



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City of Pittsburgh Permitting Process Reform Initiative: Executive Order 2026-01

In response to Executive Order 2026-01, the O'Connor Administration conducted a comprehensive 60-day review of its permitting, licensing, design review, and project approval processes to address longstanding concerns regarding inefficiency, unpredictability, and applicant experience. The initiative supports the Administration's commitment to modernizing municipal operations and improving delivery of core services that enable small business growth, neighborhood investment, economic development and housing production.

PROCESS

The review combined independent analysis, internal operational assessment, and extensive stakeholder engagement. Key activities included:

- Process mapping and bottleneck analysis conducted through research sprint;
- Coordination with City departments to assess feasibility and implementation;
- Engagement with industry stakeholders, community representatives, and City Council; and
- Iterative refinement of recommendations aligned with departmental input and Mayoral priorities.

This collaborative approach ensured that recommendations are operationally grounded while advancing meaningful system reform.

KEY FINDINGS

The review identified consistent challenges affecting projects across scale and type:

- Lack of clear guidance and transparent submission requirements;
- Repetitive review cycles caused by incomplete or unclear submissions;
- Limited predictability in timelines and review expectations;
- Fragmented communication between departments and applicants;
- Technology and workflow limitations within existing systems; and
- Operational inconsistencies and capacity constraints.

These issues contribute to longer approval timelines, increased project costs, and reduced confidence in City processes.



REFORM STRATEGY

To address these systemic and structural issues, the City is advancing one of the most comprehensive process reform packages in decades. This multi-phased modernization strategy focused on improving speed, predictability, transparency, and coordination across the development process. Phase I reforms prioritize administrative and process improvements that can be implemented quickly to stabilize operations and improve transparency, Phase II builds on operational stability and advances modernization efforts and Phase III will see the institutionalization of major, long-term structural reforms. These reforms will impact and improve every part of the permitting process and approval cycle and will result in a nationally competitive system. This will make it easier for residents to repair their homes, open small businesses, and build more housing to welcome new neighbors. We are building a process of which Pittsburgh can be proud.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Collectively, these reforms will:

- Reduce permitting timelines and redundant review cycles;
- Improve predictability for residents, businesses, and developers;
- Improve transparency and customer experience;
- Strengthen interdepartmental coordination;
- Establish data-driven performance management across City services; and
- Accelerate housing production and neighborhood investment.

SIMPLIFY AND ACCELERATE APPROVAL FOR ROUTINE PROJECTS

To make it easier to complete routine repairs and work, the City will simplify approvals for low-risk residential and small business projects by:

PHASE I

- Launching a program for quicker, easier permit approvals to allow minor interior, non-structural, low-risk work to proceed without the current full design review process. This will help small businesses and residents to complete routine improvements quickly and at a lower cost, while maintaining strong safety standards. Examples could include small-scale work, finishes, partitions, like-for-like replacements of HVAC units, and more.
- Reducing professional drawing requirements for small residential renovations to help residents make improvements to their home quicker while lowering project costs.



PHASE II

- Expanding same-day, in-person, over-the-counter permit reviews for eligible work, helping residents and small businesses complete projects that improve their homes and neighborhoods faster by eliminating unnecessary wait times. Examples could include fencing, moving, demolition dumpster, and mechanical or electrical equipment only installations.
- Expanding eligibility for accelerated plan review for routine work to shorten approval timelines and make the permitting process more predictable. Examples could include occupancy only permits, accessibility upgrades, minor façade work, small structural additions with sealed design documents, simple demolition for low-risk, detached structures meeting defined criteria (e.g., residential structures under 2,000 square feet, no shared walls, minimum setbacks met, all work is on private property, etc.).

PHASE III

- Identifying opportunities to expand the use of opt-in standards for common residential work to ease submission requirements and expedite the permit process aligned with a pending Zoning Code rewrite. This will create a quicker, predictable process that supports housing investment, encourages neighborhood improvements, and delivers more efficient service to residents. Examples could include residential decks, roof work, minor repairs, replacement of windows, doors, siding within existing openings, in-kind finish or fixture replacements, like-for-like mechanical or electrical replacements within design capacity, fences, accessory one-story structures less than or equal to 1,000 square feet meeting setbacks, and retaining walls less than or equal to 4 feet in height not supporting surcharge.

