommendations for improvement, and oversees implementation.
2. Moved management of the main permit database from Planning and Building Department to the citywide Information Technology Department; as well as created an inter-department governance committee. The new comprehensive oversight structure establishes priorities for database expansions, to include more permits and departments; and ensures integration with other city systems, for example revenue collection.

Goals and Objectives for *OAK Permits* break down into two key user groups, *Customers* and *Permitting Departments*.

For Customers:

- Streamlined and modern experience for permittees (Customer Journey)
- Highly accessible permitting, with multiple options for conducting business (digital/virtual, in-person)
- Clearly articulated procedures and processes (updated technical reference materials, public education)
- Transparent, real-time project and case management statuses
- Structured channels for providing feedback and partnering on solutions where appropriate (Development Services Advisory Group and other fora)

For Permitting Departments:

- Real-time internal monitoring of KPIs and performance against statutory requirements (i.e. single database of record; monitoring dashboards)
- Less manual labor, more staff time efficiencies (integrated digital processes)
- More efficient communication between disciplines & teams (i.e. single database of record)

- Inter-department Process Mapping to diagnose and correct inefficiencies (service blueprints)

In addition to the inter-department governance committee, *OAK Permits* has also developed multi-pronged public engagement and education strategies. The Ombuds has created structured mechanisms for collaboration and receiving feedback from external stakeholders and attending fora hosted by external stakeholders like the Building Owners and Managers Association, Housing Action Coalition, and Oakland Builder's Alliance. In terms of public education, the City Administrator's office launched a series of video public service announcements¹ about specific customer service improvements for permit seekers.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The Permit Reforms address Oakland's four Citywide Priorities in several ways. Positive implications for the City of Oakland's fee and tax revenue result from simplified code requirements and streamlined business processes create a more inviting context for opening and sustaining local businesses, developing commercial and residential properties. Government and its business processes are becoming easier, more transparent, and efficient.

Though the City rapidly digitized many permitting services during the pandemic, inter-department operating silos and coordination inefficiencies persisted. Therefore, *OAK Permits* implementation requires ongoing diagnosis and integration at a comprehensive systems level to eliminate redundant or manual processes, update protocols and consolidate departments onto the same technology platforms. Critical analyses and diagnoses include:

- A. **Permit Database (Accela) Business Process Review:** A comprehensive assessment of the City's utilization of the permitting database, resulting in recommendations across all departments for improvements. These range from configuration changes, new features, and short-term to long-term technical measures.
FY 2025-2026: Implementation of Recommendations
- B. **Customer Journey Analysis:** Documents the handoffs and interactions between different stakeholders (especially internal disciplines, bureaus, and departments). Identify opportunities for greater efficiency, streamlining, and eliminating redundancies. Identify manual procedures that could be replaced by digital automation (i.e. manual intake, etc.).
Ongoing

Informed by the above, the *OAK Permits* workplan breaks down into discrete projects with specific outcomes. Most projects serve one or more Key Action Areas, but are grouped as follows by principal Action Area:

¹ See City of Oakland Youtube Playlist here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbxnbyADLTl&list=PLh_zxW7KmmKnmKhNbmuCEDWBKZQDx7sUH

1. Policy & Legislation

1.1. **Expanding "By Right" Commercial Development**

2024-2025: Approval of commercial activities in Downtown Oakland, Broadway Valdez², and Lake Merritt Plan³ areas have been streamlined, making it easier to start business.

Fall 2025: code amendments will be heard at City Council to extend similar business approval streamlining to all other commercial districts in Oakland.

1.2. **Expanding "By Right" Residential Development**

Approval of Affordable Housing has been streamlined citywide, make it faster and easier to expand the city's affordable housing stock. This includes "by right" streamlining approval in all districts; allowing residential in Oakland outside of the very high fire zone.⁴

Aug 2025: Effective

1.3. **Administrative Instruction 19:** Establishes a definition for "Development Services" and also mandates regular citywide fee analyses to ground annual updates to the Master Fee Schedule.⁶

Dec 2024: Effective date

2. Customer Experience, Education & Support

2.1. **The Neighborhood Business Assistance Program** is being expanded to provide more up-front support to local businesses. We're also simplifying the City website and making it easier to pay fees and fines electronically.

