



To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: March 16, 2026

Re: **Streamlining the Residential Permitting Process (POR 2025 #163 / AR-26-05)**

Supporting new development—particularly housing—is a critical priority for the City, with direct implications for affordability, economic vitality, and the City’s long-term fiscal health. While zoning establishes the parameters for what can be built, the permitting and regulatory processes that follow play an equally meaningful role in determining whether projects move forward, how long they take to complete, and the level of cost, risk, and uncertainty associated with development.

In recognition of these concerns, the City Council adopted Policy Order POR 2025 #163 requesting that the City Manager work with the Community Development Department and the Inspectional Services Department to pursue opportunities to streamline the permitting process, including consideration of a centralized permitting function, improvements to the City’s online permitting tools, and the establishment of clearer timelines for review. This memo is intended as an interim update in response to that request. All this time, the purpose of this update is to outline how staff are approaching this work and to provide a timeline for delivering a more comprehensive response later this spring.

Our work is grounded in the premise that development feasibility is shaped by two primary factors: cost and time-related risk. With that framework in mind, we are organizing potential improvements into two broad categories. First, policies or requirements that add complexity to projects and may increase the cost of development. Second, fragmented or unclear processes across departments that introduce delay and uncertainty even when requirements themselves are appropriate. Understanding both dimensions is essential to identifying opportunities for improvement while maintaining the City’s commitments to safety, sustainability, equity, historic preservation, and neighborhood quality.

Engagement is a core component of this effort. We have begun discussions with key City departments that participate in the development review and permitting process—including Community Development, Inspectional Services, Fire, Public Works, Transportation,

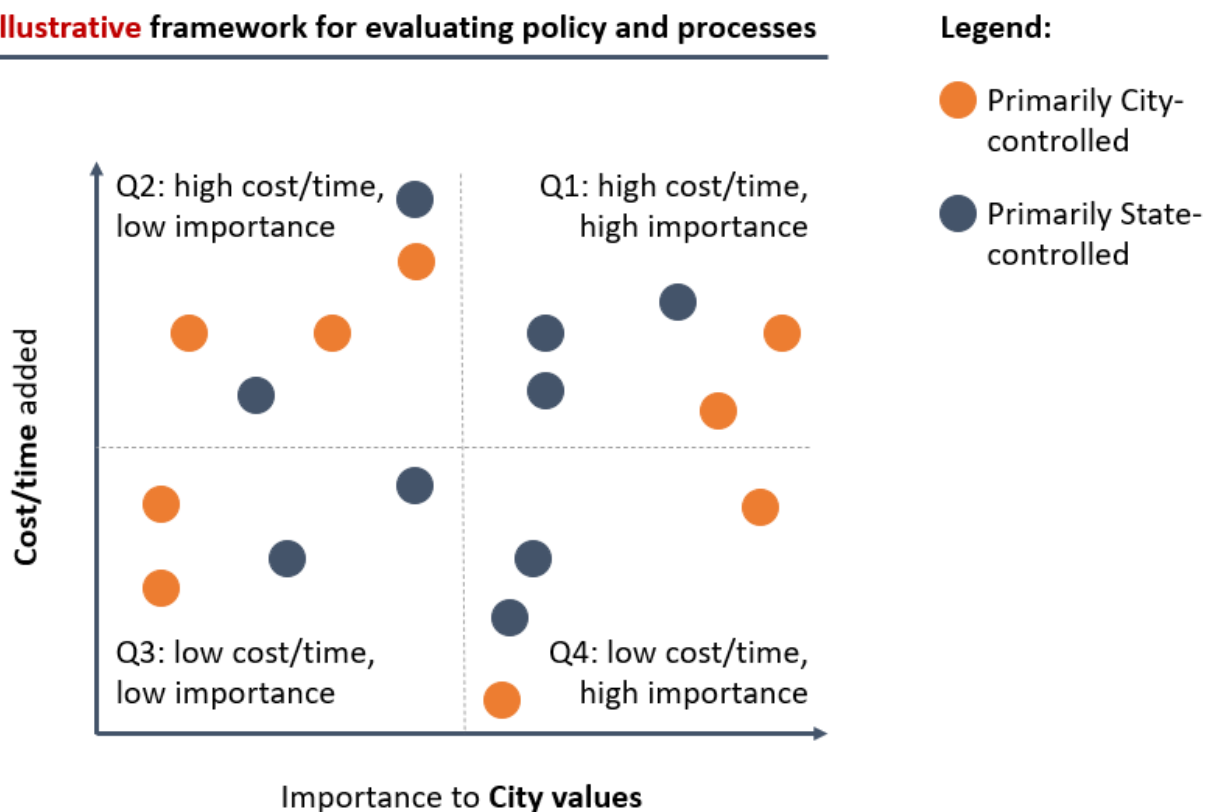
Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Sustainability, Housing, and the Historical Commission—to better understand where coordination challenges arise and where improvements may be feasible. These conversations are focused on identifying areas where processes may be duplicative, unclear, or unnecessarily sequential.

Following this internal phase of work, we plan to engage external practitioners—including developers, architects, and contractors—to test whether the issues identified by staff align with on-the-ground experience. This engagement will also help us understand which potential changes would most meaningfully reduce cost, delay, or uncertainty in the permitting process.

Potential ideas identified through this process will be evaluated using a consistent framework that considers both the magnitude of cost or delay associated with a given policy or process and the importance of that policy to core City objectives such as public safety, environmental sustainability, accessibility, historic preservation, and mitigation of neighborhood impacts.

Illustrative framework for evaluating policy and processes



As part of this work, we are also distinguishing between issues that fall within the City’s direct authority and those that are primarily driven by state or federal law and building code requirements, such as accessibility requirements and stormwater management. This distinction will allow the final response to clearly identify actions that the City can

implement locally, as well as areas where broader state-level policy changes or advocacy may be necessary.

Over the coming months, staff will continue internal coordination across departments and begin targeted engagement with external stakeholders. Through this work, we will identify a set of potential process improvements or policy changes that appear most promising for reducing cost, delay, or uncertainty in the permitting process. We anticipate returning to the City Council in late spring 2026 with an update summarizing the ideas that merit further analysis and scoping. Following that discussion, staff will continue to work over the summer and early fall to refine those concepts, assess feasibility and potential impacts, and return to the Council with recommendations on which initiatives should be prioritized for implementation.

We share the City Council's sense of urgency around enabling housing production and reducing unnecessary friction in the development process. This interim update is intended to provide transparency into our approach and reaffirm our commitment to delivering a thoughtful and actionable response consistent with the Council's direction.