



December 7, 2020

Dear Mayor Johnson and City Council Members:

On behalf of more than 1,300 residential construction professionals who comprise the Dallas Builders Association, we are writing to express our collective dismay and disappointment with ongoing delays in building permitting. These delays are crippling small businesses, depriving workers of work and the city of needed tax revenue while curtailing access to housing at a time when residents need it the most.

Processes that used to take a day or two continue to take three months or more. Several residents have waited more than 100 days, nearly one-third of the year, simply to begin construction on their home.

Business costs in the form of taxes, interest carry and lost capital, for some, are approaching a half million dollars. Our Association hears daily from builders and residents who are at a loss as to how their project or, in some cases, their business can continue in Dallas.

The housing industry did not suddenly forget how to apply for a building permit with the onset of the pandemic. The backlog and corresponding delays come exclusively from the transition to a system that was not ready for prime time, is not intuitive and lacks adequate support and training. Nothing remotely like this occurred in any other North Texas city.

We very much appreciate Kris Sweckard, Dr. Johnson and others' attention to this issue and genuine effort to make meaningful improvements. However, things continue to go in the wrong direction. Last week, permit review times escalated from 9-10 weeks to 11-12 weeks, [according to the city's website](#), moving further away from our goal of 2-3 weeks, which is on par with other cities.

Staff's briefing today expressed optimism that the goal could be met by April of next year. If that's the case, achieving our city's housing objectives in 2021 will be nearly impossible, and it will have taken Dallas over a year to make the same adjustments other cities did in a matter of days back in March.

While it is not our place to micromanage this issue, we believe the following would contribute meaningful improvements:

- Continue to hold regular council hearings on this issue and monthly meetings of the Development Advisory Committee. Advisory Committee meetings should include an agenda forecast of items to be discussed months in advance that are important to the Dallas BA and other industry organizations in order to improve the city's overall development processes.
- Proactively communicate with applicants through improved customer service. So many permits are rejected because of small clerical errors related to the online system such as file naming standards, orientation of documents, or failing to check an extra box stating payment is complete after receiving a confirmation that payment is complete. A simple call back would keep these projects moving. Small clerical errors should not cost applicants weeks by forcing them to the back of the line.
- Provide an online help desk, email or phone number where applicant questions can be answered in one or two business days.

- Better coordinate initiatives with industry representatives. In 2018, the Dallas BA volunteered a focus group to help deploy the online permitting system, but it was never utilized. A similar group would provide useful user feedback before the successor program to POSSE is implemented.
- Identify processes that will be restored to an in-person experience whenever social distancing measures are relaxed. Prioritize complex permits such as single-family construction and remodeling.
- Move certain review processes to qualified third parties to the greatest extent possible to relieve the administrative burden on city staff.

Thank you for considering our concerns and for your leadership to help overcome these crippling delays.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil Crone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Phil Crone
Executive Officer
Dallas Builders Association