



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

BMORE FAST

FACILITATING APPROVALS AND STREAMLINING TIMELINES

A Preliminary Report on Strategies to Streamline and Expedite Housing and Commercial Development Processes

MARCH 11, 2025



Table of Contents

Letter from Mayor Brandon M. Scott.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
A Three-Pillar Strategy for Baltimore’s Renaissance.....	8
Bmore Cornerstones: Building the Foundation for Development Reform.....	11
Creation of Director of Permitting and Development Services Position	11
Establishment of the Bmore FAST Advisory Group	12
Bmore Blueprint: Complete Recommendations for Permitting & Development Reform	16
Public Engagement & Access	17
Developer & Builder Support	22
Small Business & Emerging Developer Resources	30
City Operations & Capacity	34
Appendix A: Summary Table of Initiatives	38

Letter from Mayor Brandon M. Scott

Dear Baltimore,

Baltimore stands at a historic moment of opportunity. With an unprecedented \$3 billion partnership between the city, state, Baltimoreans United in Leadership (BUILD) BUILD, Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC), and other philanthropic partners, we have secured the largest coordinated investment in Baltimore's neighborhoods in generations. This transformative funding creates the potential to rehabilitate a minimum of 37,500 vacant properties and generate more than \$5 billion in additional private investment over the next 15 years.



However, I recognize that money alone is not enough. The success of this historic initiative depends on our ability to deploy these resources efficiently and effectively. Since my first term, my administration has been working with city agencies involved in permitting and development to reform our city's permitting system. To date, we've improved customer service in our permits office, raising call answer rates from less than 10% to 98%. We've begun modernizing our permitting technology with the implementation of Accela, and we have launched PermitStat to create data-driven accountability across all agencies involved in development approvals.

But we need to do more, and we need to do it FAST — Facilitating Approvals and Streamlining Timelines. The reforms detailed in this report represent a comprehensive approach to modernizing how Baltimore handles development. These recommendations will help ensure that our processes facilitate, rather than hinder, responsible investment in our communities.

Through implementing the key recommendations in this report, some of which has already begun, my administration is focused on improving both the experience of applicants who use these processes and the everyday Baltimoreans who are impacted by them. When development processes work efficiently, we create more housing options, more vibrant commercial corridors, more jobs, and more opportunity in every neighborhood.

For too long, Baltimore has managed decline with insufficient resources. Now, with this historic investment and these crucial reforms, we have the opportunity to drive genuine transformation at a neighborhood scale. The Bmore FAST initiative creates the framework for lasting renaissance that benefits all residents.

The time for incremental progress is over. Baltimore deserves development processes that match the scale of our ambition and the urgency of our challenges. Together, we can build the systems and structures needed to support Baltimore's renaissance.

Sincerely,

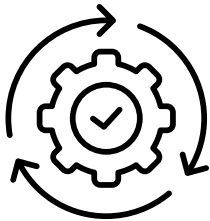
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brandon M. Scott".

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Executive Summary

Baltimore stands at a transformative moment. Mayor Brandon Scott’s historic \$3 billion partnership with Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), and the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) as well as with the State of Maryland creates an unprecedented opportunity to address vacant properties and revitalize communities over the next 15 years. This collaborative initiative will rehabilitate a minimum of 37,500 properties through strategic public investment. However, the success of this initiative — and Baltimore’s broader renaissance — requires more than funding. It demands modernized, efficient development processes capable of facilitating investment at a scale previously unseen in our city’s history.

Recognizing this imperative, The Scott Administration undertook a comprehensive review of Baltimore’s development approval processes. This report outlines a strategic framework for reform built on three foundational pillars:



STRATEGIC PILLAR

BMORE FAST

Streamlining City’s internal development processes and procedures to reduce unnecessary administrative barriers while maintaining essential oversight.

BMORE INCLUSIVE

Advancing zoning and building code reforms to create more opportunities for housing and commercial development across all neighborhoods while maintaining community character and preventing displacement.

BMORE CONNECTED

Leveraging partnerships with public, private, and philanthropic stakeholders to support implementation and expand resources for neighborhood revitalization.

While this report focuses primarily on the “Bmore FAST” pillar, it recognizes that lasting change requires coordinated action across all three domains. The recommendations center on two cornerstone initiatives:

1. Creation of a **Director of Permitting and Development Services** position to provide centralized oversight and accountability across all agencies involved in development approvals. This role will be charged with implementing the recommendations in this report, with medium-term plans to explore creation of a dedicated development services coordination office, and longer-term evaluation of potentially consolidating development-related functions into a unified department.
2. Establishment of the **Bmore FAST Advisory Group**, bringing together stakeholders from across the development ecosystem to provide expertise and guidance on re-form implementation.

Building on this foundation, the report presents specific recommendations organized around four key stakeholder groups:

- **Public Engagement & Access:** Making development processes more transparent and accessible to all community members through enhanced digital tools, expanded language access, and educational programming
- **Developer & Builder Support:** Streamlining processes for development professionals while maintaining robust oversight through modernized systems, coordinated reviews, and predictable timelines
- **Small Business & Emerging Developer Resources:** Creating targeted support systems and simplified pathways that make development more accessible to smaller scale participants
- **City Operations & Capacity:** Strengthening Baltimore’s institutional capability to support efficient development through enhanced coordination and strategic staffing

The recommendations that follow are organized by these stakeholder groups, with detailed implementation guidance provided for each initiative. A complete summary table of all recommendations, including proposed timelines and lead agencies, can be found in **Appendix A**.

Key initiatives include:

■ **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & ACCESS**

- **Public Land Use & Liquor License Information Portal:** Centralized online resource for tracking development projects, zoning decisions, and public hearings
- **Enhanced Customer Service:** Expanding our successful permits call center that raised answer rates from 10% to 98%
- **Bilingual Access Initiative:** Making development services accessible to all communities with dedicated Span-ish language resources
- **Virtual Office Hours:** Direct access to technical staff for guidance on permits and development requirements
- **Permit Review Time Transparency:** Publishing standard review times and implementing accountability measures

■ **DEVELOPER & BUILDER SUPPORT**

- **E-Permits Implementation:** Launching new comprehensive online platform for streamlined application processing
- **Self-Certification and Third-Party Review:** Allowing qualified professionals to expedite routine approvals while maintaining safety standards
- **Developer’s Agreement Process Reform:** Simplifying requirements for work in the public right-of-way

- **Utility Coordination Program:** Establishing formal coordination processes with all major utilities
- **Major Projects Coordination Committee:** Enhanced support for complex development projects with significant economic impact

■ **SMALL BUSINESS & EMERGING DEVELOPER SUPPORT**

- **Small and MWBE Developer Support Programs:** Enhanced technical assistance for minority and women-owned businesses
- **Pre-approved Plans and Documents:** Standard designs for typical renovation projects to reduce costs
- **Streamlined Minor Variance Process:** Administrative approval pathway for uncontested minor variance requests
- **Trade Licensure Reform Initiative:** Creating appropriately scaled licensing pathways for residential rehabilitation work
- **Business License Coordination:** Better alignment of city and state processes to reduce duplication

■ **CITY OPERATIONS & CAPACITY**

- **Centralized Development Leadership:** Creating the Director of Permitting and Development Services role to provide strategic oversight and accountability while fostering a culture of facilitation across all agencies
- **Comprehensive Staffing Assessment:** Ensuring adequate resources across all development agencies
- **PermitStat Implementation:** Data-driven performance management system for development services
- **Lien Release Process Reform:** Proactive clearing of liens on city-acquired properties
- **Real Estate Document Processing Assessment:** Improving deed processing and coordination with the Clerk of Court to support property rehabilitation

These proposals, including reforms to allow accessory dwelling units citywide and implement single-stair building code provisions, would work in concert with the process improvements detailed in this report to create more opportunities for housing development while reducing construction costs. The combination of streamlined processes and modernized regulations would help Baltimore achieve its housing production and neighborhood revitalization goals more effectively.

These reforms address immediate pain points while building long-term capacity for sustained improvement. Beyond technical changes, the Director of Permitting and Development Services will lead a crucial cultural transformation where staff at all levels approach their work with a facilitation mindset — understanding that they are not just processing applications or enforcing codes but

actively contributing to Baltimore’s renaissance by facilitating responsible investment. Success metrics will include:

- Reduced processing times for permits and approvals
- Increased predictability in development timelines
- Enhanced accessibility of services for all stakeholders
- Better coordination between city agencies and external partners
- Expanded opportunities for small and emerging developers

Importantly, these recommendations maintain robust protections for public health, safety, and welfare while eliminating unnecessary administrative barriers. The goal is not to reduce oversight, but to make it more efficient and predictable.