IMPROVING APPLICATION QUALITY AND PREDICTABILITY

The application process should be straightforward, easy to understand, and consistent. It should be accessible to everyone who needs a permit whether their project is big or small. The first step toward making that change is to ensure that application requirements and expectations are communicated clearly and effectively. To reduce delays caused by incomplete submissions and late design changes, the City by:

PHASE I

- Revamping mandatory multi-department and multi-agency pre-application meetings for large or complex developments to align expectations from the start.
- Strengthening intake review procedures to identify missing materials before formal review begins, reducing delays caused by incomplete submissions.



- Exploring technology tools capable of assessing application readiness, helping applicants understand requirements and submit more complete applications.
- Triage applications based on project size, type, and complexity, ensuring that routine projects move quickly while complex proposals receive appropriate review.
- Standardizing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) across reviewing departments to establish predictable timelines and improve accountability.
- Integrating transportation and site plan reviews into the development approval process earlier to prevent late-stage revisions.

PHASE II

- Expanding shortened SLAs to minor projects, excluding encroachments into public ROW, helping to ensure faster and more consistent review timelines.
- Incorporating Forestry Division evaluations into relevant reviews by creating design and installation standards, allowing for adequate planning and avoiding late-stage compliance issues.

MODERNIZE ONESTOP AND APPLICANT EXPERIENCE

OneStop is the front door to the City's permitting process. We want to make it as inviting and intuitive as possible. The City will upgrade and expand OneStop into a fully integrated permitting platform by:

PHASE I

- Integrating the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure, Department of City Planning, Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections, and more into a true one-stop system for permits and standardize department functionality.
- Adding guided workflows and visual submission tools to make it easier for applicants to navigate the process.
- Incorporating inspection comment tracking and inspection history into OneStop to improve transparency and accountability.
- Creating a shared public web presence with consolidated checklists, fee guides, and application resources to equip applicants with everything that they need.
- Publishing simplified and predictable fee guides across agencies to avoid unexpected surprises.
- Establishing an internal performance dashboard for the City to track timelines, identify bottlenecks, support interdepartmental coordination, and inform success metrics.
- Implementing formal applicant feedback mechanisms to drive continuous improvement.



PHASE II

- Enabling synchronous multi-department review feedback and centralize reviewer comments, documents, and applicant communication in OneStop to improve communication and feedback between the City and an applicant.
- Preparing a pilot program launch for virtual inspection capabilities within OneStop to make it more convenient and accessible for applicants to move through the inspection processes.

INCREASE CONSISTENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Whether you apply for one permit or 100 permits, it should be clear how the process works each time. That means predictable and consistent processes that guide project review and inspections. The City will ensure operational consistency by:

PHASE I

- Formalizing department practices by creating and aligning written rules, procedures, processes, and review standards across departments to ensure that feedback to applicants is consistent.
- Conducting joint training between reviewers and inspectors to align interpretations.
- Developing common metrics to review performance collaboratively and track success.

PHASE II

- Assigning a consistent inspector throughout a project's lifecycle when feasible to improve communication and accessibility.
- Exploring an expansion of third-party inspection programs for qualifying work. Examples could include mechanical and HVAC installations, minor structural components (anchors, reinforcing, cold-formed framing), non-structural building inspections (accessibility and interior finishes), and fire alarm, detection and suppression systems.

PHASE III

- Consolidating and reconcile of all active departmental policies, bulletins, and procedural guidance into a searchable digital repository aligned with state code updates so that applicants can easily find resources and guidance.

IMPROVE PLANNING AND DESIGN REVIEW

Pittsburgh needs to grow. We need to make it easier to build new housing, revitalize our business districts, and bring new amenities to our communities. Public review processes should



be straightforward for both applicants and residents. The City will improve planning review processes by:

PHASE I

- Amending the City Code to reduce the time to both schedule meetings and hold hearings after a Development Activities Meetings (DAM) is held, ensure that DAM reports are integrated into OneStop and available for all reviewers, and require the City to schedule all DAMs, reducing the administrative burden on Registered Community Organizations.

