

BUILDING ONE CITY

A Blueprint for Fundamental Transformation
at the New York City Department of Buildings

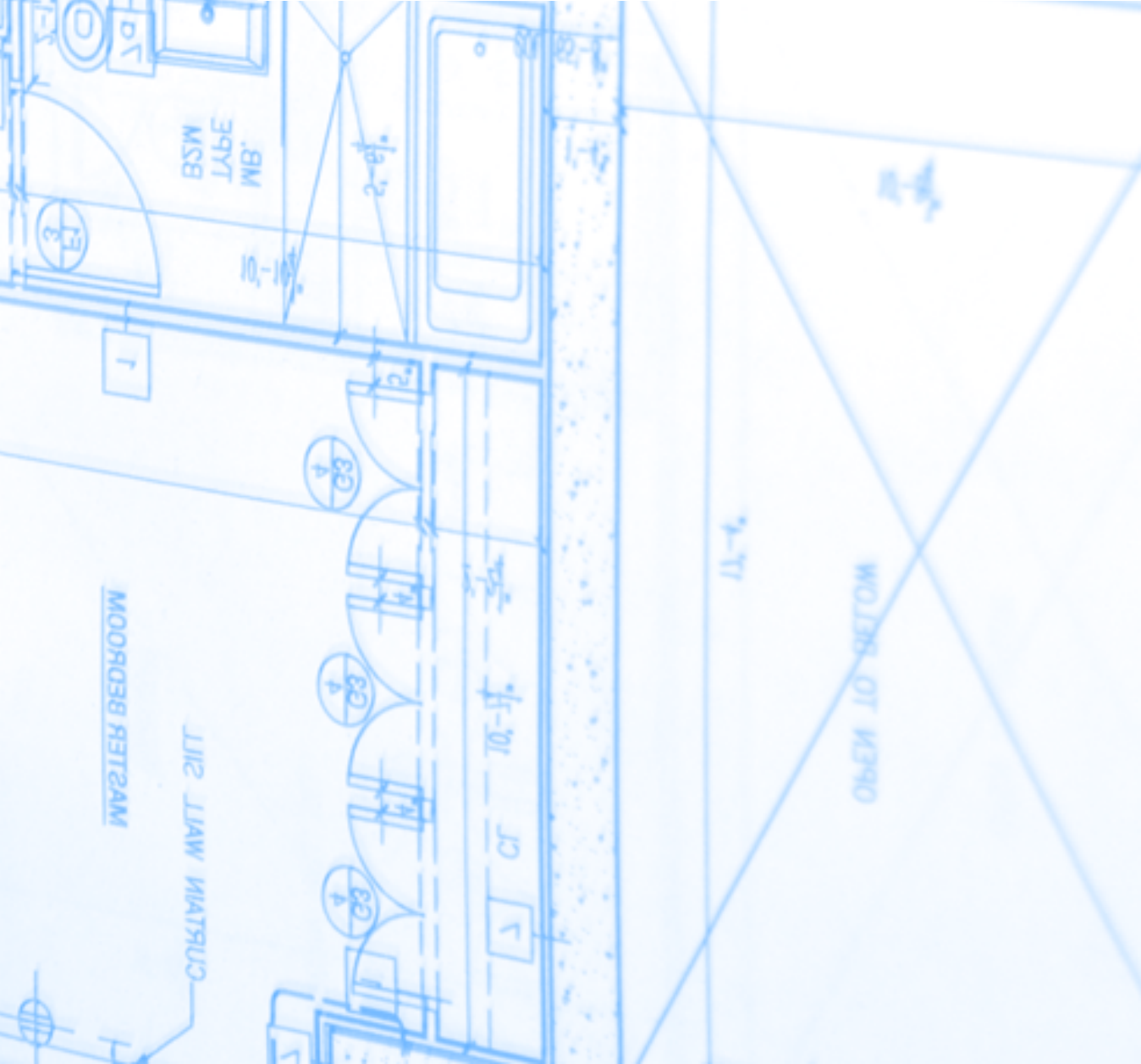


Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Anthony Shorris, First Deputy Mayor
Rick Chandler, Commissioner
Department of Buildings



“To expedite the right kind of development, we must expedite the development process. What we need, and what we will have, is fundamental reform at the Department of Buildings.”