The proposed reforms come at a crucial time. Research indicates potential demand for 5,300 to 7,100 new or renovated homes annually in Baltimore if the supply is provided. Meanwhile, neighborhood business districts need both physical renovation and new investment to thrive. Through the unprecedented partnership between the City, State, BUILD, and GBC, Baltimore will leverage at least \$3 billion in public and philanthropic investment to generate more than \$5 billion in private investment, creating transformative change across the city’s neighborhoods.

Implementation will be phased, with some initiatives already underway and others requiring legislative action or technology upgrades. However, the urgency is clear, as Baltimore embarks on its most ambitious redevelopment effort in generations, the city’s development processes must facilitate, not hinder, progress toward renaissance.

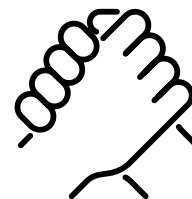
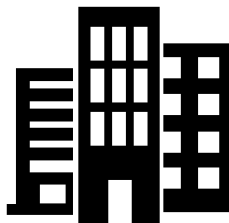
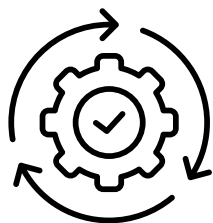
THE FOUNDATION FOR RENAISSANCE:

Why Development Reform Matters

A Three-Pillar Strategy for Baltimore's Renaissance

The challenges facing Baltimore's development ecosystem are complex and interconnected, requiring a comprehensive approach that goes beyond any single solution. Recognizing this complexity, this Report outlines a strategic framework built on three foundational pillars that work in concert to create the conditions for transformative change.

This three-pillar strategy acknowledges that development reform must simultaneously address administrative processes, regulatory frameworks, and partnership networks to achieve meaningful impact. Each pillar targets a different aspect of the development ecosystem while reinforcing and amplifying the others. Together, they create a coordinated approach to catalyzing investment and revitalization across Baltimore's neighborhoods.



STRATEGIC PILLAR	BMORE FAST	BMORE INCLUSIVE	BMORE CONNECTED
OVERVIEW	Streamlining City's internal development processes and procedures to reduce unnecessary administrative barriers while maintaining essential oversight	Advancing zoning and building code reforms to create more opportunities for housing and commercial development across all neighborhoods while maintaining community character and preventing displacement	Leveraging partnerships with public, private, and philanthropic stakeholders to support implementation and expand resources for neighborhood revitalization
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a Director of Permitting and Development Services position • Implementing modern E-Permits software • Streamlining self-certification and third-party review processes • Creating utility coordination program • Enhancing permit tracking and transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing missing middle housing and ADUs citywide • Implementing single-stair building code reforms • Eliminating parking minimums for rehabilitation and development in transit-rich areas • Updating tax incentives to support community revitalization • Creating independent zoning review processes • Providing targeted financing assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing the Bmore FAST Advisory Group with diverse stakeholders • Leveraging the Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Initiative • Expanding technical assistance through partnerships with community organizations • Coordinating with non-traditional partners like the Clerk of the Court and State agencies

While this report focuses primarily on the “Bmore FAST” pillar, it is important to understand how these three elements work together. Streamlined processes alone cannot overcome regulatory barriers that prevent certain types of development. Similarly, zoning reforms without efficient administrative systems may not translate into actual construction. Further, neither processes nor regulations can reach their full potential without the resources and support provided through strategic partnerships.

The Bmore FAST pillar addresses inefficiencies in the city’s internal processes, creating clearer pathways for development approval and reducing unnecessary administrative barriers. The Bmore Inclusive pillar creates more opportunities for development by modernizing regulations that currently limit housing options and commercial uses. The Bmore Connected pillar ensures that these improvements translate into tangible community benefits by leveraging partnerships with stakeholders who can provide additional resources, expertise, and implementation support.

This coordinated approach represents a significant departure from previous reform efforts that often focused on individual components of the development ecosystem without addressing their interconnections. By advancing reforms across all three pillars simultaneously, Baltimore can create a more conducive environment for the transformative investment needed to address vacant properties, expand housing options, and revitalize commercial corridors.

As detailed in the following sections, this three-pillar strategy creates the framework for reversing decades of disinvestment and population loss by making Baltimore’s development ecosystem more efficient, more inclusive, and more connected to the resources needed for sustained revitalization.

BMORE CORNERSTONES:

Building the Foundation for
Development Reform

Bmore Cornerstones:

Building the Foundation for Development Reform

The transformation of Baltimore's development ecosystem requires more than incremental improvements to existing processes. It demands fundamental changes to how the city coordinates and manages development approvals. This report puts forward two cornerstone initiatives that will create the leadership structure and stakeholder engagement framework necessary to drive comprehensive reform.

■ 1. CREATION OF DIRECTOR OF PERMITTING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES POSITION

Addressing Fragmentation Through Centralized Leadership

The single most important recommendation of this report is the creation of a new Director of Permitting and Development Services position. This position addresses a fundamental challenge that has historically hindered Baltimore's development processes, the lack of centralized authority and accountability across the numerous agencies involved in development approvals.

Currently, development approvals are fragmented across different agencies with varying priorities and performance metrics. While most residents think of DHCD as the agency in charge of permitting, there are many other departments that play crucial roles in approving and inspecting construction and building projects. This includes divisions of agencies that do not view development facilitation as their core mission.

For example, the Fire Department Chief is understandably focused on emergency response readiness and firefighting capabilities and similarly Director of Public Works prioritizes trash collection, recycling, water infrastructure, and wastewater treatment facilities. The hardworking staff in these specialized divisions often lack the time, authority, or resources to implement strategic operational improvements, especially when changes require cross-agency coordination.

Providing Objective Mediation for Process Conflicts

This fragmentation also creates challenges when conflicts arise between reviewers and applicants. Currently when disagreements occur, there is no clear, objective third party with the authority to mediate these situations. A centralized, objective authority can help resolve these conflicts fairly and efficiently, ensuring that both legitimate concerns from applicants and necessary regulatory requirements are properly addressed.

Core Responsibilities and Authority

The Director of Permitting and Development Services will serve as the city’s primary coordinator for all development-related approvals and processes. This position will maintain comprehensive oversight of the entire development lifecycle, from initial application through final inspection and occupancy, with authority and responsibility to:

- Coordinate across all agencies involved in development approvals
- Identify and eliminate bottlenecks in the approval process
- Drive implementation of process improvements and technological solutions
- Serve as an objective mediator when conflicts arise between applicants and city reviewers
- Monitor performance metrics and ensure accountability
- Lead strategic planning for continuous process improvement
- Ensure reforms maintain necessary oversight while eliminating unnecessary barriers

A Phased Approach to Institutional Development

Looking ahead, this report recommends a phased approach to building institutional capacity for development coordination. In the medium term (1–2 years), the City should explore creating a dedicated Development Services Coordination Office. This office would provide focused staff support for the Director’s coordination role, helping to institutionalize improvements in cross-agency collaboration and process efficiency.

For the longer term (2–3 years), the City should undertake a comprehensive evaluation of potentially consolidating development-related staff and functions from various agencies into a unified Development Services department. This assessment would examine successful models from peer cities that have implemented consolidated development services departments, while carefully evaluating the operational and budgetary implications of such a reorganization. This methodical approach to potential consolidation ensures that any structural changes would enhance rather than disrupt the improved coordination achieved through the Director’s oversight role.

The creation of this position signals the Administration’s commitment to fundamental reform and creates the leadership structure necessary to drive sustained improvement in Baltimore’s development processes.

■ 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BMORE FAST ADVISORY GROUP

The second cornerstone recommendation is the creation of the Bmore FAST Advisory Group. This initiative recognizes that effective reform requires ongoing collaboration between the city and the diverse stakeholders involved in development.

