

Public Works Permit Process Discussion Group

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The list of people above were involved in discussions about the Public Works Permit (PWP) process. Many of these people have over 15 years of experience with the process.

The biggest issue discussed was the timeline of the PWP process. As civil engineers, we are tasked with obtaining PWP's without holding up the rest of the development process. The overall length of the PWP process is unpredictable and quite long. The 30/60/90 plan submittal structure was originally developed to create a reliable timeline and cost for this permit. In the past years this process has gone through changes and "interim" reviews were introduced. The PWP process timeline is now completely unreliable.

Below is an overall list of issues that were discussed with possible solutions.

1. Interim reviews

The requirement for "interim" reviews has a substantial effect on the overall timeline of the PWP. Interim reviews are regularly caused by conflicting bureau requirements, new bureau requirements, or lack of review by a bureau.

Possible solution - Eliminating the interim review entirely would streamline the process and lighten the load for all reviewers. This would allow reviewers to spend more time on each individual review... quality vs. quantity. This would also require all bureaus to give clear direction at the EA, Preapp, or building permit checklist stage. See items #3 and #6 below.

Another idea was to create a planned second review during concept. This could be called initial concept and final concept. In order for this to work the timeline must be defined and there could only be a total of two plan reviews during concept. Concept is the most critical stage as it is tied to the release of the building permit and sometimes Land Use approval.

Other issues related to interim reviews below.

a. Small issues causing interim review by one bureau

Possible solution - Allow modification to the digital copy of concept or design that would allow progression to the next stage. For example, if the water bureau needs a slight modification to a design level plan set, this could be marked up on the digital copy knowing that it will be picked up for the final submittal.

- b. Unclear cause of interim review** - Interim requirements are sometimes unclear and engineers are expected to address all comments and resubmit a new set of plans. The original issue that caused the interim sometimes gets lost and all the bureaus do a new review of the entire plan set.

Possible solution - If interim is being required by one bureau, the PWP manager could be responsible for issuing a document that clearly identifies what needs to be addressed on the plans. This document would be accessible to all bureaus so there was no confusion about who should be reviewing the interim submittal.

2. Additional PBOT processes tied to PWP process that prevent moving from one stage to the next.

Design Exceptions, Encroachment Permits, ADA ramp reports. Review of these applications are done by other groups within PBOT and these timelines are unpredictable which causes delays. For design exceptions the PBOT utilities group often does not know the history behind the decision to apply for a design exception which causes confusion and delays.

Possible solution - Identify additional processes at concept and consistently require approval prior to design stage approval. The PBOT PWP project manager could handle the coordination of these processes within PBOT which would minimize delays to the project. Copies of these applications could be submitted with the design submittal to help the PBOT PWP project manager with coordination.

3. Poor quality of PBOT information given at early assistance and pre-applications meetings.

Possible solution - PBOT traffic, PBOT signals & street lighting, and PBOT utilities could be giving feedback at this level to reduce the length of the PWP process. PBOT traffic could comment on ADA crossing requirements and curb extensions. PBOT signals & street lighting could layout their requirements. PBOT utilities group could list possible issues related to site.

4. Internal communication between bureaus is lacking or strained.

Possible solution - PWP project manager could require engagement and decision making between bureaus to give clear direction to design engineers. This could also be accomplished by having the city do an internal meeting to discuss their comments before the comments are presented to design engineers. Engineers should not be required to navigate conflicting requirements between bureaus.

5. Frequent staff turnover of PWP reviewers with no accountability of previous reviews.

Possible solution - New requirements should not be brought up past concept phase regardless of staff turnover. Interim reviews are consistently required when a new reviewer is introduced. This adds to the unpredictability of the process timeline.

6. Complicated and inconsistent PBOT building permit checksheets.

PBOT checksheets are lengthy and hard to follow. Once public improvements are triggered by value of project or occupancy, it is unclear when a PWP is required versus an MIP.

Possible solution - If a PWP is required it could be stated clearly why that decision was made. If a PWP has already been initiated there could be reference to that process and the checksheet could be much simpler. Overall these checksheets could be revised so people can read them and understand what is needed to release the building permit.

7. No accurate and reliable online tracking of the PWP process or the other PBOT processes listed in item #2.

The PWP and encroachment permits are logged in portlandmaps.com under permit tracking but the information is minimal and inconsistent. This causes confusion which creates regular phone calls and emails to the PWP group.

Possible solution – Improvements could be made to how the information in TRACS is displayed in portlandmaps.com permit tracking. Although design exceptions and ADA ramp reports are not permits there could be some way of tracking these processes as well.

8. No public access to required roadway sections or estimated ROW dedications.

Possible solution – Street classifications are listed on the Transportation System Plan (TSP) which is accessible through Portlandmaps.com. Based on the combination of different classifications (Transit, Traffic, Emergency Response, Street Design, Bicycle, Pedestrian, Freight) a standard street layout and sidewalk corridor could be determined. There could be a note stating that confirmation is required through PBOT review.

9. Option to cancel meeting is given to engineers without knowing what the comments are.

Possible solution – If the PBOT PWP project manager thinks a meeting could be cancelled, all comments could be sent to the engineer so they can make an educated decision on whether a meeting is necessary. If PWP reviews were completed a few days prior to the scheduled meeting, more PWP meetings could be cancelled which would save the reviewers and design engineers time.

10. Excessive number of plan sets required for subdivisions.

A typical subdivision requires 4 separate sets of public works plans (PBOT, BES, PWB, and BDS). Other cities in the metro area and beyond can permit and construct a subdivision with one set of plans. Multiple plan sets lead to potential inconsistencies between plans, additional cost, and longer review times.

Possible solution – Consolidate the required plan sets for subdivisions.