- Mayor Bill de Blasio, State of the City 2015





To My Fellow New Yorkers:

New York City is the world's leading destination for opportunity. Like many other transplants, I have seen the City change dramatically during my time here. Unlike many other New Yorkers, I understand first-hand the complexities of regulating construction and ensuring public safety from my time at the Department of Buildings.

In my various roles at the Department, I have been struck by the dedication of the staff to protect the City while simultaneously supporting its development. This team juggles the responsibilities of being staunch enforcers of the New York City Construction Codes and advocates for growth – keeping projects moving, the economy expanding, people employed, and businesses opening.

As a Council Member, Mayor de Blasio pushed for an equitable and efficient Department of Buildings. Responding to that vision, we provide an outline for change. Through an unprecedented infusion of resources, we have been afforded a singular opportunity to transform the Department. These efforts are in lockstep with the Mayor's goals to develop affordable housing; support small businesses; improve the efficiency of our buildings; and build a thriving, equitable, sustainable, and resilient city.

Development is crucial to our great City. Our partnership provides the foundation for the future of New York City's built environment. Your hard work keeps our City vibrant, and together, our work will have a lasting, positive impact on New York.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Chandler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Commissioner Rick D. Chandler, P.E.



INTRODUCTION

From the towering skyscrapers that shape our skyline, to the shops that line our main streets, to the apartment buildings and single family homes that form our neighborhoods, the Department of Buildings works with New Yorkers to ensure safe construction of our homes and businesses. Department of Buildings (DOB) employees are responsible for enforcing the New York City Construction Codes and Zoning Resolution on over one million buildings and construction sites throughout the City. In 2014, the Department issued more than 140,000 construction permits.

DOB is integral to solving some of New York's most daunting challenges: ensuring continued economic growth and prosperity; spurring the development of affordable housing; improving energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emission; and helping our buildings and neighborhoods withstand sea level rise and other extreme consequences of climate change. DOB is an essential partner in the success of the Mayor's Housing New York and One City Built to Last initiatives. Through the skilled application of code and zoning regulations and a keen understanding of safety concerns in construction, DOB will advance the Mayor's vision for safe and sustainable development across New York City. This transformation effort aligns directly with the goals of One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City.

New Yorkers deserve a DOB that is efficient, effective, transparent, and fair. In his State of the City speech in 2015, Mayor de Blasio stated that "fundamental reform" was needed at the agency. With an unprecedented infusion of resources, including 320 new positions and \$120 million over four years, and root and branch reforms to internal processes and public interactions, we can have a world class Department of Buildings that is worthy of a 21st century urban leader. A revolutionized agency will benefit all New Yorkers, including the hard-working men and women at the Department of Buildings, who deserve technology advancements and optimized processes to get the job done right.

This document outlines a vision of change – including long-term targets and immediate action items – focused on identifying areas where reinvestment will strengthen the agency to carry out its core mission of safe and lawful use of buildings, as well as supporting the creation of a thriving, equitable, sustainable, and resilient 21st century New York.

How will we know if we're succeeding? A successful Department of Buildings will be fast and transparent, with exceptional and responsive customer service, streamlined operations, utmost integrity, and an ingrained ethos of ensuring public safety. Together we will:

Improve customer service by increasing online offerings; improving public spaces where New Yorkers interact with DOB; and enhancing educational offerings.

Streamline operations and reduce processing times, enabling New Yorkers to quickly navigate regulatory processes.

Perform with the utmost integrity, creating a foundation of trust between DOB and the public. Reinforce public safety by strengthening proactive enforcement and strategically deploying enforcement resources.