Working directly with the Director of Permitting and Development Services, the Advisory Group will bring together representatives from across the development ecosystem, including:

- Market-rate and affordable housing developers
- General contractors and construction professionals

- Architects and design professionals
- Permit expeditors
- Civil engineers
- Real estate attorneys
- Environmental consultants
- Commercial and residential lenders
- Community development experts
- Real estate brokers
- Small business representatives

This diverse membership reflects the interconnected nature of development challenges. For example, when architects face design review delays, these can trigger cascading impacts on stormwater management plans and construction schedules. When contractors encounter inspection bottlenecks, this can affect project financing and eventual occupancy timelines. By bringing these stakeholders together in a formal advisory capacity, the Advisory Group can:

- Provide practical insights into development challenges
- Share industry expertise with city staff
- Support implementation of new processes and technologies
- Establish and monitor performance metrics
- Build awareness and support for reform initiatives
- Ensure reforms address the full spectrum of development needs
- Advise on potential organizational structures as reforms progress
- Help evaluate models from other cities for consolidated development services

The Advisory Group will serve as a crucial sounding board as Baltimore moves through the phases of development reform — from immediate process improvements in connection with the Director of Permitting and Development Services’ coordination authority, to potential creation of a dedicated coordination office, to longer-term evaluation of consolidated development services models.

The Advisory Group will help ensure that Baltimore’s development reforms are comprehensive, practical, and responsive to stakeholder needs while maintaining necessary oversight and community protections. The group’s expertise will be particularly valuable in assessing how different organizational models could best serve Baltimore’s development needs.

■ FOUNDATION FOR COMPREHENSIVE REFORM

Together, these two cornerstone initiatives create the leadership structure and stakeholder engagement framework essential for successful implementation of the broader reforms detailed in this report. The Director of Permitting and Development Services provides the centralized authority and accountability necessary to drive change across city agencies. The Bmore FAST Advisory Group ensures that reforms benefit from industry expertise while remaining aligned with community needs and development realities.

This foundation will support the implementation of numerous specific process improvements, technological innovations, and policy reforms detailed in the following section. By establishing strong leadership and meaningful stakeholder engagement at the outset, Baltimore positions itself to achieve lasting improvements in its development processes.

BMORE BLUEPRINT:

Complete Recommendations for
Permitting & Development Reform

Bmore Blueprint:

Complete Recommendations for Permitting & Development Reform

Building upon the foundation established by the new Director of Permitting and Development Services position and Bmore FAST Advisory Group, this section presents a comprehensive set of reforms organized by the stakeholders they serve. This organization recognizes that Baltimore's development ecosystem includes diverse participants — from residents seeking to understand and shape neighborhood change, to experienced developers managing complex projects, to small businesses and emerging developers working to grow their capacity. The recommendations provide a detailed framework for implementing the Bmore FAST pillar through initiatives that support all these participants while maintaining robust oversight of development activities. This will be implemented by the new Director of Permitting and Development Services, who will provide centralized leadership while working closely with agencies across city government.

The recommendations are organized into four key areas:

1. Public Engagement & Access

These initiatives focus on making development processes more transparent and accessible to Baltimore residents and communities. By providing clear information and expanding opportunities for meaningful participation, these reforms help ensure development serves community needs.

2. Developer & Builder Support

These recommendations streamline processes for development professionals while maintaining necessary oversight. The reforms address key operational challenges identified through stakeholder feedback and performance analysis, creating more predictable and efficient pathways for project delivery.

3. Small Business & Emerging Developer Resources

These initiatives reduce barriers and provide targeted support for smaller-scale participants in Baltimore's development ecosystem. The reforms recognize that making processes work for small businesses and emerging developers is crucial for equitable economic growth.

4. City Operations & Capacity

These internal reforms strengthen Baltimore's institutional capability to support efficient development. By enhancing coordination and building staff capacity, these changes create the operational foundation for sustained improvement in development services.

Each recommendation includes specific implementation guidance while maintaining alignment with the Director of Permitting and Development Services' development coordination role. For quick

reference, **Appendix A** provides a comprehensive summary table of all initiatives, organized by theme and including proposed implementation timelines and responsible agencies.

■ PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & ACCESS

The success of Baltimore’s development reforms — depends on meaningful community engagement and transparent, accessible processes. Under the coordination of the Director of Permitting and Development Services, these initiatives will create multiple pathways for residents to engage with development processes while ensuring consistent coordination across agencies. The Director’s oversight will help ensure that public engagement efforts align with broader development goals while maintaining robust community input.

These reforms recognize that true accessibility requires multiple approaches: enhanced digital tools for those comfortable with technology, traditional customer service for those who prefer person-to-person interaction, expanded language access for Baltimore’s diverse communities, and educational programming to build deeper understanding of development processes. Together, these initiatives create multiple pathways for residents to engage with and shape development in their communities.

Planning Academy Expansion Assessment

Building on the demonstrated success of Baltimore’s Planning Academy program, this initiative proposes exploring opportunities to expand community education and engagement in development processes. The current Planning Academy has established an effective model for creating informed community leaders who can meaningfully participate in development decisions. As Baltimore embarks on its historic \$3 billion vacant property initiative, examining ways to scale and adapt this proven approach could help ensure robust community involvement in neighborhood transformation.



The assessment would evaluate potential opportunities to either expand the existing Planning Academy program or create a complementary initiative more specifically focused on development and vacant property rehabilitation. This exploration should consider how such programming could strengthen community understanding of development processes while creating pathways for residents to participate in the city’s vacant property strategy.

Any expansion should maintain the rigorous standards and community focus that have made the current Planning Academy successful, while identifying strategic opportunities to increase its reach and impact. The assessment should examine how expanded programming could support both current development reforms and the broader vacant property initiative.

Lead Agencies: DOP, DHCD

Public Land Use & Liquor License Information Portal

This comprehensive online resource will centralize information about land use and liquor license approvals, creating unprecedented transparency in these crucial regulatory processes. The portal will provide real-time access to application status, hearing schedules, and decision records. Beyond

simply building public trust, this centralized platform addresses a critical procedural challenge, ensuring effective community notification of development proposals. Currently, insufficient public notice can lead to postponed or appealed hearings, creating delays and uncertainty for all parties. By providing a single, reliable source for hearing information and project updates, the portal will both strengthen community engagement and reduce procedural delays due to notification issues. Community members will have a clear way to stay informed about projects affecting their neighborhoods, while developers benefit from more predictable hearing schedules and reduced risk of notification-related appeals.

Lead Agencies: Office of Digital Services, Liquor Board, BMZA, DOP (CHAP/UDAAP/Planning Commission)

Citizen’s Guide to Development and Zoning

This initiative proposes developing a comprehensive “Citizen’s Guide to Development and Zoning in Baltimore City” modeled after the successful approaches implemented in other jurisdictions. The proposed guide would break down complex zoning and development regulations into accessible language, creating a valuable resource for residents seeking to understand how these processes impact their neighborhoods.

Unlike technical manuals designed for professionals, this guide would specifically address the information needs of community members. Key components would include clear explanations of zoning classifications, development review processes, public meeting procedures, and the legal framework governing land use decisions. The guide would help residents understand when and how they can provide meaningful input on development projects, while also explaining the legal rights of property owners and developers and the parameters of administrative review.

Lead Agencies: DOP, DHCD, Law Department

Enhanced Permits Website

While initial improvements to Baltimore’s permits website were successfully implemented through the Permit-Stat process last year, a more comprehensive redevelopment is recommended once the city completes its broader website modernization initiative. The reimaged permits website should serve as a central hub for development services, offering intuitive navigation and comprehensive resources for all users.

The proposed enhanced digital presence would build upon existing functionality to include expanded features such as:

- Interactive permit application guides tailored to different project types
- Comprehensive FAQs addressing common scenarios and requirements
- Real-time permit status tracking capabilities
- Step-by-step submission checklists
- Integration with the new E-Permits platform

This enhanced digital infrastructure would help reduce confusion, minimize unnecessary phone calls and emails, and enable applicants to submit complete, accurate applications on their first attempt. By aligning the permits website redevelopment with the city’s broader digital transformation efforts, Baltimore can ensure consistent user experience while leveraging modern web technologies and design standards.

Lead Agency: Office of Digital Services

Dedicated Building Permits Call Center

Building on the successful implementation of a specialized call center for building permits, which dramatically improved service by raising answer rates from less than 10% to 98% within months of launch, this initiative proposes evaluating opportunities to expand this model to other development-related offices experiencing high call volumes.

The assessment would examine which additional offices in the development approval process receive significant numbers of non-technical inquiries that could be effectively handled by trained call center staff. This analysis would help identify where dedicated customer service resources could both improve public access and increase operational efficiency by allowing technical staff to focus on application processing.

