

2022 Budget Statement to the City Council Committee on the Budget and Government Operations
October 5, 2021
Matthew Beaudet, Commissioner

Good (morning/afternoon) Chairman Dowell, Vice Chair Silverstein and members of the City Council. I am pleased to be here today to discuss the 2022 budget request for the Department of Buildings. I am grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with Mayor Lightfoot and the members of the City Council to support economic development in all 77 Chicago neighborhoods, and to help ensure building safety for residents and visitors through the administration of the Chicago Construction Codes.

We remain proud to provide uninterrupted continuity of services during these unprecedented and challenging times. Our staff did not miss a beat and we continue to offer both in-person and remote and alternative processes for permitting, inspections, and trade licensing.

Through August, we have issued a total of 26,852 building permits representing \$20,058,332 in fees. By year's end, we expect to issue approximately 40,000 permits. Despite COVID, economic development continues throughout Chicago, and we continue processing and issuing permits in a timely manner.

We have completed over 139,478 inspections which includes 30,827 complaints closed via 311.

To further protect public safety, we work with Aldermen, other departments, and the community to identify, secure and in some cases, demolish vacant buildings that can serve as a hub for criminal activity and have demolished 208 buildings and have boarded up and secured 1,035 properties. Also, a total of 2,772 vacant buildings were registered and/or renewed, and \$1,076,569.36 in fees were collected.

Our Strategic Task Force also works closely with CPD and Law to enforce the Drug and Gang House Ordinance and the Responsible Establishment Safe Neighborhood initiative, which targets troubled buildings and businesses. We also continue to take action against bad contractors that prey on homeowners and businesses.

Over the past decade, we have implemented reforms that make it more equitable and cost-effective to build and easier to obtain permits through a streamlined, more user-friendly process. To build on these efforts, DOB continues to work with AIS on a multi-year effort to migrate from outdated systems used to support permitting and inspection functions (Suntrack, Hansen 7 and Kneebone) to the IPS 11 platform used by other similar departments. This initiative will eliminate DOB's remaining paper-based permitting and payment processes, reducing the time to permit and providing enhanced public data.

The new Chicago Building Code has been in effect for a year now. With rising construction costs and a dire need for more affordable housing and neighborhood commercial investment, the new code's flexibility and expanded options for equitable and cost-effective construction are more important than ever as the City seeks to encourage redevelopment in communities that have long been overlooked.

In 2021, we also continued to modernize our Chicago Construction Codes, including interim amendments to the Mechanical Code passed last month, to provide further options to residents and small businesses impacted by COVID and also to keep residents in their homes, businesses reopening, and on-going equity-based investment and growth in all communities.

The multi-year process to modernize our codes continues through internal review of requirements for plumbing, mechanical ventilation, refrigeration, natural gas, hazardous occupancies, and trade licensing. As with other code updates, we will collaborate with industry partners and the community to develop consensus-based codes for Council consideration. And I wish to re-stress that we are making equity a keystone in all of our code modernization efforts and have codes that work for all 77 communities.

As we head into the colder months, we will enforce the Chicago Heat Ordinance. During times of extreme cold, we detail inspectors every day including weekends and work with Law to expedite legal action in Circuit Court. We also work closely with DFSS to assist tenants when the heat cannot be immediately restored and temporary relocation is required.

We are also committed to working with Mayor Lightfoot and the City Council on the city-wide effort to promote access and equity in the construction industry for women and people of color. The Associated General Contractors of America reported that the Chicago area lead the nation in construction job growth with a 12% increase while other major areas like New York City and Houston both suffered a 14% decline in construction jobs. It is imperative that we not only continue this growth but that the growth be equitable. As the son of a Native American electrician, I can attest that a good paying career in the trades is not just a paycheck but a generational blessing.

In 2022, DOB remains committed to bringing commonsense solutions to the challenges facing our City, and we will to do what we can, through innovation and streamlining, to move construction projects and equitable residential and commercial economic investment forward in all communities while, at the same time, protecting building safety, and the safety of the neighborhoods where residents call home.