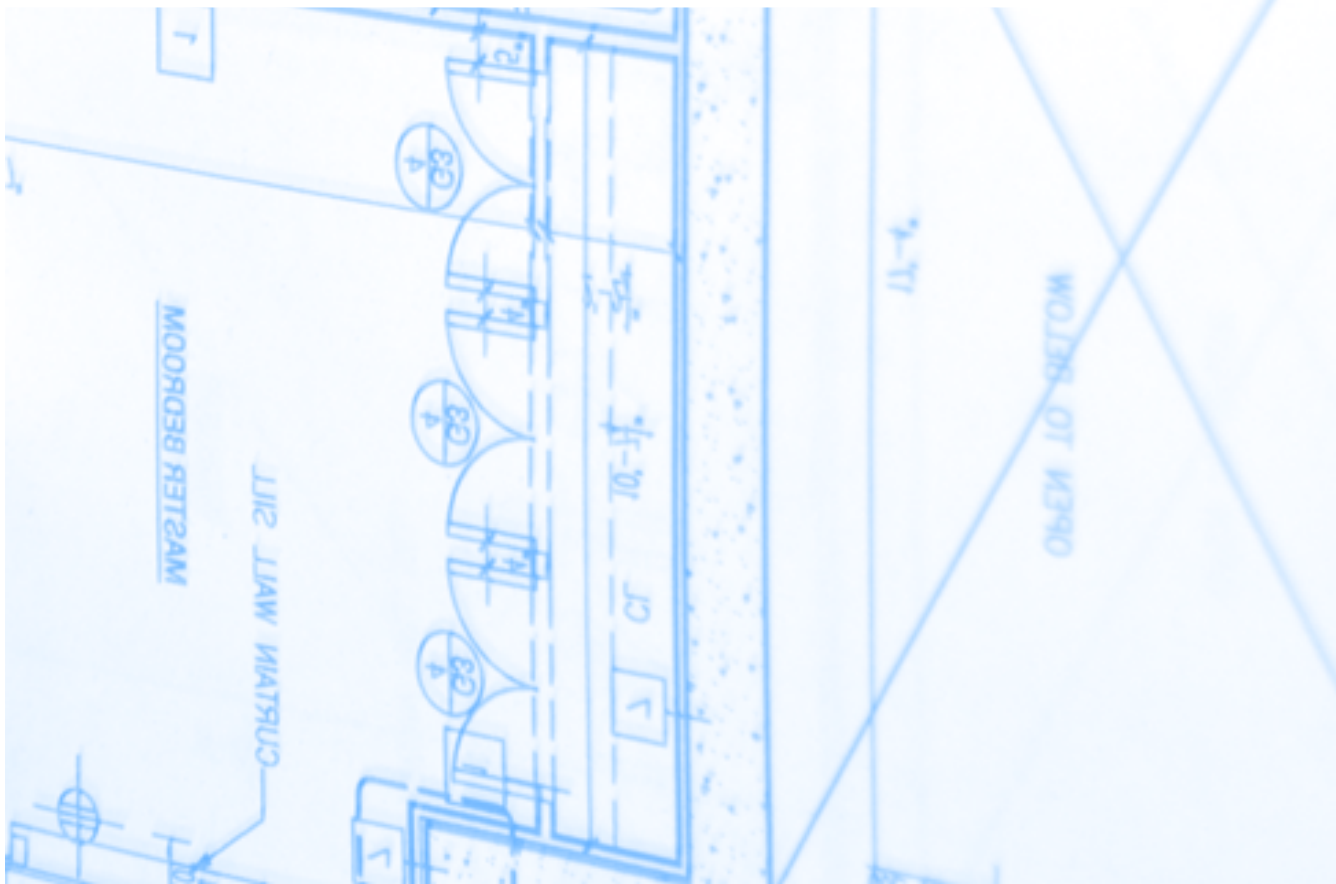
Increase transparency by providing clear information about status, process, and requirements without the need for unnecessary intermediaries.

Ensure that everyone who interacts with DOB receives an appropriate and equitable level of service.

A 21st Century Department of Buildings

At the end of our effort, New Yorkers will interact with a revolutionized DOB in which:

- **100% of applications, reviews, payments and scheduling** can be handled **online**.
- **100% of projects have a clear and transparent status**.
- **Integrity** is deeply ingrained among all DOB staff and the risk of fraud is reduced through **quick, transparent processes**.
- **100%** of inter-agency **inspection and review** transfers that are part of the development process are **automated**.
- Cycle times for major processes are **best-in-class for major US cities**.
- Resources are targeted to the highest risk and highest priority work.
- More low-risk filings are **self-certified**, and auditing resources are targeted to self-certified jobs based on risk.
- An **Affordable Housing** unit works to facilitate and expedite the construction of new affordable housing.
- The building industry's first ever **Code of Conduct** is in place.
- Proactive enforcement increases compliance with all **public safety standards**.



The background of the page features architectural blueprints. On the left side, there are vertical labels such as '2B' at the top, 'MURDER BEDROOM' in the middle, and 'CURTAIN WALL UNIT' at the bottom. The blueprints themselves show various lines, circles, and text, including 'OPEN TO BELOW' and '11-4'.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The New York City Department of Buildings is tasked with enforcing the New York City Construction Codes in order to ensure that construction across the five boroughs is completed safely and within the City's zoning regulations. The main functions include issuing of construction permits; inspecting construction sites; and licensing and registration of trades, contractors, and other industry professionals.