Key elements of the proposed assessment include:

- Analysis of call volume and types across all development-related offices
- Identification of which inquiries could be handled by trained customer service staff versus requiring technical expertise
- Evaluation of staffing requirements and operational costs for potential expansion
- Assessment of technology needs and integration requirements
- Development of performance metrics based on the building permits pilot
- Examination of opportunities to create shared call center resources across multiple offices

By systematically evaluating where the call center model could provide the greatest benefit, Baltimore can make strategic decisions about expanding this successful customer service approach while ensuring efficient use of resources. The assessment would build upon lessons learned from the building permits pilot while accounting for the unique needs and constraints of different development-related offices.

Lead Agencies: DHCD, BCIT

Month	Answer Rate
November 2023	13.9%
December 2023	9.8%
January 2024	31.7%
February 2024	67.9%
March 2024	83.9%
April 2024	98.6%

In January 2024, 311 call center operators were detailed to assist answering phone calls to the Building Permits Office, which resulted in dramatically better answer rates.

*In April 2024, the Permit Call Center spent **197 hours** answering **2,771 calls**, averaging **four minutes** per call.*

Bilingual Access Initiative

This initiative proposes expanding language accessibility across Baltimore’s development services ecosystem. The program would begin with planned language access onboarding through the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) for key agencies already identified for 2025 implementation, including BDC, DHCD, and BMZA, before evaluating systematic expansion to other development-related agencies.

The proposed program would ensure all essential development and permitting documentation is available in Baltimore’s top five languages, while establishing clear protocols for language access in regulatory processes. The initiative would prioritize positions with frequent community interaction for bilingual staffing considerations and language training opportunities.

A dedicated multilingual community education and outreach program would focus on proper permitting practices, working directly with community organizations to ensure information reaches all of Baltimore’s diverse communities effectively. Additionally, all development-related websites and online resources, including the permits website, public land use portal, and training materials, would be designed for accessibility in multiple languages with Limited English Proficient (LEP) constituents in mind.

This comprehensive approach would improve service delivery to Baltimore’s diverse communities while reducing communication barriers in the development process. The phased implementation, building on existing language access planning efforts, would allow for strategic expansion while maintaining high quality standards.

Lead Agencies: DHR, All reviewing agencies, MIMA

Virtual Office Hours for Plan Review Staff

This initiative proposes evaluating the potential implementation of scheduled virtual consultation opportunities between applicants and plan review staff. The assessment would examine how structured online office hours could make expert guidance more accessible while improving the efficiency of both pre-submission guidance and post-submission issue resolution.

Currently, scheduling discussions with review staff can be challenging, often leading to unnecessary delays and multiple rounds of written correspondence where a single conversation might resolve issues more efficiently. The proposed program would assess how dedicated virtual consultation periods could expedite both initial submissions and revision processes.

The evaluation should examine several key considerations:

- Optimal scheduling structures that balance staff availability with applicant needs
- Technology requirements and platform options for virtual consultations
- Staffing implications and workload management approaches
- Potential criteria for prioritizing consultation requests
- Methods for documenting and tracking guidance provided
- Performance metrics to evaluate program effectiveness

This assessment would help determine whether virtual office hours could enhance customer service while making more efficient use of staff time through structured online engagement. The findings would inform decisions about implementation approach, resource requirements, and potential phasing of the program across different review departments.

Lead Agencies: OPI, DHCD

Training Resources Portal

Building upon existing training initiatives like DHCD’s “Permit Like a Pro” how-to guides, this proposal recommends developing a more comprehensive online training platform across all development-related agencies. While current resources provide valuable guidance for certain permit types, there is significant opportunity to expand educational content across the full spectrum of development approvals and processes.

The proposed enhancement would create on-demand access to educational videos and classes addressing common submission issues and review requirements across all development-related agencies. This expanded platform would provide step-by-step guides for typical applications, detailed explanations of technical standards, and examples of complete, successful submissions.

The platform would work with each agency to identify other common challenges and develop targeted educational content to address them. Special consideration should be given to creating resources that help applicants understand complex requirements involving multiple agencies, such as major development projects that require coordinated approvals. The platform should also integrate with other proposed digital initiatives to ensure consistent information delivery across all channels.

Lead Agencies: All reviewing agencies

Permit Review Time Transparency

Under Baltimore’s former ePermits system, meaningful analysis of processing times was severely constrained by data limitations. The system’s structure made it impossible to differentiate between permit types — for example, a simple residential deck permit was tracked identically to a complex commercial development, and use and occupancy permits for new construction were indistinguishable from those issued for ownership changes or rehabilitation projects. This lack of granular data has historically prevented the establishment of clear performance metrics and processing time expectations.

With the implementation of the new Accela platform, Baltimore now has an opportunity to develop more sophisticated tracking and reporting of permit processing times. This initiative proposes leveraging this enhanced data capability in two key ways:

- First, the City will publish the 80th percentile review times for various permit approvals and plan reviews, providing detailed breakdowns by project type and review stage. This transparency will help applicants better estimate timelines while identifying opportunities for process improvement.

- Second, for non-discretionary permits and licenses, the City should explore implementing prescriptive review timelines with automatic fee refunds for missed deadlines, following the successful model established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.¹ This approach recognizes that Baltimore’s economic vitality depends on efficient processing of permits and licenses. When businesses and residents invest time and resources in preparing complete applications, the City has a corresponding obligation to process them promptly.

The implementation of these recommendations would require careful consideration of appropriate timelines for different permit types, clear criteria for what constitutes a complete application, and mechanisms for tracking and processing potential refunds. The program could be piloted with specific permit types before considering broader implementation.

Lead Agencies: DHCD, OPI

■ **DEVELOPER & BUILDER SUPPORT**

The new Director of Permitting and Development Services, will streamline administrative processes while maintaining robust oversight of construction quality and community impacts. The Director’s dedicated focus on development processes positions this role to drive meaningful improvement while ensuring appropriate controls remain in place.

These recommendations address pain points identified through extensive stakeholder feedback, from initial permitting through project completion. They create clear pathways for project approval, establish predictable timelines, and enhance coordination between agencies. Special attention has been given to reforms that can accelerate housing production and vacant property rehabilitation while maintaining essential quality controls. By making Baltimore’s development processes more efficient, these initiatives help ensure that more resources go toward actual construction rather than administrative overhead.

Self-Certification and Third-Party Review Pilot

This pilot program will explore multiple pathways to accelerate plan reviews and inspections while maintaining robust safety oversight. The initiative includes three key components, professional self-certification, third-party plan review, and third-party inspections. Each component requires careful consideration given Baltimore’s unique building stock, particularly the interconnected nature of rowhome construction that can increase risk compared to detached housing typologies common in other cities.

The self-certification component will allow registered architects and engineers to certify compliance for certain small-scale projects, reducing review time and city inspection requirements. The third-party plan review option would enable qualified private sector professionals to conduct plan reviews, potentially reducing wait times during peak periods. Similarly, third-party inspection services could help ensure timely responses to construction schedules while maintaining quality control.

1. Editorial Board, [A Simple Idea for Speedier Government](#), WALL ST. J. (Mar. 18, 2024).

Key program elements include:

- Rigorous qualification requirements for participating professionals
- Clear scope definitions for eligible project types
- Regular audits of self-certified and third-party reviewed projects
- Enhanced documentation requirements to support quality control
- Performance monitoring and reporting systems
- Progressive discipline framework for non-compliance

The program will start with a carefully selected range of project types, with potential for expansion based on performance data and stakeholder feedback. This approach has proven successful in other major cities, demonstrating that alternative review and inspection pathways can safely accelerate development while allowing city staff to focus on more complex projects.

Lead Agencies: DHCD, BCFD, DPW

PermitStat Implementation

PermitStat represents an innovative approach to performance management in development services, now operating under the direction of the new Director of Permitting and Development Services. This program brings together relevant agencies to identify and address systemic bottlenecks. Launched during Mayor Scott's first term, the program has already yielded significant insights, particularly through collaborative work with DHCD. The Director's direct involvement will enhance the program's effectiveness by providing clear authority for implementing identified improvements and resolving cross-agency challenges. Regular PermitStat meetings create a structured forum for agencies to analyze performance data, share challenges, and implement process improvements, ensuring continuous optimization of development services.

