

Permitting Improvement Program

Key initiatives: November 2020 to July 2024

November 2020 to February 2021– [ePlan](#), the City’s electronic permit application system, launched for certain permits.

- Includes plumbing, occupant load, electrical and sprinkler permits, and review of design drawings by Certified Professionals.
- Significantly reduces costs related to printing, courier and drop-off wait times.
- Saves 23,000 large paper plans printed per year on trade permits.
- Reduces the need to scan and manually stamp approximately 11,500 large sheets per year.
- Streamlines review and collaboration through digital software.

March 2021 – Established the [City Manager’s Internal Development Application and Permitting Modernization Task Force](#) to address service levels and backlogs, identify opportunities and implement change.

April 2021 – [ePlan](#) expanded to include sewer and water connection permit.

June 9, 2021 – City Council approved first series of actions to reduce permitting and licensing backlogs, and the processing times of in-progress applications. This included:

- Temporarily non-enforcement of design guidelines for one- and two-family dwellings in select zoning district schedule
- Temporarily relaxing the Protection of Trees By-law.

October 14, 2021 – Piloting regulatory changes to support [commercial renovations](#) and small business, including:

- Treating subdividing a suite into two or more suites as a minor rather than a major renovation.
- Relaxing small suite definitions to allow occupant limits up to 100 people (previously 60).
- Exempting low risk changes of use from the requirement to submit a Development Permit as a means of reducing the permitting backlog and expediting the issuance of business licenses.
- Waiving change of occupancy upgrade requirements when changing between low-risk occupancy types as a means of reducing the permitting backlog and expediting the issuance of business licenses.
- Increase the threshold for meeting parking minimums from 200m² to 300m².

November 2021 – Created a [Residential Renovation Fast Track stream](#), resulting in the elimination of internal reviews and reduced processing times by six to eight weeks.

BACKGROUND

January 2022 – Implemented operational initiatives to streamline permitting.

- Combined the intake and plan review process for low density housing.
- Created a stand-alone laneway stream for laneway homes to clear the backlog.

March 2022 – Staff cleared a backlog of more than 500 applications for single detached homes, duplexes and laneway homes.

April 2022 – Implemented risk-based reviews at plan check for low-density housing applications, resulting in reduced number of items checked by 64% from 99 to 36.

August 2022 – Implemented enhanced communications with applications, improving the completeness of applications.

November 2022 – Released an updated, user-friendly Zoning and Development By-law to make it easier to find and use information. This includes:

- Created the [Zoning and Land Use Document Library](#).
- Added a [Digital Zoning Map](#).
- Simplifying land use regulations.
- Improving access to land use documents and information.
- Clarify zoning regulations, including amendments to building height, improved definitions and consistency of regulations, clarifying authorities, and consolidating administrative regulations.

February 2023 – Launched [ePlan](#) for all application types, allowing applicants to apply, submit and pay for a permit all online.

June 2023

- Eliminated more than 150 engineering conditions previously required for many complex development projects and expanded the use of risk-based reviews for remaining conditions.
- Expanded the scope of the [Residential Renovation Fast Track](#) stream to 20% of all renovation applications.
- Staffing levels returned to historical norms following higher than normal vacancies.
- City Council formally [adopted the 3-3-3-1 Permit Approval Framework](#), which sets out the following goals:
 - 3 days to approve home renovation permits (including renovations to accommodate mobility and accessibility-related challenges).
 - 3 weeks to approve single-family home and townhouse permits.
 - 3 months to approve permits for professionally designed multi-family and mid-rise projects where existing zoning is already in place.
 - 1 year to approve permits for a high-rise or large-scale project.

BACKGROUND



September 2023

- Launched the [Project Requirements Exploration Tool \(PRET\)](#) for laneway homes. Applicants can now use the digital tool to explore and understand regulations and requirements for locations throughout Vancouver. Eliminated the requirement for [rainwater management](#) plans and subsequent development permit conditions for mid to large scale (Part 3) buildings, speeding up a process that averaged 56 weeks of processing time.

November 2023

- City Council voted to [eliminate parking minimum requirements](#) for new developments from West End and Broadway, effective January 1, 2024.
- Consolidated nine residential zones into a single [Residential Inclusive zone \(R1-1\)](#), streamlining the process. Sites within the R1-1 zone can develop up to six strata units or eight secured rental units, on a standard lot.
- Created a dedicated multiplex team to process over 170 applications that have been received since Council approved the multiplex zoning. Under this system, the first multiplex permit was issued in less than six months – faster than the current average for single detached and duplex permits.
- Removed 86 (30%) of 287 land use policies and documents.

January 2024

- Launched a [Fast Track Sprinkler Permit stream](#), over 90% of sprinkler permits can now be issued within 24 hours. Permits no longer required for simple sprinkler repairs and simpler head or valve replacements.
- Eliminated the requirement for [rainwater management](#) plans and subsequent development permit conditions for mid to large scale (Part 3) buildings, speeding up a process that averaged 56 weeks of processing time.

February 2024 – Reducing requirements to submit traffic impact studies saving approximately 100 multi-family applications \$10,000 per year and saving significant staff review time

March 2024 – Eliminated, simplified or shifted to risk-based review, 70% (over 800) of 1,192 initial conditions required of applicants for all development types.

April 2024 – Began industry pilots for [eComply](#), an online design compliance check tool developed in partnership with Archistar that allows applicants to upload their designs and drawings and check if they meet the City's regulations.

May 2024 – Consolidated over 500 different [business licensing](#) categories to under 100. Reducing the need for similar business licenses and making it easier and faster to apply and get a license.

June 2024 – [Removed parking minimum requirements citywide](#), going beyond requirements under the Province's Transit-Oriented Areas and Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing legislations.

Where are we now:

On July 9, 2024, City staff presented an update on current permitting timelines. This includes*:

- **Home renovations:** 50 per cent faster in year-to-date 2024 vs 2023, currently three to 23 days compared to 44 days in 2023
 - Three days for [Residential Renovation Fast Track](#) permits, which accounted for 63 per cent of home renovation permits in May 2024.
 - 23 days for all lower complexity home renovation permits.
- **New detached and duplex homes:** 25 per cent faster in year-to-date 2024 vs 2023, currently 33 weeks compared to 43 weeks in 2023.
- **Laneway Homes:** 60 per cent faster in year-to-date 2024 vs 2023, currently 13 weeks compared to 32 weeks in 2023.
- **Commercial Renovation Permits:** Issued permits 45 per cent faster. Currently 32 days compared to 56 days in 2022.
- **Business Licenses:** Decreasing wait times for business license applications to be assigned for staff review by 50 per cent. Despite high application volumes, the current assignment period is three weeks compared to six weeks in 2023.

*based on medians

Upcoming Actions:

Building on these successes, the City is committed continuing to make all permitting streams simpler and more efficient, and to extend permit application improvements to mid-rise and high-rise projects. Next steps include:

- Piloting new technologies to accelerate compliance, improve applicant understanding of regulations and reduce the need for revisions. This includes launching eComply, which is currently in industry piloting phase, for public use.
- Expanding PRET for multiplexes to support better understanding of regulations and delivery of missing middle housing.
- Proposing relaxation or removal of requirements related to mechanical equipment space on rooftops, acoustic reports, and angle of daylight. These changes will make the permitting process easier and more predictable for larger-scale projects and enable the faster delivery of more diverse housing. Staff are recommending these proposed changes be referred to public hearing.
- Continuing to simplify zoning regulations and development guidelines to provide more transparency and predictability for industry.

For more information about the City's Permitting Improvement Program, please visit:

<https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/permitting-improvement-program.aspx>