

Chicago Department of Buildings

2015 Budget Statement to the City Council
Committee on the Budget and Government Operations

October 27, 2014

Felicia Davis, Commissioner

Good morning Chairman Austin and Aldermen. I am very happy to be here today to discuss the 2015 budget request for the Department of Buildings (DOB). It has been nearly one year since I was confirmed as Commissioner, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve Mayor Emanuel and the members of the City Council as we work in partnership to support Chicagoans' safety and quality of life through the enforcement of the Chicago Building Code. This year was spent holistically reviewing the Department's operations and taking steps to streamline our processes, improve our services and reduce the time it takes to obtain a building permit. Highlights for 2014 include upgrades and maintenance to the electronic plan review system (E-Plan), enhanced customer service throughout Department functions, along with a new communication strategy to the design professional community, including increased outreach to industry partners and the public at large.

In addition, we have continued our focused coordination with the Police Department to keep our streets safe by securing or, when necessary, demolishing vacant buildings that have been identified as havens for gangs and criminal activity.

We are pleased to report that through September 2014, DOB revenues were up nearly \$225,000 over last year.

Let me share with you more details about these and some of our other key accomplishments from 2014.

Permitting

DOB has issued a total of 33,791 permits as of October 6, 2014, including Standard Plan Review, Developer Services and Easy Permit Process. This represents an increase of 2,203 permits compared to the same period in 2013, or a citywide increase of 7 percent, and the highest number of permits issued in five years.

Additionally, DOB has issued 6,837 permits to date in 2014 through the Standard Plan Review and Developer Services process in Chicago neighborhoods (excluding the Central Business District), an increase of 11 percent compared to same permits issued as of year-end 2013.

Enhancing Electronic Plan Review

In July 2012, DOB fully implemented E-Plan, which facilitates multiple discipline review and tracking of projects through every step of the process. This system allows design professionals to submit plans electronically from the convenience of their offices, allows multiple DOB plan reviewers to examine and approve plans simultaneously, and allows design professionals to receive corrections and approvals in real time. To ensure the process worked for all involved, we implemented E-Plan with participation and cooperation of users and members of the design community. I want to acknowledge the hard work of DPD/Zoning and DoIT staff on this effort.

Chicago continues to be on the forefront of this plan review technology as more and more governments are going paperless. Our E-Plan system is considered a best practice model in North America and abroad. In fact, DOB was asked to provide E-Plan demonstrations for several municipal and state officials this year, ranging from Atlanta, Boston, and DC to a delegation from Japan.

DOB metrics indicate that economic development is on the upswing throughout Chicago. To date in 2014, DOB has issued more than 7,790 permits through the E-Plan system, approximately 1,000 more permits than we reported at budget time last year; and we are also seeing an increase in the number of building permit applications –this is good news on the development side. So, it is important to note that new efficiencies have simultaneously led to an increase in permits issued and a decrease in the overall time to permit.

Highlights of efficiencies implemented in 2014 include:

- Overall, since E-Plan implementation, the time to permit has been reduced by 21 percent from 76 days to 60 days (as of September 30, 2014). In the two years the system has been in use, E-Plan has saved thousands of trees, hundreds of thousands of dollars in printing and transportation costs, and most importantly, reduced the time to issue permits.
- DOB provided design professional training for better project description on permit plans, saving significant hours of permit review time tracking down the nature of the project. Now all building permit applications must include a comprehensive project description to include the actual use and the specific location within a larger, multi-unit building.
- An analysis revealed thousands of projects lingering in the system in an inactive state. These inactive projects not only decreased the Department's efficiency, but increased overall time to permit active projects and decreased the Department's permitting revenue, as the Department was not paid for services rendered. DOB now voids projects with no documented activity for more the 120 days and places these in an archive status. As a result, 3,379 abandoned projects were eliminated and 143 extension requests related to these projects were requested this year.

Enhancing Customer Service

DOB is, in many ways, on the front line of economic development in the City of Chicago and it is essential to have a strong customer service program in place. As such, in 2014, DOB identified and implemented the following customer service enhancements:

- A new welcome desk for handling most of DOB’s customer concerns and questions.
- Code Clarification Triage to accommodate the requests for “in-person” meetings to clarify code questions.
- Additional staff for DOB’s Neighborhood Residential Permit Centers trained and dedicated to meeting homeowners’ needs for building permits. DOB also added additional computers and technology to support these community centers.

Communication Strategy

Building upon our regular communication with Aldermanic offices, in 2014, DOB implemented a new and expanded communication strategy featuring regular communication to the design professional community, industry partners and the public at large, including:

- Regular e-mail correspondence to the design professional community notifying them of important process updates.
- Active social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook highlighting important DOB events and public safety information.
- Continued dialogue with industry partners to learn what their experiences have been, listen to their ideas and collaboratively explore opportunities to move the department forward, identify policy initiatives and evaluate potential code updates.
- Regular internal communication to DOB employees highlighting Department events, new processes and procedures, and employee highlights.

