

**POLITICS**

# Need a building permit in Denver? Auditor says you can expect to wait — too long

Planning department says online plans submission is chipping away at wait time

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By **JESSE PAUL** | [jpaul@denverpost.com](mailto:jpaul@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post  
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[Long wait times to submit building-permit applications and a disorganized filing system are delaying development across Denver, an audit has found.](#)

People start lining up hours before the Department of Community Planning and Development opens to hand in plans for review, according to Denver Auditor Timothy O'Brien. O'Brien said the agency should take steps to improve its intake practices to dramatically improve efficiency.

"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 a written statement Thursday.

The department says that improvements are already either completed or underway in response to the auditor's report, like better use of digital-submission systems, which have begun to reduce waits for those trying to file plans. It disagreed, however, with the notion that Denver's development boom is any way being hampered by the hold ups.

"I think the people that may be waiting at our counter are being held up for the duration of their time the at counter," planning department spokeswoman Andrea Burns said. "Development in Denver is happening. The actual reviews of the plans are not being held up. The delays — we're talking about minutes or hours. We are not talking about days or weeks."

Chief among the Denver Auditor's Office findings were inefficiencies in the permit intake process that caused an average wait time of more than an hour and a half for submissions of building permits. When compared to reported wait times in Colorado Springs, San Diego and Aurora, the division exceeds the average of 30 to 45 minutes, the office said.

Additionally, the department lacks sufficient storage capacity for the significant number of construction plans submitted as part of the permit process, the audit found. That issue has resulted in no defined organizational system and time wasted by staff searching for documents, according to the auditor, which released photos of plans and paperwork stacked up at the department.

"Auditors also found that although customer feedback is provided and tracked, there is little or no management process for addressing the issues from customers," O'Brien's office said in a news release. "Best practices, standardized by federal executive orders, have not been implemented."

Burns said wait times have already been reduced since the building department began allowing online submission of permit applications for small projects — like appliance installation and roof work — earlier this summer.

"We have a new queuing system going live within the month that will allow for people to make appointments to log in their plans for permits," she said.

Before the end of 2018, the department hopes to allow all building permits — for any size project — to be submitted electronically.

O'Brien says the planning department, which has seen historic levels of permit demand in the past several years, has also agreed to address the long lines by better training its staff by the end of 2018.

Burns emphasized that while there may be wait times for people trying to submit their plans for permitting, the actual review of those plans is going smoothly.

For new homes or additions of 400 square feet or larger and major commercial projects, it takes a month for the reviews to be completed. Intermediate residential projects take two weeks for review.

"If you submit your plans for review, you will get them back within the time that we have promised you," she said. "That is something we've achieved for the first time in a couple of years."

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Politics reporter. He has worked at The Denver Post since the summer of 2014, covering cops, courts, politics, environment, skiing and everything in between. He loves telling stories about Colorado's mountain towns and the Eastern Plains and wants to make sure our newspaper's great work extends into their communities.

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