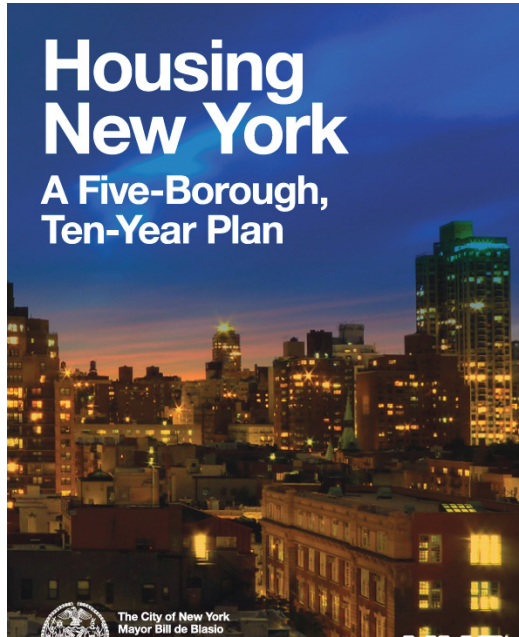
As in previous times of economic growth, in the past three years New York City has seen a surge in development applications. This increase in demand has revealed some additional needs in DOB's staffing levels and organizational structure. In the past, the agency has been under-resourced to meet the demand for quick and thorough plan reviews.

Many of the challenges faced by the agency have their root in technological limitations. Currently, DOB maintains its data in an outdated legacy mainframe system. As a result, DOB's customers have limited access to and understanding of their status within the DOB process. Too often, New Yorkers need to rely on intermediaries to navigate DOB's processes, unfairly making developers, architects, engineers, and DOB employees reliant on incomplete or second-hand information. Existing technology limitations also reduce the speed at which DOB employees can process applications.

DOB has pursued a number of technological advances to simplify the development process, but there is more to be done. In 2011, the Department launched the Development Hub to allow electronic filing and virtual plan review. These simplifications have eased traffic at the Department's five Borough Offices and allowed for faster reviews of the City's largest projects. In 2015, DOB rolled out the Inspection Ready program that has armed agency staff with tablets to expedite inspections by giving staff access to more information from the field.

In order to put it on a transformative trajectory, the Department of Buildings has developed a number of initiatives to fundamentally improve the agency. With new resources, DOB will increase its vigilance to ensure public safety and integrity; dramatically reduce processing times generally and for affordable housing projects in particular; increase transparency; improve customer service; and improve internal operations.

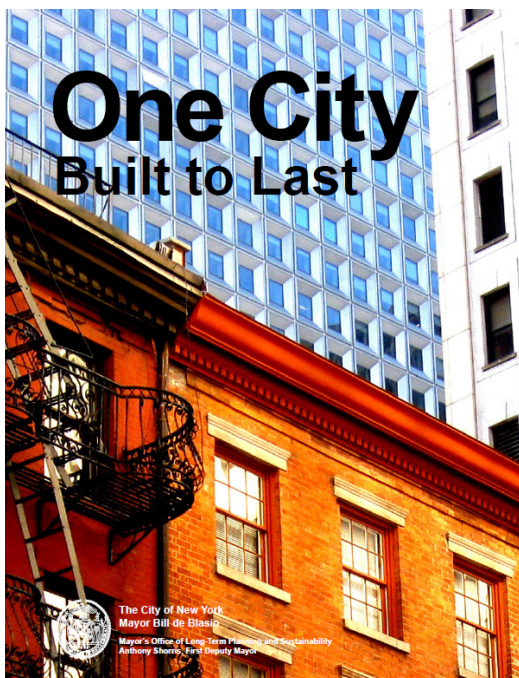
The vision and goals of the Department of Buildings as outlined in this report are in lockstep with the Mayor's goals to develop affordable housing, support small businesses, improve the efficiency of our buildings, and build a thriving, equitable, sustainable, and resilient city. Several of these other Mayoral platform initiatives are detailed in these recent reports from the Mayor's Office:



