Portland City Council Housing and Permitting Committee Written Testimony
Document number 2026-296

	Name or Organization	Position	Comments	Attachment	Created
1	Greg Harris - AKS Engineering and Forestry	Support with changes	I am a project manager in land development with multiple past and current projects in the City of Portland. I am writing today because I believe Portland has an opportunity to meaningfully improve its permitting system, and I want to speak from the perspective of a customer and someone who works with the system daily. First, I recognize and appreciate the work the City has been doing through the Code Alignment Project. I also appreciate the staff who are trying to move projects forward within a system that is often complicated even for the people who apply it. But after years of working through Portland's development review process (as far back as 2018), I believe the City's biggest permitting problem is not simply that reviews take too long. It is that the process is often unpredictable. I have had projects experience this firsthand. We have had projects where Public Works, Transportation, BES, and the Water Bureau each have legitimate responsibilities, but the customer is left coordinating the gaps between those departments. We have also had situations where one bureau confirms a requirement is not necessary, only to have another department require that additional process anyway because 'that's just how we do things to make it equitable for all customers'. As the City continues looking for ways to improve its systems, I believe staff should ask a simple question: Is the problem actually the improvement, or is it the process required to arrive at the improvement? That distinction matters. Every additional review means additional engineering time, added permit costs for redesign, coordination on behalf of city staff, and lost time for construction. I have watched permit coordination on Portland project become a project management exercise in and of itself. Spending hours trying to get multiple City bureaus moving in the same direction, sending emails and follow-ups to City staff, leaving voicemails that go unanswered, and repeatedly trying to determine who actually owns an issue or can provide a decision when at times the solution is clear to me and has never been an issue in neighboring jurisdictions. This is not time spend advancing the project. It is time spent navigating the City's own process. On projects with hundreds of thousands of dollars in permitting costs and millions in purchasing costs, even relatively small delays can have substantial financial consequences. I get it, some projects are complex... But when the permitting process slows to a crawl or becomes unpredictable, the cost do not disappear. They become carrying costs, consultant fees, redesign fees, contractor escalation, financing costs, and these ultimately get rolled into the higher housing costs we see today. So I am asking Council to focus on measurable improvements to the customer experience, not simply changes to which codes can be suspended until a solution is found. I suggest the City establishes clear ownership of a project from application through approval, require bureaus to coordinate internally rather than making the applicant serve as the City's project manager, create clear escalation paths when bureaus disagree, and establish measurable standards for response times and inter-bureau coordination. Portland has acknowledged that its permitting system has become a patchwork of processes across separate bureaus. I am encouraged that the Council has acknowledged the problem and is attempting to address it. But I ask you to go one step further. The goal should not be a system where experienced consultants become better at navigating bureaucracy. The goal should be a system where the bureaucracy becomes easier for everyone to navigate. If Portland wants to build more housing, reduce development costs, support small businesses, and become more competitive, permitting reform is one of the most direct things this Council can influence.	No	09/01/26 8:04 AM

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2	Greg Harris	Support with changes	I am a project manager in land development with multiple past and current projects in the City of Portland. I am writing today because I believe Portland has an opportunity to meaningfully improve its permitting system, and I want to speak from the perspective of a customer and someone who works with the system daily. First, I recognize and appreciate the work the City has been doing through the Code Alignment Project. I also appreciate the staff who are trying to move projects forward within a system that is often complicated even for the people who apply it. But after years of working through Portland's development review process (as far back as 2018), I believe the City's biggest permitting problem is not simply that reviews take too long. It is that the process is often unpredictable. I have had projects experience this firsthand. We have had projects where Public Works, Transportation, BES, and the Water Bureau each have legitimate responsibilities, but the customer is left coordinating the gaps between those departments. We have also had situations where one bureau confirms a requirement is not necessary, only to have another department require that additional process anyway because 'that's just how we do things to make it equitable for all customers'. As the City continues looking for ways to improve its systems, I believe staff should ask a simple question: Is the problem actually the improvement, or is it the process required to arrive at the improvement? That distinction matters. Every additional review means additional engineering time, added permit costs for redesign, coordination on behalf of city staff, and lost time for construction. I have watched permit coordination on Portland project become a project management exercise in and of itself. Spending hours trying to get multiple City bureaus moving in the same direction, sending emails and follow-ups to City staff, leaving voicemails that go unanswered, and repeatedly trying to determine who actually owns an issue or can provide a decision when at times the solution is clear to me and has never been an issue in neighboring jurisdictions. This is not time spend advancing the project. It is time spent navigating the City's own process. On projects with hundreds of thousands of dollars in permitting costs and millions in purchasing costs, even relatively small delays can have substantial financial consequences. I get it, some projects are complex... But when the permitting process slows to a crawl or becomes unpredictable, the cost do not disappear. They become carrying costs, consultant fees, redesign fees, contractor escalation, financing costs, and these ultimately get rolled into the higher housing costs we see today. So I am asking Council to focus on measurable improvements to the customer experience, not simply changes to which codes can be suspended until a solution is found. I suggest the City establishes clear ownership of a project from application through approval, require bureaus to coordinate internally rather than making the applicant serve as the City's project manager, create clear escalation paths when bureaus disagree, and establish measurable standards for response times and inter-bureau coordination. Portland has acknowledged that its permitting system has become a patchwork of processes across separate bureaus. I am encouraged that the Council has acknowledged the problem and is attempting to address it. But I ask you to go one step further. The goal should not be a system where experienced consultants become better at navigating bureaucracy. The goal should be a system where the bureaucracy becomes easier for everyone to navigate. If Portland wants to build more housing, reduce development costs, support small businesses, and become more competitive, permitting reform is one of the most direct things this Council can influence.	No	09/01/26 8:05 AM

Portland City Council, Housing and Permitting Committee
September 1, 2026 2:00 p.m.
Testimony list

	Name	Document Number
1	Amber Cook	2026-296