DOB also continues its ongoing communication to City Council members including daily reports on permit applications and monthly reports on all buildings referred to DOAH and Circuit Court. To further enhance communication, an Aldermanic Staff Information Workshop is planned for later this year so that you and your staff are armed with the latest tools to serve your constituents. If I may, I want to acknowledge Ms. Earnestine Black who liaises with your staff.

Enforcement of Vacant Properties

Demolitions

DOB works closely with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) to identify, secure and in some cases demolish vacant buildings that can serve as a hub for criminal and gang activity. That successful working partnership with CPD continues, and to date in 2014, DOB has demolished 228 buildings to remove these hubs of violence from our communities. Additionally, DOB has boarded up and secured 1,917 properties to date in 2014.

In addition to working with CPD, DOB also received DOB 6,426 vacant building related calls to 311 to date in 2014. As of October 1, 2014, the DOB Demolition unit inspections have led to

1,587 cases on the demolition call in Cook County Circuit Court. To date this year, 4,206 vacant buildings have been registered as required under the vacant building ordinance.

Strategic Task Force (STF)

DOB's Strategic Task Force (STF) works closely with CPD and the Department of Law to keep neighborhoods and school passages safe by holding building owners responsible for activities inside their building, encouraging landlords to properly screen all new tenants and taking action against those that are destroying communities. This includes the enforcement of the Drug and Gang House Ordinance and the Responsible Establishment Safe Neighborhood Initiative (RESN), which targets troubled businesses.

To date in 2014, STF conducted approximately 2,356 inspections of buildings referred to DOB by CPD, including 130 inspections of troubled business, of which 61 businesses were determined to have dangerous and hazardous conditions and were closed down. Of these, 39 businesses are still closed. STF will continue to actively partner with CPD in 2015.

Inspection Efficiencies

DOB performs a wide variety of inspections each year, including annual technical inspections for buildings, signs, elevators and other devices; permit inspections; restaurant and other small business inspections; carnival rides and stages to ensure life safety during summer events; and thousands of inspections in follow-up to complaints coming into the 311 CSR system with regard to local homes or businesses that may not be in compliance with the Municipal Code.

Our inspectors completed an estimated 198,623 inspections as of September 30, 2014, which include an estimated 40,033 complaints received via 311.

DOB senior management also works closely with OEMC, Police and Fire to respond to safety emergencies. To date in 2014, DOB has responded to nearly 20 emergency incidents including inspecting buildings post-fire, failure of water tanks and other incidents related to building structures.

DOB continues to examine ways to streamline inspection operations while continuing to assure public safety and enforce the City's Code. In partnership with Mayor Emanuel and the City Council, DOB enhanced its enforcement efforts through ordinance updates described below, and we continue to look for new ways to enhance life safety such as the recent introduction of the Smoke Detector and Carbon Monoxide detector ordinance.

Signage/Billboards

On July 24, 2013, the City Council enacted a temporary moratorium on all dynamic image display signs of 100 square feet or less in area. We used the time, both in an interdepartmental working group and in meetings with Aldermen who expressed interest in working on legislation to address sign proliferation, to research and address changes in sign technology, including meeting with industry experts and examining best practices from other larger cities throughout the country.

On April 30, 2014, City Council approved a Sign Ordinance amendment that imposed new restrictions on maximum luminance, pushes them away from our residences, and dramatically limits them in size. In drafting the ordinance, we sought to minimize the effect these signs have on our residential quality of life, while also acknowledging that digital advertising is here to stay in the foreseeable future and is a commercial necessity for our City's businesses.

Electrical inspectors inspect the approximately 37,000 permitted signs every other year, with approximately 18,500 signs inspected annually. As of September 30, 2014, DOB inspected 16,461 signs and issued 427 sign violations. These violations resulted in more than \$90,000 in fines.

If I may, I want to acknowledge my colleagues at DPD/Zoning, BACP and Law on the coordinated efforts on signs.

Water Tanks

One of my first initiatives as Commissioner was to review the recent incidents where century-old rooftop water tanks experienced structural failure and required emergency action from the Department and other city emergency response agencies. The increase in extreme weather incidents combined with the aging of the tanks and supporting structures warranted the evaluation of the time span and degree of the inspections.

The new ordinance provisions approved in July 2014 are designed to properly evaluate and monitor the structural integrity of the rooftop water tanks and associated supporting structures.

I want to acknowledge the members of the City Council who diligently worked to introduce and approve this important legislation and the staff at the Department of Law who assisted on our behalf.

Individual Programs

There are three other important programs I would like to mention.

Life Safety Evaluations

One of the most important goals for DOB in 2014 is the deadline for compliance with the City's life-safety ordinance.

By January, all construction associated with the compliance of the individualized Life Safety Evaluation report must be completed and verified through inspection by DOB and CFD.

Since I became Commissioner in January 2014, DOB has been working tirelessly with building owners, property managers, condo and co-op boards, and other building representatives to gain full compliance. There are a total of 729 buildings that require LSE reports.

For many years, the Department has been working to get buildings to submit a Life Safety Evaluation report approved by both the DOB and CFD. Today we report significant progress with 677 accepted reports. This year has been crucial for buildings to complete the construction and upgrades in the individual buildings and pass the required inspection by the January 1, 2015 deadline.