*One New York
The Plan for a Strong and Just City*



*Housing New York
A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan*



*One City
Built to Last*



*Small Business First
Better Government, Stronger Businesses*

ACTION PLAN

Public Safety and Integrity

Public safety and integrity are the underpinnings of optimal operations of the Department of Buildings. The most significant mission of DOB is to ensure safe construction practices across the City, keeping residents, business owners and work sites free from the danger of unsafe construction practices. As development activity rises across the City, it is increasingly important to identify and mitigate noncompliant practices to identify and punish individuals whose actions put the public in danger and to clearly communicate our standards for behavior to those responsible for developing housing and all other construction projects. To that end DOB will take the following steps:

- New Office of Risk Management will identify and mitigate risk.
- Auditing resources will be targeted to self-certified jobs based on risk.
- Litigation against bad actors will be strengthened.
- Industry Code of Conduct will clarify requirements for developers, professionals and other stakeholders.

Processing

Building in New York City is an extraordinarily complex undertaking, often involving numerous City agencies and requiring transactions with outdated systems and incongruent processes. DOB recognizes the importance of minimizing bureaucracy to ensure safe and rapid development.

DOB is deepening its investment in plan review and approval, implementing creative strategies to deploy data, technology improvement, and the proven technical expertise of agency staff to speed up approvals. These efforts will transform the development process as well as support the Mayor's goal of accelerating the development of affordable housing. Significant technological enhancements to outdated DOB systems will improve processing times by streamlining the plan exam process; improving decision-making; and reducing the amount of time it takes to conduct transactions with DOB.

Interagency coordination efforts will improve the required handoffs between agencies and will result in projects being approved more expeditiously. DOB will:

- Dramatically reduce plan examination and inspection times, with an increase of 159 plan examiners and 34 development inspectors over two years.
- Launch an affordable housing unit to expedite affordable housing development.
- Redesign DOB's online presence to reduce the need for in-person visits.
- Equip inspectors with tablets to expand field capabilities and improve efficiency.
- Make online plan review and submission the default practice.
- Ensure interagency handoffs are seamless and automated.

Increase Transparency

Transparency and consistency have been significant challenges to the success of DOB's mission. Understanding the need for clarity in the rules and regulations that govern development in the City, DOB will standardize objections, consolidate codes, and strengthen the ongoing communication with the industry and stakeholders. DOB will:

- Standardize objections to improve transparency, clarity, and consistency of the plan review process.
- Continue to engage and educate the industry to create and share best practices.
- Consolidate Construction Codes, enabling customers to more easily ensure compliance.

Customer Service

The Department of Buildings, at its core, is a customer service agency. To that end, DOB will restructure its interface with the public. Including technological advancements noted above, the agency will invest in the physical plant of its Borough Offices and increase availability of DOB staff in order to speed approvals. DOB will:

- Re-design Borough Office public spaces with a focus on customer service and online processes.
- Develop and deploy a more equitable fee structure to support transformation.
- Add 10 project advocates over two years to provide more resources to navigate DOB's review and approval processes.
- Test after hour inspections.
- Invest in our staff through additional training and technology, leading to an improved customer experience.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the Department of Buildings will lead to a best-in-class operation. Through a dramatic increase in funding and staffing allocated in the Mayor's 2016 Executive Budget, DOB will have the resources to strengthen public safety, devote attention to high risk work, and ensure that transactions with the agency are easier and faster, all with the utmost integrity.

Implementation is already underway. DOB has deployed multi-disciplinary workgroups, which will be supported and directed by a new Change Management Office that will deliver on the commitments outlined in this report.

A number of changes require collaboration and coordination with external entities. DOB will work closely with City and state agencies, authorities, utilities, elected officials, and other stakeholders to achieve results.



TIMELINE OF ACTION PLAN

Public Safety and Integrity	3 months	6 months	2016	2017 +
New Office of Risk Management				
Target auditing resources to higher-risk self certified jobs				
Litigation against bad actors will be strengthened				
Industry Code of Conduct will clarify requirements				
Processing	3 months	6 months	2016	2017 +
Dramatically reduce plan examination and inspection times				
Launch an affordable housing unit				
Redesign DOB's online presence				
Equip inspectors with tablets				
Make online plan review and submission the default practice				
Ensure agency handoffs are seamless and automated				
Increase Transparency	3 months	6 months	2016	2017 +
Standardize objections to improve transparency				
Continue to engage and educate the industry				
Consolidate Construction Codes				
Customer Service	3 months	6 months	2016	2017 +
Re-design Borough Office public spaces				
Develop and deploy a more equitable fee structure				
Add 10 project advocates over two years				
Pilot after hour inspections				

APPENDIX

Public Safety and Integrity

Risk Management

The recently created Office of Risk Management will proactively assess risk for the City. Using business intelligence and analytics tools, this office will identify and pursue punishment of “bad actors;” identify buildings that pose a threat to public safety; and actively penalize unsafe and corrupt behavior.