Lead Agency: OPI, All Reviewing Agencies

Developer's Agreement Process Reform

This initiative launches a comprehensive review of Baltimore's Developer's Agreement process, which is currently required for any work performed in the public right-of-way. While these agreements serve an important oversight function, the current process contains numerous inefficiencies that create unnecessary delays and costs. The process relies heavily on manual tracking through spreadsheets rather than modern permit review software and culminates in a Board of Estimates approval requirement that can add significant time to project schedules.

Particularly challenging is the continued reliance on paper plans that must be submitted, reviewed, and physically transported between offices for signatures and approvals. This outdated workflow creates substantial delays, increases the risk of lost documents, and prevents stakeholders from tracking progress in real time. The reform will prioritize implementing a digital system similar to e-Plans that would allow for electronic submission, routing, review, and approval of all Developer's Agreement documents.

A comprehensive digital system would provide several key advantages:

- Eliminate the need to physically transport plans between offices
- Enable concurrent reviews by multiple agencies
- Create an automatic tracking system with notifications
- Reduce processing time through streamlined electronic approvals
- Provide transparency for applicants regarding review status
- Create a searchable digital archive of agreements and approvals

This reform will examine opportunities to streamline the entire process while maintaining appropriate oversight of work affecting public infrastructure.

Lead Agencies: DOT, DPW

Water Service Connection Requirements Reform

This initiative proposes examining two critical aspects of water service connections for residential sprinkler systems that may be creating unnecessary barriers to development.

1. First, the assessment would evaluate the current threshold that triggers Developer's Agreement requirements for water service connections. Under existing regulations, connections under 3 inches do not require a Developer's Agreement, creating an apparent inconsistency where a 2-inch line requires no agreement while a 4-inch line triggers the full process. For developers, this requirement can add significant costs — typically at least \$10,000 in design expenses — and extend project timelines by 6–9 months through the review process. The study would examine whether this threshold could be adjusted upward for smaller residential projects, such as developments of 10 units or less, while maintaining appropriate performance bonding and contractor qualification requirements.
2. Second, the assessment would review the fixed-fee structure for larger water meters required by sprinkler systems. Analysis suggests for example that properties requiring 4-inch water service for sprinkler systems currently face substantially higher fixed water charges compared to similar properties with smaller meters, even when actual water consumption is identical.² The evaluation would explore opportunities to better align fixed charges with actual service costs for residential sprinkler systems.

This comprehensive review would aim to identify potential modifications that could reduce development costs and timelines while maintaining necessary oversight of water infrastructure. Any recommendations would need to balance efficiency goals with ensuring appropriate system capacity and maintaining public safety standards.

Lead Agency: DPW

2. A developer consulted on this issue noted that two comparable 4-unit properties incur additional water bill costs of approximately \$1,000 per dwelling unit annually due solely to meter size requirements, despite no difference in actual water consumption.

Design Review Process Reform

This initiative recommends a comprehensive review of how the Urban Design and Architectural Advisory Panel (UDAAP) can best support Baltimore’s development goals while maintaining its crucial oversight function. Just as this report seeks to make Baltimore’s development processes more efficient and predictable, the city’s design review process should be evaluated to ensure its processes and requirements align with these broader objectives.

The reform includes two key components: process improvements and guidelines reform. The process review will establish clearer review criteria, implement more predictable timelines, and develop a framework that better balances design objectives with economic feasibility. Simultaneously, a thorough review and update of design guidelines will aim to create more specific, objective criteria that achieve essential urban design goals while providing clear direction to applicants.

Given that each design review cycle can cost developers tens of thousands of dollars in fees for architects, lawyers, consultants, and engineers, the process should be streamlined to minimize unnecessary iterations. While UDAAP panelists should maintain their independence to provide candid feedback, they must remain cognizant that they represent the City of Baltimore, focusing on constructive, professional dialogue that advances legitimate design objectives rather than seeking headlines or confrontation.

Lead Agency: DOP

Historic Preservation Review Reform

A separate but parallel reform effort will examine how the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) can better align its crucial preservation mission with the city’s development goals. This review takes on particular urgency given the pending legislation before the City Council to establish Conservation Districts, which would create an alternative designation with less restrictive requirements than full historic districts.³

If enacted, there should be an evaluation of whether certain existing CHAP districts might be more appropriately designated as Conservation Districts. This assessment should consider both the architectural significance of each district and the practical implications of preservation requirements. The review will also examine how to better balance preservation requirements with economic feasibility across all district types. This balanced approach recognizes that overly burdensome preservation requirements can have unintended consequences that ultimately undermine preservation goals. When compliance costs become prohibitive, property owners may resort to illegal demolition, or worse, properties may remain vacant because rehabilitation costs exceed market feasibility. These outcomes run counter to the fundamental aim of preserving Baltimore’s architectural heritage and neighborhood character.

The reform will focus on creating clearer standards and more predictable timelines while maintaining appropriate oversight of Baltimore’s historic resources. Success requires finding the right balance between protecting architectural heritage and ensuring the economic viability of preservation efforts.

Lead Agency: DOP (CHAP)

3. Council Bill No. 25-0003, “Historic Preservation – Conservation Districts – Establishment” (pending legislation).

Infrastructure Bond & Surety Release Reform

This initiative proposes examining opportunities to create a more standardized and transparent process for closing out development projects and releasing infrastructure bonds and sureties. Current procedures for releasing bonds that secure stormwater management systems, roads, sidewalks, and other public infrastructure often involve unpredictable timelines and unclear requirements, creating uncertainty for developers and inefficiencies for city staff.

The assessment would evaluate potential reforms to establish clear criteria for bond release, develop standard processing timelines, and implement a transparent tracking system. This evaluation would be particularly important for small and emerging developers, who may have limited bonding capacity tied up in completed projects while awaiting release approval.

The study should examine several key areas for potential improvement.

- First, it should review current release requirements to ensure they appropriately balance protecting public infrastructure with avoiding unnecessary holds on developer resources.
- Second, it should evaluate opportunities to create more predictable processing timelines that give developers clarity on when they can expect bonds to be released.
- Third, it should consider implementing a tracking system that would allow both city staff and developers to monitor the status of release requests.

This systematic review would aim to develop recommendations that could help ensure security requirements protect public infrastructure without creating unnecessary financial burdens or administrative delays. Any proposed reforms should maintain robust oversight while creating more efficient processes for both developers and city staff.

Lead Agencies: DPW, DOT

Utility Coordination Program

This recommendation proposes establishing formal coordination processes with all major utility providers during the predevelopment pipeline and Site Plan Review Committee phases (DPW, DOT, BGE, Vicinity). Delays caused by independent utilities typically impact otherwise completed projects — and for homebuyers it can be difficult to distinguish where the cause originates.

Current challenges extend beyond just scheduling delays. The fragmented nature of utility coordination creates particular inefficiencies. Developers report having to redesign utility plans multiple times as multiple utility and telecommunications providers often review plans sequentially rather than collaboratively. Each iteration requires new engineering work, impacting other facilities, and creates cascading delays. These challenges affect projects of all sizes — from major developments to scattered-site housing rehabilitation where upgraded services are needed for modern appliances and systems.

Further, the city's standard conduit requirements, developed through franchise agreements, can result in oversized infrastructure that may not match actual project needs. For example, the city standard conduit profiles provide different arrangements of manhole and duct sizes and counts,

which design is ultimately determined by utility requirements which are often oversized, even when actual load calculations might indicate a much smaller need.

The initiative proposes using the Mayor’s convening power to bring all major utilities into a more coordinated development process. Through structured coordination meetings validated by DOT’s conduit division, designers can develop appropriate improvements without running separate, iterative processes for each utility. This approach addresses the structural tendency of utilities to require over-engineered specifications, which creates unnecessary costs for developers because the utility isn’t the entity bearing the costs.

Key program elements include:

- Regular coordination meetings with all major utilities
- Review of standard conduit requirements to better match actual needs
- Streamlined process for load letter reviews and service design
- Coordinated scheduling of utility installations
- Clear protocols for developer agreements involving utility work
- Integration with DOT’s conduit management system

Lead Agencies: DOP, OPI, DOP, Utilities

Major Projects Coordination Committee Program

To better support complex development projects that have significant economic impact and require extensive agency coordination, this initiative proposes establishing a formalized Major Projects Coordination Committee, operating under the Director of Permitting and Development Services’ oversight. This initiative would establish a consistent framework for managing projects above certain thresholds, recognizing that large-scale developments face unique coordination challenges that can create costly delays when handled through standard processes.