The City has given these buildings much time and extensions – nine years to be exact. As such, the City is taking legal action on 43 properties that failed to submit an approved LSE report. The remaining outstanding reports are currently under review.

The LSE buildings also require an inspection by the end of 2014. To date, we have completed 303 inspections and 163 buildings have passed. 298 additional inspections are scheduled to date and the Department of Buildings continues to schedule new inspections every day. I have rallied the appropriate internal resources at the Department of Buildings to complete these inspections prior to the end of the year. Every building will be inspected by January 1, 2015.

Annual Inspection Certification (AIC) Program for Elevators and Other Devices

The Annual Inspection Certification (AIC) program for elevators was established in 2009 in cooperation with building owners. The program requires that buildings in Chicago's Central Business District hire a qualified third-party inspector to perform the annual inspection of elevator systems and then report the results electronically to DOB in lieu of an annual inspection conducted by a DOB elevator inspector.

As of October 9, 2014, 1,291 buildings in the CBD or 98 percent of the buildings eligible for the program in the CBD had 8,639 devices in the program. Outside of the CBD, 237 buildings had 1,258 devices in the program.

In 2014, DOB continued to focus on enhancing the AIC user website and pursuing enforcement action against buildings in the CBD that have not yet participated in the program.

The program is currently being expanded beyond the CBD to include large institutions such as universities, hospitals and sports arenas; and we will be welcoming new construction buildings into AIC later this year.

Green Permit Program

The City encourages building design, construction and renovation in a manner that provides healthier environments, reduces operating costs and conserves energy. Created in 2004, the Green Permit Program offers financial incentives and an expedited permit process for those that include sustainable design features in their project. In 2014, we will issue more than 53 green permits.

Other Initiatives

In addition to the above, we have worked closely with the City Council, other departments and the community on several key ordinances and programs, including the Keep Chicago Renting Ordinance, which protects tenants in foreclosed rental properties, and the Bed Bug Abatement

Ordinance which provides education to both landlords and tenants along with a coordinated departmental approach.

Moving Forward

Chairman Austin and members of the City Council, during 2014, DOB has taken many steps to make our department more efficient and more transparent. In the next year, we plan to continue our efforts to complete more inspections and provide better services to residents. We look forward to our continued collaborative partnerships with Aldermen, residents, businesses, the construction industry and our sister agencies to ensure that Chicago buildings remain safe.

Department of Buildings

2015 Budget Hearing

MBE/WBE Contracting Data

Period: 1/1/2014 – 9/30/2014

Total Purchases: \$12,005,514.25

<u>MBE/WBE Spend</u>	
WBE:	\$506,700 (4.22%)
Asian MBE:	\$440,298.78 (3.66%)
African-American MBE:	\$2,561,005.66 (21.33%)
Hispanic MBE:	\$0 (xx%)
Total Purchases:	\$3,508,004.44 (29.22%)

Staffing Data

Department Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	7	3	10	4%
Black	45	28	73	27%
Hispanic	38	11	49	18%
Native American	2	0	2	1%
White	122	11	133	50%
Total	214	53	267	100%
	80%	20%	100%	

New Hires Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	0	0	0	
Black	2	2	4	31%
Hispanic	2	0	2	15%
White	7	0	7	54%
Total	11	2	13	100%
	85%	15%	100%	

Department Managers Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	1	1	2	33.3%
Black	0	2	2	33.3%
Native American	1	0	1	15.15%
White	1	0	1	15.15%
Total	3	3	6	100%
	50%	50%	100%	

Interns

School	Gender	Race
DePaul University	Male	White
DePaul University	Male	White
Dominican University	Female	Hispanic
East West University	Female	African American
Florida Atlantic	Female	White
IIT	Male	Asian
IIT	Male	Asian
IIT	Female	Asian
Intrax	Female	Hispanic
Intrax	Male	Hispanic
Intrax	Female	Asian

Department of Buildings

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Intrax	Male	Asian
School	Gender	Race
Intrax	Male	Hispanic
Lake Forest	Female	Hispanic
Loyola University	Female	White
Loyola University	Male	White
Northwestern University	Female	Asian
Northwestern University	Male	Asian
Northwestern University	Male	Asian
Northwestern University	Female	White
Purdue University	Female	Asian
Roosevelt University	Female	Hispanic
Tallinn University	Female	White
University of California	Female	White
University of Chicago	Female	Asian
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	Asian
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	Asian
University of Illinois at Chicago	Female	African American
University of Illinois at Chicago	Female	Asian
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Female	White
University of Illinois at Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois at Urbana	Female	Asian
University of Illinois at Urbana	Female	White
University of Illinois at Urbana	Female	Asian
University of Illinois at Urbana	Female	Asian
University of Illinois at Urbana	Male	White
University of Michigan	Male	White
University of Michigan	Male	African American
University of Michigan	Female	White
University of Michigan	Female	White
University of Michigan	Male	White
University of Prague	Female	White
University of Wisconsin	Male	African American