Enhance Audit Structures for Professional Certification

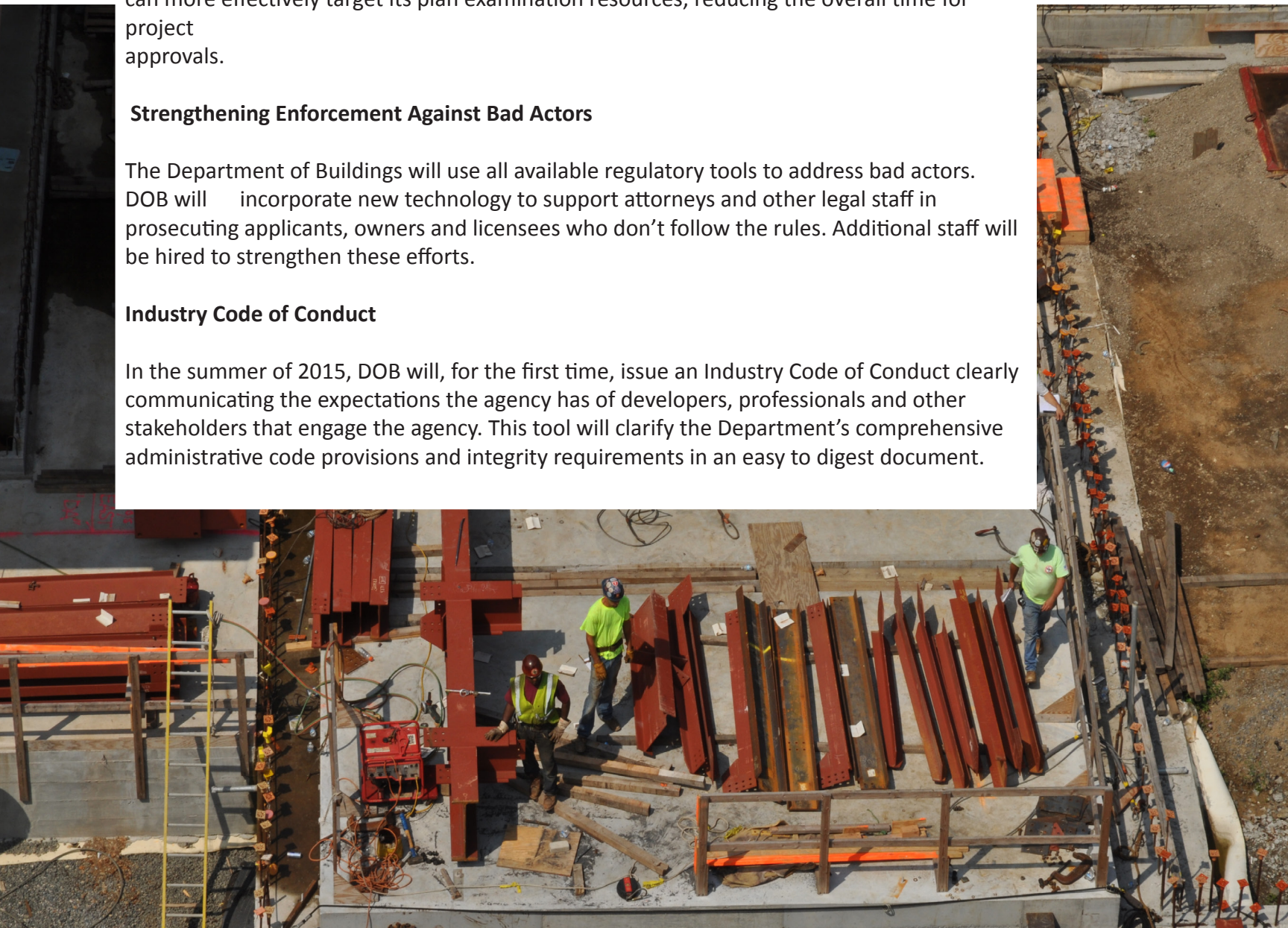
The Department of Buildings conducts audits on a targeted number of projects that are professionally certified (a provision that allows architects and engineers to affirm that their plans meet the regulations stipulated by the construction codes). Moving forward, DOB will adopt a risk-based model that places additional attention on the largest and most complicated projects. By enhancing the audit structure for Professional Certifications, DOB can more effectively target its plan examination resources, reducing the overall time for project approvals.