FY 2026: Target execution

2.2. **Single Storefront ('One Stop')** Physical Permitting Center at Building 250: It's now much easier to access in-person permitting services at 250 Frank Ogawa Plaza. Most permitting agencies have been relocated there; are offering expanded hours of availability; with walk-in and pre-scheduled appointment options.⁷

Jul 2024: expanded service through lunch hour (Planning, Building, Fire, Transportation)

Jan 2025: integrated Housing and Community Development front-facing services to 2nd

² Planning Code Chapter 17.101C - D-BV amendments significantly reduce many previous restrictions on ground floor uses.

³ Planning Code Chapter 17.101G- LM amendments significantly reduce many previous restrictions on ground floor uses.

⁴ Provisions for expanded "By Right" Residential Development was heard at City Council on July 15, effective August 29 2025.

⁶ See the City of Oakland Auditor's report "PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES FUND: CENTRALIZED FUND MANAGEMENT WILL BETTER CAPTURE CITYWIDE COSTS," June 2024. https://www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/20240628_Performance-Audit-of-the-Development-Services-Fund.pdf

⁷ More than 80% of PBD permits are submitted online. The Permit Center is already open Monday – Friday 8:30 – 4:00pm. Departments each offer a variety of options, including: In-Person service for Walk-ins (without appointment), in-person pre-scheduled appointments, virtual meetings with pre-scheduled appointment, and online live chat without appointment).

⁸ "Central District Entertainment Venue." Any approved arts, entertainment, and cultural use venue, anticipating the sale of alcoholic beverages (either on-sale and/or off-sale) in conjunction with an approved arts, entertainment, or cultural use and located in zones specified by the DOSP shall be defined as a Central District Entertainment Venue and may not require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). Approved uses may include entertainment, cultural uses such as bars, cabarets, night clubs, pool halls, bowling alleys, mini-golf, mechanical or electronic games, museums, art galleries, barbershop or salon, nail salon, performing arts centers, auditoriums, theaters, and other similar venues.

Floor

FY 2026: integration of EWDD counter services to 2nd Floor

- 2.3. **Signage & Wayfinding at Building 250 Permit Center:** comprehensive signage program that streamlines of all ad-hoc signage into a consistent design system.
FY 2026: Target execution.
- 2.4. **Integrated Appointment Scheduling:** Single platform for booking and managing virtual and in-person appointments. Upgrades to queueing hardware at Building 250.
May 2025: completion with Planning, Building, Records, OFD, OakDOT
Jan 2026: Target integration Housing & Community Development, OPW, and EWDD
- 2.5. **Communications and Public Education:** Develop and implement a variety of strategies for sharing RCWP improvements. Create structured mechanisms for collaboration and receiving feedback from external stakeholders.
FY 2025 Q1: Video Public Service Announcements series Phase 1 completed⁸
- 2.6. **Oaklandca.gov Permitting Webpage(s) Optimization:** Streamlines the customer journey on the City website by creating a single permit landing page, simplifying navigation, and consolidating redundant webpages from multiple departments.
FY 2026: Target completion

3. Expanded Digital Options

- 3.1. **One-Stop Digital Permit Intake:** Common high-volume permits, related to development and construction, can now be submitted online with a single application instead of multiple in-person submittals to various departments. These include Zoning Clearances⁹, Construction & Demolition Recycling, Tree Removals, Bollards (Minor Encroachments) on Public Property, Sign Design Review, Entertainment Venues, and Accessory Dwelling Units for single-family homes.¹⁰
CY 2025: Completed
- 3.2. **Zoning Clearance Digital Application:** Enhanced digital application eliminates errors with submittal
July 2025: Completed
- 3.3. **Digital Accessory Dwelling Unit Permit:** Enhanced, streamlined digital intake; allowing applicants to obtain GIS integrated site conditions identification (Creeks, Supplemental Zoning, Base Zone, Location to Major Transit corridors).
Oct 2025: Completed Phase 1: Single Family Homes
CY 2026: In queue for scoping Phase 2: Multi-Family Homes