Under this committee structure, qualifying projects would receive:

- Assignment of an empowered project coordinator
- Regular interagency coordination meetings with decision-makers present
- Integrated review timelines across all agencies
- Streamlined utility coordination through the Utility Coordination Program
- Enhanced tracking of review status and deadlines
- Clear escalation pathways for resolving conflicts

The program would establish clear qualification criteria based on factors such as:

- Project investment level
- Number of housing units or square footage
- Infrastructure improvement requirements
- Economic impact metrics
- Community benefit commitments

The Committee would help reduce engineering costs by eliminating the need for multiple design iterations as different agencies provide sequential feedback. It also creates accountability for review timelines while enabling more collaborative problem-solving between developers and city agencies.

Lead Agencies: MOID

Board of Estimates Approval Streamlining

This initiative proposes evaluating how development-related items move through the Board of Estimates approval process, with particular focus on identifying opportunities to streamline routine approvals that currently create unnecessary delays and administrative burden.

The assessment would examine several approval requirements that may no longer serve their intended oversight purpose. For example, Minor Privilege Approvals and Developer's Agreements must currently await formal Board consideration even when they meet all technical requirements and raise no significant policy concerns. This requirement adds processing time and demands considerable staff effort to prepare Board materials, potentially without providing meaningful public benefit or enhanced oversight.

The evaluation would systematically review which types of development-related approvals could be handled administratively while maintaining appropriate controls and transparency. This analysis should consider the original intent of Board approval requirements, actual oversight value provided by the current process, and potential alternative approval pathways that could maintain proper controls while reducing administrative burden.

For items that would continue to require Board consideration, the assessment should examine opportunities to make the submission and review process more efficient. The goal would be to reduce processing time while maintaining appropriate oversight of significant development matters.

Lead Agencies: Comptroller, DOT, DPW

Trade Licensure Reform Initiative

This initiative proposes a comprehensive review of building trades licensure requirements, with a particular focus on creating appropriately scaled pathways for residential rehabilitation work. Current licensing structures, while intended to ensure safety and quality, can create unnecessary barriers to expanding the workforce needed to rehabilitate Baltimore's vacant housing stock. For example, under existing Maryland regulations, only master electricians can pull electrical permits, requiring seven years of experience plus examination. Developers report this is a bottleneck in

the rehabilitation pipeline and the extensive experience requirement likely deters many qualified individuals, including motivated general contractors and developers, from pursuing licensure. The requirement appears particularly burdensome when compared to other professions.

The reform would examine opportunities to create residential-specific trade licenses with requirements better aligned to the scope and complexity of rowhouse rehabilitation work. This approach has been successfully implemented in several states, including Idaho, which recently joined other jurisdictions in creating a “residential electrician” tier.⁴ These programs demonstrate how licensure requirements can be appropriately scaled while preserving career advancement pathways, as experience gained under the residential license can count toward higher-level certifications.

The initiative will evaluate:

- Creation of residential-specific license tiers for various trades, following successful models from other states
- Evidence-based review of experience requirements to ensure they align with actual public safety needs
- Opportunities to expand supervised work arrangements
- Alignment of licensing requirements with documented safety outcomes
- Potential for reciprocal licensing with other jurisdictions

This reform recognizes that current requirements may be disproportionate to actual safety needs in residential settings. While maintaining rigorous safety standards is paramount, the current system may be unnecessarily restrictive, particularly for residential rehabilitation work. Creating more accessible pathways to licensure could help expand the qualified workforce needed to address Baltimore’s vacant housing challenges while maintaining appropriate oversight.

Implementation would require coordination with state licensing boards and will require state legislative action. However, the potential impact on Baltimore’s ability to rehabilitate vacant properties makes a worthy initiative for the City to take the lead on reforming.

Lead Agencies: Mayor’s Office, MOED

Tax Credit Implementation Reform

The Tax Credit Workgroup, composed of key stakeholders and city officials, is developing comprehensive recommendations to better align Baltimore’s tax credit programs with the city’s development goals. As part of this broader reform effort, a key priority is addressing the timing misalignment between tax credit applications and property reassessment schedules. Currently, projects can face unintended tax burdens during the sensitive period between construction completion and full occupancy. The workgroup will recommend statutory changes to ensure credits can be applied immediately following reassessment, providing more predictable financial planning for developers and reducing cash flow challenges during the crucial lease-up period.

4. Parrish Miller, *House Bill 337 – Electricians, Licensure*, IDAHO FREEDOM FOUND. (Mar. 20, 2023) <https://idahofreedom.org/house-bill-337-electricians-licensure/>.

These timing improvements represent one component of a larger strategy to optimize Baltimore’s tax credit programs for maximum community benefit while reducing administrative complexity.

Lead Agencies: Finance (Subject to City Council Approval)

■ **SMALL BUSINESS & EMERGING DEVELOPER RESOURCES**

The revitalization of Baltimore’s neighborhoods requires participation from developers of all sizes, not just large established firms. The Director of Permitting and Development Services portfolio creates new opportunities to coordinate support for smaller businesses and emerging developers who often face disproportionate challenges in navigating development processes. By leveraging existing relationships with both city agencies and external partners, the Director can help create targeted support systems and simplified pathways that make development more accessible to smaller-scale participants.

These recommendations recognize that many of Baltimore’s vacant properties are best suited for rehabilitation by small, often neighborhood-based developers. By reducing administrative barriers and providing technical assistance, these reforms help expand and diversify Baltimore’s development community while ensuring projects maintain high quality standards. Special attention has been given to supporting minority and women-owned businesses seeking to participate in neighborhood revitalization.

Small and MWBE Developer Support Programs

Building on existing partnerships with third-party organizations providing training to emerging developers like O’Hara Development Partners’ DevelopHER program, Harbor Bank’s Emerging Developers program, and Charm City Buyers’ NEXTGen Accelerator, this initiative enhances technical assistance and capacity-building programs for small developers and minority and women-owned business enterprises (MWBEs) in development. The program recognizes that emerging developers often face unique challenges, from accessing capital to navigating complex regulatory requirements. Current support activities include development process training, project feasibility analysis assistance, guidance on accessing financing and incentive programs, connection to professional service providers, and support with permit applications and project management.

To strengthen the practical impact of these programs, DHCD should intentionally align its vacant property disposition strategy with developer training initiatives. Through this approach, DHCD will provide cohorts of emerging developers with opportunities to rehabilitate city-owned vacant properties, supporting their efforts with small subsidies when appropriate. This hands-on experience allows new developers to build track records and operational capacity while helping reduce Baltimore’s vacant building inventory. The program creates a pathway for participants to progress from classroom training to actual development projects, building the expanded pool of capable developers needed to address Baltimore’s housing challenges.

Lead Agencies: DHCD, SMBAD

Pre-approved Plans and Documents

This innovative program will provide pre-approved examples of plans and documents for common building typologies, such as standard Baltimore rowhouse renovations. Small developers often pay disproportionately higher per-unit costs for design services compared to larger developers who can spread architectural costs across more units. By making pre-approved plans available for typical projects, the city can help reduce pre-development costs while ensuring compliance with building codes and zoning requirements. These resources will be particularly valuable for:

- Small-scale residential renovations
- Standard rowhouse configurations
- Typical storefront improvements
- Common building system upgrades

The initiative includes developing both complete sets of standard plans and modular components that can be adapted for specific project needs. This approach helps level the playing field for smaller developers while potentially accelerating the review process for standard project types.

These initiatives work together to create a more inclusive development ecosystem that supports business growth and expanded opportunities across all Baltimore neighborhoods. By reducing barriers for small businesses and emerging developers, these programs help ensure that streamlined development processes benefit the entire community.

Lead Agency: DHCD

Streamlined Minor Variance Process

While the Transform Baltimore Zoning Code enacted in 2016 authorized an administrative approval pathway for minor variances, this process has not yet been implemented. Currently, all variance requests must go through the full Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals process, regardless of scale or complexity, creating unnecessary delays for both applicants and the Board.

The Zoning Administrator should move forward with implementing this already-authorized process. The Zoning Code has established clear criteria for which variance requests qualify for administrative review. The process, as designed, includes safeguards to ensure appropriate oversight. Properties must be posted with notice of the variance request, and administrative approval is only possible if no opposition is submitted during the notice period. If any opposition is received, the variance request would proceed to a full public hearing like other variance requests.