Strengthening Enforcement Against Bad Actors

The Department of Buildings will use all available regulatory tools to address bad actors. DOB will incorporate new technology to support attorneys and other legal staff in prosecuting applicants, owners and licensees who don't follow the rules. Additional staff will be hired to strengthen these efforts.

Industry Code of Conduct

In the summer of 2015, DOB will, for the first time, issue an Industry Code of Conduct clearly communicating the expectations the agency has of developers, professionals and other stakeholders that engage the agency. This tool will clarify the Department's comprehensive administrative code provisions and integrity requirements in an easy to digest document.



Processing

Indicator	Current State	Future State	Future State Affordable Housing
Time to First Review (New Buildings)	15.1 days	10 days	7 days
Time to First Review (Alt - 1s, Borough Office)*	12.4 days	10 days	7 days
Time to First Review (Alt - 2s and Alt - 3s, Borough Office)**	3.7 days	2 days	N/A
Average Wait for Boiler Inspectors	22.2 days	5 days	5 days
Average Wait for Elevator Inspectors	23.2	5 days	5 days

*Alt-1s are applications to existing buildings that require a new or amended certificate of occupancy.

**Alt 2s are construction filings with multiple work types (i.e. plumbing, general construction) and Alt 3s are filings with a single work type.

Reduce Plan Examination and Inspection Times

The Department of Buildings will increase and re-allocate resources to reduce the time it takes an applicant to get all necessary plan exam approvals and inspections. Over the course of the next two years, DOB will hire over 159 new plan examiners to improve performance and service levels. Additionally, Assistant Chief Plan Examiners, who advise and mentor plan Examiners, guide difficult projects, and provide more rapid problem solving and plan review consistency, will be hired to provide more immediate support to plan examiners.

This infusion of resources is expected to create a best-in-class process for large cities, as identified in the table below. With these additional resources, DOB will complete initial reviews on all filings within an average of 10 days from initial submission, and will have plan examiner appointments available within 10 business days of request. The average service level targets will be faster for affordable housing.

DOB will hire 34 additional development inspectors to more quickly meet the increasing needs of DOB's customers. Wait times for most inspection types will be reduced to an average of five business days by the end of FY16.

Processing (cont.)



Launch an Affordable Housing Unit

A new unit housed within the DOB Development HUB will prioritize plan review and development inspections for affordable housing projects. This group will focus on reviewing projects that will reduce inequity in New York City's housing stock.

This unit will provide significantly faster service, provided by staff knowledgeable and experienced with affordable housing. The team will consist of both plan examiners and inspectors who will coordinate closely with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and other agencies involved in the plan review process. Two project advocates will be tasked with facilitating internal and external interagency hand-offs and coordination.

This office will enable:

- Completion of first plan review within seven days of filing
- Availability of subsequent plan review appointments within seven days of request
- Development inspections (construction, electrical, and plumbing) within three days of request
- Boiler and elevator inspections within five days of request

Redesign DOB's online public interface

A new public facing web interface will allow customers to conduct any transaction online. Customers will be able to manage more robust online accounts, where they can make payments, check the status of their project, and have virtual interactions with agency staff. These efforts will reduce the number of in-person visits to DOB offices, and will be enabled by the replacement of DOB's current mainframe system, the Building Information System (BIS).

Expand Inspection Ready

The Department will launch the second portion of the Inspection Ready program which has already provided handheld tablets to enforcement inspectors. The next round of enhancements will enable online scheduling of development inspections, notify applicants of inspection results, and optimize inspectors' routes. These changes will continue to improve inspection quality, increase the number of inspections conducted each day, and reduce inspection wait times.

Processing (cont.)

Online plan submission and review

By the end of Calendar Year 2015, all applicants and owners will be able to review plans and objections alongside their plan examiner virtually or in-person. Services currently available at the DOB Development HUB will be enhanced and expanded to the five borough offices. The virtual review software will eliminate the need for developers to visit a borough office and will allow the applicant to access reviewer comments and objections online.

