

Denver auditor criticizes delays in city building permitting

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Denver City Auditor Timothy O'Brien issued a report Thursday that blamed inefficiencies and disorganization in the Department of Community Planning and Development for causing delays in building permits at a time of significant development in Denver.

O'Brien's audit comes at a time when business owners and builders are beginning to speak out publicly about issues they have with the permitting process following years of grumbling privately about delays.

Andy Ganick, owner of The Pig & the Sprout restaurant just west of Denver Union Station, recently detailed to the [Denver Business Journal](#) what he saw as excessive obstacles that have kept him from adding a patio at his eatery, which opened more than a year ago.

However, the report comes also as planning director Brad Buchanan is in the midst of a series of overhauls of the department that he says are speeding up the time in which builders can receive permits and making life easier for people dealing with city government.

> **COVER STORY: Reining in Denver's runaway permitting rules (Video)**

A spokeswoman for Buchanan responded to the audit Thursday by noting that steps have already been put into place to address some of O'Brien's primary concerns.

"Imbalances in staff training and long wait times are holding up the business of growing and developing the city of Denver," O'Brien said.

In the audit, O'Brien found that lines to file construction permits with the department begin hours before the office opens and require an average wait time of 90 minutes for submission of a residential or commercial permit. That exceeds the average 30- to 45-minute wait that developers experience in Aurora, Colorado Springs and San Diego (a city comparable to Denver), he said.

The audit also criticized the department for lacking sufficient storage capacities for the significant amount of construction plans that are submitted, leaving staff to search too long for needed documents. And it said that while the department seeks and tracks customer feedback, it has no management process for addressing complaints.

Planning department leaders agreed to address the long lines, track customer feedback more thoroughly and update their paper-filing system through the use of digital storage.

Laura Swartz, a community planning and development spokeswoman, noted that many of those efforts are underway already, in fact.

She noted that last month it launched its first electronic permitting system for smaller projects like water-heater installation and roof repair that represent about 60 percent of the 66,000 permits that the department issued last year. That system will cut down greatly on lines as it is utilized more fully, Buchanan has said.

Swartz said also that the department will begin offering contractors next week the ability to schedule appointments for larger projects, allowing them to skip the line by planning ahead. This idea came from customer feedback, she added.

"We see this as the future of Development Services. Following the successful launch of e-permits, we are now working on moving many of our contractor licensing functions to be fully online, and most importantly, are also working to implement electronic document review so that the remainder of our permit types can be applied for online," Swartz said in an e-mail. "We estimate that service will go live in 2018."



KATHLEEN LAVINE | DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL
Brad Buchanan, executive director of Denver Community Planning and Development

Ed Sealover

Reporter

Denver Business Journal