⁸ See City of Oakland YouTube Playlist here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbxnbyADLTi&list=PLh_zxW7KmmKnmKhNbmuCEDWBKZQDx7sUH

⁹ Zoning Clearances available for One-Stop Digital submittal as of June 2025

¹⁰ Single digital application replaces paper applications to multiple departments; fees calculated and online payment now an option (in addition to in-person). Significantly improves internal staff time efficiencies and coordination of approvals to meet state mandated requirements: See AB 68, AB 881 (2019); AB 345 (2021); AB 2221, SB 897, (2022); AB 976, AB 1033, AB 1332 (2023); AB 2533, SB 477, SB 1077, SB 1211 (2024)

- 3.4. **Digital Special Event Permit:** Single digital application replaced paper applications to multiple departments; fees calculated and online payment now an option (in addition to in-person). Significantly improves internal staff time efficiencies and coordination of approvals. FY 2025 volumes are outperforming FY 2024.¹¹
Mar 2024: Completed
- 3.5. **Digital Film Permit:** Single digital application replaces paper applications to multiple departments; fees calculated and online payment now an option (in addition to in-person). Significantly improves internal staff time efficiencies and coordination of approvals.
Apr 2024: Completed
- 3.6. **Digital Cannabis Permit:** Single digital application replaces paper applications to multiple departments; fees calculated digitally. Online payment now an option (in addition to in-person). Significantly improves internal staff time efficiencies and coordination of approvals. Anticipate higher percentages of compliance and also increased revenue.
Mar 2026: Target Complete
- 3.7. **Digital Fire Safety Permit Intake:** These include Inspections for New Construction, Tennant Improvement, Fire Alarm, Fire Suppression, and Fire Safety
CY 2026: Target execution
- 3.8. **Same-Day Digital Building Permits:** Replaced manual submittal process, reducing turnaround time from 3-7 days to 20 minutes or less. Accounts for 62% of building department permit types.¹²
Sep 2024: Completed
CY 2026: Building alterations permits¹³
- 3.9. **Same-Day Digital Solar Permit Permits:** Replaced the manual process, reducing average turnaround time from 16 days to about 15 minutes. Accounts for 38% of all solar permit applications submitted since October 1, 2023 (and growing).
Sep 2023: Completed
- 3.10. **Other Same-Day Digital Permits:** These include Bollards on Private Property¹⁴ and Sewer Lateral Repair.¹⁵
- 3.11. **Elimination of Building Worksheet:** Removes a manual data entry step and automatically creates a permit record.¹⁶ Allows for better tracking, and performance

¹¹ 500 permits processed in FY24; over 260 permits processed so far in FY25

¹² Eligible permits include residential solar permits; Lead-based paint abatement permits; Commercial mechanical, electrical, and plumbing permits; Residential mechanical, electrical, and plumbing permits; Re-roofing and roof insulation certificates. Projects that require structural modification, or re-partitioning of interiors, are ineligible.

¹³ These include specific kinds of building alteration that do not require plan check: Non-structural kitchen and/or bath, Non-structural tenant improvements, Foundations, Window Replacement, stucco / siding.