Additionally, this initiative will allow DOB to better allocate plan examiner workloads. By more evenly distributing work across the five boroughs, DOB can ensure faster initial plan reviews and shorter wait times for an appointment.

Interagency Work Group

The development and construction process is, at times, a complex web of agency checkpoints and hand-offs. A new interagency work group, including agencies and utilities critical to the success of development and construction in New York City, will meet regularly to identify and solve problematic touch-points and reoccurring cross-agency issues.



A construction worker in an orange shirt and blue helmet is working on a large steel structure, possibly a bridge or a large building frame, over a body of water. The worker is positioned on a horizontal steel beam, and another worker is visible below on a lower beam. The structure consists of numerous vertical and horizontal steel beams connected by gusset plates. The background shows a dark, calm body of water.

Increase Transparency

Standardize Objections

DOB will make a number of changes to increase predictability and consistency of plan exam objections.

In partnership with Small Business First, DOB will identify the most common objections found when reviewing plans for restaurants and other small businesses. This analysis will enable the agency to communicate to small business owners about DOB's code and common issues, helping the small business community to move more quickly through the plan review process.

Building on this initiative, DOB will conduct a broader review of common objections to plans across all job types. The Department will then work to standardize objection language to increase consistency across plan reviewers. DOB will also work with its customers to ensure that the information can support a better understanding of code requirements, reducing the number of reviews required to reach approval.

Engage and Educate Industry

DOB will deepen its industry engagement by utilizing new technology and analytics to discern best practices. DOB will promote best practices for developers and trade organizations at existing industry meetings and create new pathways for information sharing.

Increase Transparency (cont.)

Single Code for Existing Buildings

The Department of Buildings will create a building code based on the International Existing Building Code (IEBC).

The Department of Buildings currently administers multiple construction codes applicable to alterations of buildings based on the code in place at the time of initial construction. The Department moved to a suite of construction codes in 2008, with revisions in 2014, to bring widely used national standards to New York City. These model codes are most applicable to new buildings constructed after 2008, leaving existing buildings under the standards applicable at the time of their construction. Multiple codes make compliance more challenging.

Developing a code for existing buildings will allow DOB to streamline permitting and simplify regulations governing building upgrades and resiliency improvements for the existing housing and building stock. It will also make it much easier for applicants to comply with the Building Code.

DOB will contract with a group of building code experts to assist in this development effort. DOB will begin by engaging the City's experts and stakeholders in June 2015 to identify issues



that should be addressed in this development effort. DOB will establish an Existing Buildings Code Revision Committee, consisting of relevant experts and stakeholders.

It is anticipated that these changes will be submitted as proposed legislation to the City Council by the end of 2017. This new single code will be used for all alterations by 2018. Once the code is adopted, DOB will establish and maintain industry-wide training programs on the new code.

Customer Service

Redesign Borough Office Public Spaces

To enhance the customer experience, the Department of Buildings will modernize a number of public areas in its borough offices. The renovated space will provide more open and user-friendly areas to enhance service delivery and will integrate additional technology into day-to-day operations.

Fee Structure

DOB will seek legislative approval for a more equitable fee structure in which larger development projects will pay fees that better represent the level of interaction they have with the agency, while fees for small business and homeowners would be determined based on a structure more appropriate to their scope of work.

Increase Number of Project Advocates

Project Advocates provide a single point of contact within DOB to assist in the resolution of technical and operational issues relating to a project or property. DOB will hire 10 additional Project Advocates over the next two years who will facilitate efficient decision making within DOB.

After Hours Inspections

To best serve the City that never sleeps, DOB will begin offering after-hours and weekend inspections for a reasonable fee. DOB will test this initiative using high rise inspections in the summer of 2015 and will then expand it further. To receive fast service at the times that work best for them, developers will have the opportunity to request early morning, night or weekend inspections.

Investing in Staff

DOB will invest in staff development and retention through educational opportunities, including leveraging Buildings University – its successful training programs – and implementing additional technologies to help staff execute their daily responsibilities.



NOTES

Photo Credit:
DOB: pgs. 1-6, 8, 9, 11, 13-18
Mayor's Office: 7

Prepared by:
The Department of Buildings
The Mayor's Office of Operations