PHASE II

- Standardizing Planning Commission submission requirements through audits, implementation of required staff memos, published checklists, and Commissioner training.

PHASE III

- Completing the transition to a re-vamped, coordinated permit process that builds on reforms and aims to identify risks earlier, improve interdepartmental coordination and accelerate permitting approval timelines for everyone.

MODERNIZE TRANSPORTATION AND SITE REVIEW

Continuing on Mayor O'Connor's commitment to Vision Zero, our transportation and site review processes should be designed to guide projects toward neighborhood needs and safety. The City must move toward a policy-driven, multimodal framework that prioritizes safe streets, public realm improvements, and transportation network performance. The City's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure will study its Transportation Impact Study guidelines to make it easier for high-quality projects to be built by:

PHASE I

- Reducing unnecessary traffic study requirements by tailoring requirements based on project size and scope;
- Exploring tiered review structure so that recommendations and guidance are project-specific.
- Recognizing trip credits for multimodal investments, benefiting our neighborhoods;
- Investigating impact-based proportional mitigation framework;



- Considering potential fee-in-lieu options to streamline implementation and help fund neighborhood infrastructure and transportation priorities.

PHASE III

- Adopting updated Transportation Impact Study standards upon the study's completion.

ADVANCE ZONING AND REGULATORY MODERNIZATION

The City's Zoning Code is outdated and makes it harder to build housing and bring economic opportunities to Pittsburgh. Zoning can be a tool to encourage affordability, growth, and responsible, equitable development in all parts of Pittsburgh. The City will begin the long overdue process of updating its Zoning Code by:

PHASE I

- Formalizing an annual assessment of the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) decision trends to inform further amendments.
- Beginning to reform the Zoning Code with smaller, targeted changes to help bring it in line with the standards of comparable cities.
- Removing obsolete sections and language to make the Zoning Code easier to understand and use for and by everyone.
- Eliminating redundancy dimensional standards by modernizing floor-area-ratio requirements where feasible and regulating height in feet rather than stories to provide new, denser housing opportunities across Pittsburgh while clarifying design expectations.
- Simplifying height requirements in zoning districts like Urban Neighborhood Commercial and others that can support denser buildouts.
- Adjusting outdated compatibility standards to make it easier to build vibrant neighborhoods with mixed-use amenities like small businesses and transit opportunities.
- Initiate the required study for a comprehensive Zoning Code reform package to make it easier to build high-quality, abundant housing in Pittsburgh.

PHASE II

- Initiating a comprehensive Zoning Code update that is aligned with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Amending Zoning Code provisions that annual Zoning Board of Adjustment assessments flag as otherwise commonly approved.
- Enabling more actions by right to reduce the need for Zoning Board of Adjustment hearings and administrator action, making it easier to navigate the review process for projects that require zoning approval.



- Updating outdated setback requirements to make compact, high-density development easier to build in older neighborhoods, bringing more housing choices to new parts of Pittsburgh.
- Creating conditions for more types of housing builds, including infill housing both between and above existing units and structures.
- Updating the bonus point system structure so that applicants have clear and effective ways to use the system for responsible development.
- Lowering the number of zoning districts, replacing existing special districts with improved citywide standards where feasible, reducing the need for future special districts.

PHASE III

- Adopting a reformed Zoning Code that better meets the modern needs of Pittsburgh.
- Instituting a regular Zoning Code maintenance amendment process to keep it clean and simple.
- Modernizing the temporary certificate of occupancy process, allowing safe projects to open sooner and reducing unnecessary delays in the final stages.



NEXT STEPS

IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION: Departments will begin implementing Phase I operational changes, prioritizing changes that streamline permitting, simplify applications, expand faster approval pathways, and improve the applicant experience.

TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENTS: The City will advance improvements to the OneStop platform to support integrated permitting, increased communication, inspection scheduling, and performance tracking.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS: The Administration will advance legislative proposals where necessary.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION: The City will continue engagement with elected officials, industry groups, community stakeholders, and applicants to communicate new procedures and gather feedback as reforms are implemented.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING: Departments will track implementation progress and permitting performance metrics to evaluate improvements throughout the implementation process.