This approach mirrors Baltimore County's administrative variance process for owner-occupied properties, which has operated without controversy for decades. Implementation in Baltimore City would reduce processing times for straightforward requests while allowing the BMZA to focus its resources on more complex cases requiring full Board consideration.

All minor variance requests should be posted on the new public land use approval website to ensure transparency and accessibility of information. This digital notification would complement the physical posting requirements and enhance public awareness of proposed variances.

The efficiency gains from implementation would benefit both applicants seeking minor variances

and those requiring full Board review by reducing overall docket volume and wait times. The administrative pathway would maintain robust community input opportunities while eliminating unnecessary hearings for uncontested matters that meet established criteria.

Lead Agencies: DOP, BMZA

Minor Privilege Reform

This initiative proposes examining Baltimore’s unique “minor privilege” process, which governs approvals for various encroachments into the public right-of-way such as stairs, cornices, awnings, and signs that project over sidewalks or other public spaces. Currently, the City Charter requires Board of Estimates approval for these privileges, even for routine items like storefront signs or basement access stairs that are essential for business operations.

The assessment would evaluate opportunities to streamline this process through several key reforms.

- First, it would examine the potential for developing an online application system to improve efficiency.
- Second, it would explore options for delegated approval authority for routine items that meet established criteria. Implementation of these changes would require both City Council action and ultimately voter approval of a Charter amendment.

A comprehensive review of privilege categories and fee structures would be particularly important. Current fee structures contain apparent inconsistencies that may work against city goals. For example, the fee structure charges higher rates for outdoor dining installations that help activate streets and create vibrant pedestrian environments, while charging lower rates for valet parking zones that dedicate public space to vehicle storage. The assessment would aim to identify and correct such misalignments, ensuring fee structures incentivize desired outcomes like pedestrian activity and street-level vibrancy rather than inadvertently discouraging them.

The evaluation would also examine arbitrary distinctions in current categories and fees that may no longer serve their original purpose. The goal would be to develop a reformed system that maintains appropriate oversight and compensation for use of public space while better supporting Baltimore’s economic development and placemaking objectives.

These proposed reforms would aim to reduce processing times and administrative burden while ensuring appropriate oversight and fee collection for use of public space. Any recommendations would need to balance efficiency goals with maintaining proper management of public rights-of-way.

Lead Agencies: DOT, DOP, Comptroller (Subject to City Council & Approval of Charter Amendment)

Business License Coordination

This initiative will explore opportunities to better align state and city business licensing processes, reducing redundancy and confusion for business owners. Currently, entrepreneurs must navigate separate state and city processes, often providing similar information multiple times. The program will examine potential areas for process coordination, data sharing, and aligned renewal schedules. While maintaining necessary oversight from both jurisdictions, these improvements will help reduce administrative burden on businesses starting or expanding in Baltimore.

Lead Agencies: BDC, Finance

License Requirement Review

This systematic evaluation will identify opportunities to eliminate or simplify city licenses that lack clear connections to public health or safety in today's context. Some of Baltimore's licensing requirements date back to the 1800s, and while they likely served important regulatory purposes in their time, administrative inertia has kept some requirements in place long past their relevance to modern commerce and public safety.

The review will create a comprehensive inventory of current requirements, assess their necessity and effectiveness, and recommend specific changes to reduce administrative burden on businesses. The continued enforcement of outdated regulations creates real costs for businesses and city staff. The initiative includes developing improved online systems for remaining licenses, making the application and renewal process more efficient for businesses that still require oversight.

Lead Agencies: Department of Finance, Baltimore Development Corporation, Comptroller's Office (Subject to City Council Approval)

Small Business Permitting and Licensing Website

While Baltimore's SourceLink [website](#) provides valuable information for small businesses, this initiative proposes refreshing and expanding the platform to create a more comprehensive resource for navigating city licensing, permitting, and zoning requirements. The enhanced site would build upon the existing foundation while addressing current gaps in information about development-related approvals commonly needed by small businesses.

The proposed enhancement would expand the current content to include detailed guidance on the full range of approvals typically required when starting or expanding a business in Baltimore. This would encompass not only traditional business licensing information but also clear explanations of common permitting and zoning requirements that businesses frequently encounter. For instance, a restaurant owner would find guidance on not only food service licensing, but also use and occupancy permits, minor privilege requirements for outdoor seating, and relevant zoning considerations.

The refreshed platform would provide step-by-step guidance tailored to different business types, interactive checklists for common scenarios, and clear explanations of approval processes. This comprehensive approach would help reduce startup delays and costs by enabling business owners to better understand and prepare for all necessary regulatory requirements from the outset of their projects.

Currently underway, this initiative addresses a common challenge where small business owners, particularly first-time entrepreneurs, struggle to understand the full scope of permits and approvals needed for their operations. By making this information more accessible and creating clearer pathways through regulatory processes, the enhanced website would help support small business growth across Baltimore.

Lead Agencies: SMBAD, BDC

■ **CITY OPERATIONS & CAPACITY**

The successful implementation of Baltimore’s development reforms — and the broader success of the \$3 billion vacant property initiative — requires building robust institutional capacity within city government. The creation of a Director of Permitting and Development Services provides an immediate foundation for strengthening internal operations while longer-term capacity improvements are implemented.

These recommendations focus on the fundamental organizational improvements needed to support more efficient development processes. They address key operational challenges like cross-agency coordination, staff capacity, and performance management. Rather than creating new bureaucratic layers, these reforms optimize existing resources and establish clear accountability for development operations. By strengthening Baltimore’s institutional capacity to support development, these initiatives create the foundation for sustained improvement in service delivery.

Office of Zoning Administrator Reorganization

This strategic reorganization will embed the Office of the Zoning Administrator within the Department of Planning, creating stronger alignment between zoning administration and planning priorities. The current separation of these functions can lead to disconnects between long-term planning goals and day-to-day zoning decisions. By integrating these operations, the city can improve response times, optimize staff resources, and ensure more consistent application of zoning regulations. This reorganization, planned for implementation through the FY26 operating budget, will enhance coordination while maintaining the Zoning Administrator’s independent authority to interpret and apply the zoning code.

Lead Agency: DOP

Comprehensive Staffing and Organizational Assessment

This ongoing evaluation will be directed by the Director of Permitting and Development Services as part of their core responsibilities. The assessment examines workload data, processing times, and staff capacity to identify areas where additional personnel or reorganization could eliminate bottlenecks and improve service delivery. Having this assessment led by the Director is particularly crucial, as individual agencies often face competing priorities for limited resources. The Director’s role will be to ensure that development-related staffing needs receive appropriate attention and advocacy during budget discussions.

Throughout all phases, special attention will be given to:

- Plan review positions requiring specialized technical expertise
- Inspection staff needed to provide timely response to construction schedules
- Customer service positions supporting new technology initiatives
- Cross-training opportunities to increase staff flexibility
- Organizational structures that support efficient coordination
- Resource requirements for various consolidation options

This phased assessment approach supports both immediate process improvements and long-term organizational development to sustain Baltimore's reformed development services.

Lead Agencies: OPI, Mayor's Office, All Reviewing Agencies

Building Permit Requirements Update

This ongoing program will systematically review and clarify the full scope of permit requirements to help property owners, contractors, and developers better understand when permits and professional design services are required. The initiative recognizes that unclear requirements can lead to both unnecessary applications for exempt work and failure to obtain required permits for regulated activities.

The program will create comprehensive, user-friendly online guides covering three key areas:

- First, the guides will clearly identify which types of work require building permits. Current requirements can be difficult to parse, particularly for property owners undertaking smaller projects. By providing detailed descriptions of regulated work with specific examples, the guides will help ensure appropriate over-sight of construction activities.
- Second, the guides will explicitly list common work types that do not require permits. This clarity helps reduce unnecessary applications while giving property owners confidence to proceed with minor repairs and maintenance. For example, while structural modifications typically require permits, many property owners are uncertain whether permits are needed for basic repairs like replacing kitchen cabinets or repairing existing fences. Clear exemption guidance helps both applicants and staff use their time more efficiently.
- Third, the guides will specify which types of permits require sealed drawings from licensed design professionals. This information is particularly important for smaller contractors and developers who need to budget appropriately for professional services. Understanding these requirements early in project planning helps avoid delays when permit applications are rejected for lacking required professional certifications.

The initiative includes developing interactive online tools to help users navigate these requirements based on project type and scope. Regular updates will ensure the guidance remains current as building codes and city requirements evolve.

