

Chicago Department of Building
2025 Budget Statement to the City Council
Committee on the Budget and Government Operations
November 7, 2024
Marlene Hopkins, Commissioner

Good afternoon, Chairman Ervin, Vice Chair Lee, committee members, and Aldermen. I am very happy to be here today to discuss the Department of Buildings (DOB) 2025 budget request. It has been seven months since my confirmation as Commissioner, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve Mayor Brandon Johnson and collaborate with each of you, the members of the City Council. Together, we are working to enhance the safety and quality of life for all Chicago residents through the enforcement of the Chicago Construction Codes and by promoting equitable economic development in every neighborhood.

Before we discuss the budget request in detail, I want to emphasize how grateful I am for the dedicated Department of Buildings staff, who have the incredible responsibility to come to work each day to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all Chicagoans through enforcement of the Chicago Construction Codes. I am honored to work alongside these men and women every day on our core activities: issuing permits, conducting inspections, and issuing trade licenses.

The Department of Buildings is committed to fighting for those who lack the resources to fight for themselves through aggressive enforcement of the health and safety standards set forth in the Chicago Construction Codes. In the past year, DOB inspectors have responded to over 46,000 311 calls. DOB's experienced supervisors review every 311 request that comes in, and prioritize those with immediate life-safety implications, especially when children or seniors are involved. In the winter, we especially prioritize calls for buildings without heat, and since 2022 we also prioritize calls regarding violations of the cooling ordinance. When building owners do not promptly correct violations, DOB works with the Law Department to file enforcement cases, both in the Department of Administrative Hearings and in the circuit court. DOB inspectors are true first responders who provide the critical protection that's needed in our most vulnerable communities.

Through September, the Department has issued a total of 26,233 building permits and collected \$22,387,231 in permit fees. Mayor Johnson's bold and aggressive Cut the Tape initiative is already removing bottlenecks and accelerating approval timelines in the development process. The Cut the Tape strategies are straightforward: build faster, build everywhere, and build together. The Department committed to reducing the time it takes to get a building permit and making the permitting process more transparent. We implemented several reforms this year, including sending more frequent reminders to architects and expeditors that have outstanding corrections that they have not addressed and resubmitted providing free, virtual code-correction-mediation

meeting with the design professional and property owners for projects with open corrections after two rounds of plan review, inviting the property owner to attend the correction mediation meeting provides them with an opportunity to learn about the status of their project as well as they can now hold the design professional accountable for getting the project resubmitted in a timely manner.

There is also better intradepartmental collaboration with the Department of Planning and Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Water Management, and the Department of Public Health. Every day, we report the average time for plan-based building permits issued during the past two weeks on our website. At the end of October, the average time with the Department of Buildings was 21 days and time with the applicant or design professional was 50 days for a total time to permit of 71 days. As you can see, more than two-thirds of this time is spent with the design professional. We realized that our customers were relying on their design professional or expeditor to provide them with the status of the permit application and sometimes were not getting accurate information. As a solution, in March of this year, we launched a significantly improved website that provides owners with direct, real-time access to the status of their projects in the review process.

In addition, we continue to promote our longstanding self-certification program. Many small and medium-sized projects are eligible to use this program, as long as they are working with one of our more than 600 registered self-certification professionals. Self-certified projects bypass most building reviews but are subject to field inspections. Many self-certified permits are issued in less than 10 days. Last year 41 percent of our plan-based building permits were self-certified, and we expect that number to continue to grow in the coming years.

In November of 2023, we launched our Express Permit Program, transitioning from a paper-based system to a majority online-based permitting program which expanded our online payment options for permitting. I am very excited to announce that as of mid-September, through our close collaboration with DTI, two-thirds of the permits issued by DOB on an annual basis are now issued through the City's multi-department permit, inspections, and licensing platform, IPS11. We expect to retire our existing 20-year-old Hansen system by the end of 2026.

This fully web-enabled platform allows our customers to check application status, pay fees and view their inspection progress and results all from the comfort of their homes and offices. This real-time transparency gives customers and contractors more control of the process than ever before. One of the biggest enhancements is the ability to automatically suspend or expire issued permits due to the permit holder not requesting required inspections pursuant to the provisions of the Construction Codes.

The department's 2025 initiatives include continuing to work with DTI on the modernization of our permitting, inspection, and licensing system; the modernization of the Chicago Construction Codes with a focus on the mechanical provisions, which is inclusive of ventilation, refrigeration, boilers, and natural gas. After this, we will be focusing on updating the building, electrical, energy conservation, fire prevention, plumbing, and rehabilitation code provisions over the next 15 months. Our goal is to make sure that Chicago is ahead of or, at the very least, aligned with the latest industry standards as laid out by the International Code Council. We will also further enhance

our online Guide to Building Permits, improve our online inspection request process, and require annual online training for the contractors that we license. The department will continue to work collaboratively with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and the Department of Housing to ensure that projects submitted for various housing types are designed and constructed to accommodate individuals with varying impairments.

The Department of Buildings is grateful for the partnership and support of the City Council, and we look forward to working with you in 2025.