¹⁴ Bollards on Private Property available as of June 2025

¹⁵ Emergency Repair and Standard Sewer Lateral Repair

¹⁶ Under the current procedure using the ZW and BW, it can take up to 14 days to create a permit record after manual review and data entry of the initial submittal, depending on volumes and internal capacity.

against state-mandated targets.
CY 2026: Target Completion

- 3.12. **Digital Project Scoping Tool:** Significantly reduces staff time spent providing initial scoping guidance; drastically improves customer experience by guiding them to the appropriate permit(s) for their project and also estimating fees. Will facilitate Elimination of Planning Worksheet (see below).
CY 2026: In Queue for scoping

- 3.13. **Elimination of Zoning Worksheet:** Removes a manual data entry step and automatically creates a permit record.¹⁷ Allows for better tracking, and performance against state-mandated targets.
2025: Target completion

- 3.14. **Universal Cashiering:** Consolidate fees and fines cashiering in one location for all permitting departments. Implement cost-sharing agreement between departments.
2026: In Queue for scoping

4. Systems, Data, Analytics

- 4.1. **Single Database of Record:** Consolidates various disconnected permit databases across departments; for more efficient inter-department permit tracking, management and reporting. Supports inter-department governance and centralized management of enterprise technology systems.
Ongoing

- 4.2. **Code Enforcement Inspector Mobile Application:** New cloud-connected application increases efficiencies by allowing inspectors to document conditions in the field immediately, versus coming back to the office to manually type them into the permit record. Turnaround time for noticing violations reduced from an average 13 days to 5 days.
Mar 2024: Completed

- 4.3. **Electronic Plan Review:** Replaces several different plan review platforms with a centralized system; provides visibility and coordination between commenters of different disciplines; automates and digitizes transmittals between the sponsor and city; clearer status tracking.
CY 2026: In Queue for scoping

- 4.4. **Citywide Point of Sale Platform:** *Enhancing the existing Point of Sale (POS) cashiering system to improve functionality, and ensure compliance with digital payment card industry (PCI) standards. These upgrades provide a more secure and reliable payment environment for end users while positioning the system for future integration opportunities.*
Mar 2026: target completion

¹⁷ Under the current procedure using the ZW and BW, it can take up to 14 days to create a permit record after manual review and data entry of the initial submittal, depending on volumes and internal capacity.

FISCAL IMPACT

OAK Permits reforms have several positive implications for the City of Oakland's fee and tax revenue. Simplified code requirements and streamlined business processes create a more inviting context for opening and sustaining local businesses, developing commercial and residential properties.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The City Administration has received consistent feedback through a variety of channels about the necessity for continued permit reform and streamlining.

COORDINATION

The Office of the City Attorney reviewed the Report as to form and legality. The City Administration also coordinates intensively with other departments, including the PBD, DOT, OPW, EWDD, OFD, ITD, and OCA on permit reform strategy and execution.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: Permit reforms have several positive implications for the City of Oakland's fee revenue. Simplified code requirements and streamlined business processes create a more inviting context for opening and sustaining local businesses, developing commercial and residential properties.

Environmental: No environmental impacts or opportunities are identified in this report since there is no possibility that Permit Reform may impact the physical environment. This proposal is administrative in nature, for the purpose of implementing regulations that have already been approved by the City Council. As such, it will have a positive impact on environmental policies in Oakland since it will help more efficiently implement those policies, such as By-Right approvals and approvals pursuant to the City's Equitable Climate Action Plan (ECAP).

Race & Equity: This proposal can impact racial inequities in the City of Oakland by making permitting (opening and operating a business, producing housing for all income levels, owning and managing property, building infrastructure and public facilities) more efficient.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

This proposal is for informational purposes only. There is no proposal for Council or Committee action at this time. Nevertheless, the options before the Council are for creating administrative processes to implement Planning and Building regulations that have already been legislatively approved, which is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15378(b)(4) (not a project – organizational and

administrative activities) and section 15061(b) (common sense exemption). As such, no further environmental review is required since this informational report is not a project.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report Regarding Citywide Permit Reform: Fall 2025 Update

For questions regarding this report, please contact Robin Abad Ocubillo, Citywide Permit Ombuds, at RAbad@oaklandca.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Abad", with a horizontal line underneath.

Robin Abad Ocubillo, Citywide Permit Ombuds
Office of the City Administrator