Lead Agencies: DHCD, OPI

Lien Release Process Reform

This initiative proposes examining Baltimore’s approach to managing liens on properties acquired through foreclosure or receivership. Under current practices, when the City acquires title to a property, liens remain on record despite being legally extinguished, and properties continue accumulating new liens during City ownership. This creates significant delays in property disposition, as the process of clearing these liens typically only begins when a potential buyer emerges. Initial analysis suggests lien certificates can face delays of up to three weeks, and obtaining required signatures for abatement often becomes cumbersome.

The assessment would evaluate implementing a proactive approach where properties are cleared of liens as soon as the City acquires title, rather than waiting for a potential sale. The study would also examine systems to prevent the accumulation of additional, legally meaningless liens during City ownership. These potential reforms would need to be supported by improved tracking and notification systems.

The evaluation should consider how reformed processes could accelerate property conveyance for redevelopment while reducing administrative burden on City staff. Building on work already underway through the Lien Abatement Working Group, the assessment would examine opportunities to improve both City-owned property processes and the City’s broader policy on lien abatement for private sales. This comprehensive review recognizes that efficient lien resolution processes are crucial for both City-owned and privately held properties.

The study should specifically evaluate current bottlenecks, staffing needs, technology requirements, and potential process improvements that could streamline lien resolution while maintaining appropriate controls and documentation.

Lead Agencies: Mayor’s Office, Finance, DHCD, Comptroller’s Office

Unpermitted Work Enforcement

This initiative proposes developing an enhanced civil and criminal enforcement strategy to address property flippers who conduct unpermitted renovations and fraudulently sell to unwitting buyers. This targeted enforcement assessment would complement efforts to streamline permitting by examining how to better address those who deliberately circumvent the process.

The evaluation would examine several key components of a potential enforcement program:

- The assessment would explore developing proactive investigation strategies that help identify unpermitted work before properties are sold to unsuspecting buyers. This could include evaluating data-driven approaches to identify patterns of suspicious activity and establishing clear protocols for responding to community complaints about potentially unpermitted work.
- The study would evaluate resource requirements for dedicated legal support, examining both civil and criminal enforcement pathways. This assessment would consider staffing needs, training requirements, and potential coordination mechanisms between city agencies and law enforcement.

- The evaluation would examine opportunities to enhance coordination between city and state enforcement agencies, recognizing that effective enforcement often requires multi-jurisdictional cooperation.
- The assessment would also consider developing comprehensive public education strategies about proper permits and buyer protection. This educational component would aim to help potential buyers understand red flags to watch for and steps they can take to protect themselves from fraudulent sales.

By strengthening enforcement against bad actors, this proposed program would help protect consumers while supporting developers who follow proper procedures. The assessment would aim to identify the most effective combination of proactive investigation, enforcement action, and public education to address this ongoing challenge.

Lead Agencies: Law Department, DHCD

Real Estate Document Processing Assessment

This initiative proposes examining opportunities to improve Baltimore’s processing of deeds and other real estate documents, addressing current inefficiencies that can delay transactions and increase costs. The assessment takes on particular urgency given the anticipated increase in property transfers associated with the City’s vacant property rehabilitation strategy.

Current challenges in document processing stem from several factors. The City’s internal technology limitations continue to slow the issuance of lien certificates, a problem that has persisted since pandemic-related disruptions. These delays can impact expiring real estate contracts and interest rate locks, creating additional costs and uncertainty for buyers and sellers. Additionally, title companies report limited opportunities for hand delivery of documents, while delays from rejected submissions can postpone closings and generate unnecessary mailing expenses when issues could have been resolved more efficiently through direct communication.

The assessment would evaluate several potential improvements:

- First, it would examine technological solutions to accelerate lien certificate processing to help reduce processing times while maintaining accuracy and proper controls.
- Second, the evaluation would consider establishing enhanced coordination protocols with the Clerk of Court’s office, which handles document recording in Land Records. This becomes particularly critical as Baltimore’s vacant property rehabilitation program accelerates — delays in recording rehabilitated property deeds could prevent subsequent sales by making it impossible for buyers to obtain clear title.
- Third, the assessment would examine opportunities to create more efficient document review processes, potentially including pre-submission guidance to reduce rejection rates and establishing clearer channels for resolving issues quickly when problems are identified.

The study would aim to develop recommendations that could help prevent deed recordation processes from becoming a bottleneck in Baltimore’s broader development initiatives while maintaining necessary oversight of real estate transactions.

Lead Agencies: Finance, Law Department, Clerk of Court

Appendix A:

Summary Table of Initiatives

No.	Theme	Description	Timeline	Lead Agency
1	Public Engagement & Access	Planning Academy expansion - Building on successful community education program	Mid-term	DOP
2	Public Engagement & Access	Public Land Use & Liquor License Information Portal - Centralized online resource for tracking applications and hearings	Short-term	Office of Digital Services, BLLC, BMZA, DOP
3	Public Engagement & Access	Citizen's Guide to Development and Zoning - Comprehensive resource explaining zoning regulations and development processes in accessible language	Mid-term	DOP, DHCD, Law Department
4	Public Engagement & Access	Enhanced Permits Website with improved navigation and resources	Short-term	Office of Digital Services
5	Public Engagement & Access	Dedicated Building Permits Call Center expansion	Short-term	DHCD, BCIT
6	Public Engagement & Access	Bilingual Access Initiative - Expanding language accessibility across services	Mid-term	DHR, All reviewing agencies, MIMA
7	Public Engagement & Access	Virtual Office Hours for Plan Review Staff	Short-term	OPI, DHCD
8	Public Engagement & Access	Training Resources Portal - Comprehensive online training platform	Mid-term	All reviewing agencies
9	Public Engagement & Access	Permit Review Time Transparency Initiative	Short-term	DHCD, OPI

10	Developer & Builder Support	Self-Certification and Third-Party Review Pilot Program	Mid-term	DHCD, BCFD, DPW
11	Developer & Builder Support	PermitStat Implementation for performance management	Short-term	OPI
12	Developer & Builder Support	Developer's Agreement Process Reform	Mid-term	DOT, DPW
13	Developer & Builder Support	Water Service Connection Requirements Reform	Mid-term	DPW
14	Developer & Builder Support	Design Review Process Reform - UDAAP modernization	Long-term	DOP
15	Developer & Builder Support	Historic Preservation Review Reform	Long-term	CHAP
16	Developer & Builder Support	Infrastructure Bond & Surety Release Reform	Mid-term	DPW, DOT, Finance
17	Developer & Builder Support	Utility Coordination Program	Mid-term	DOP, OPI, Utilities
18	Developer & Builder Support	Major Projects Coordination Committee Program	Mid-term	MOID
19	Developer & Builder Support	Board of Estimates Approval Streamlining	Long-term	Comptroller, DOT, DPW
20	Developer & Builder Support	Trade Licensure Reform Initiative	Long-term	Mayor's Office, MOED
21	Developer & Builder Support	Tax Credit Implementation Reform	Mid-term	Finance
22	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Small and MWBE Developer Support Programs enhancement	Short-term	DHCD, SMBAD
23	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Pre-approved Plans and Documents for common building types	Mid-term	DHCD
24	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Streamlined Minor Variance Process	Mid-term	DOP, BMZA
25	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Minor Privilege Reform	Long-term	DOT, Comptroller
26	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Business License Coordination with State	Mid-term	Clerk of the Court, BDC, State Comptroller, Finance

27	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	License Requirement Review and Modernization	Mid-term	Finance, BDC, Comptroller's Office
28	Small Business & Emerging Developer Support	Small Business Licensing Website Development	Short-term	SMBAD, BDC
29	City Operations & Capacity	Office of Zoning Administrator Reorganization	Short-term	DOP
30	City Operations & Capacity	Comprehensive Staffing Assessment	Short-term	Director of Permitting and Development Services, OPI
33	City Operations & Capacity	Building Permit Requirements Update	Mid-term	DHCD, OPI
32	City Operations & Capacity	Lien Release Process Reform	Mid-term	Mayor's Office, Finance, DHCD, Comptroller's Office
33	City Operations & Capacity	Unpermitted Work Enforcement Enhancement	Mid-term	Law Department, SAO
34	City Operations & Capacity	Real Estate Document Processing Assessment	Mid-term	Finance, Law Department, Clerk of Court



City of Baltimore

BALTIMORECITY.GOV