



Nicolas Huff, PE, Bureau Manager | Bureau of Street-Use & Mapping

nicolas.huff@sfdpw.org | T. 628.271.2000 | 49 South Van Ness Ave. 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103

Establishment of Public Works' Minimum Standards for Building Permit Application Intake Reviews and Releases (Effective September 1, 2023)

Purpose:

- I. Establish Technical Design Standards for submittal and design review for release of Building Permit Applications (BPAs) routed to and reviewed by Public Works.
- II. Update standard review procedures and protocols for Public Works release of Building Permit Applications (BPAs).
- III. Establish a collaborative procedure toward faster approvals of housing projects falling under Mayoral Executive Directives [13-01](#), [17-02](#), [18-01](#) and [23-01](#).
- IV. Improve customer service, permit review and responsiveness through transparency.

Summary:

Currently, when a BPA is routed by DBI to Public Works, the Public Works plan checker will determine which Public Works permits are required for construction or occupancy of the public right-of-way (Attachment A). The applicant for the BPA is notified of the corresponding Public Works permit(s) required as a result of the proposed construction or occupancy. At that time, the BPA is placed on hold by Public Works and a note detailing the permit requirements are added to the Department of Building Inspection's (DBI's) Permit Tracking System (PTS) by the Public Works plan checker. The hold on the BPA will remain in place until the applicant submits the appropriate Public Works permit applications and the Public Works plan checker has performed a detailed engineering review of the application(s).

Due to a variety of internal and external factors, including the time required by applicants to prepare and submit a complete Public Works application(s) and corresponding plan set following notification after the submittal and review of BPAs, the BPA can remain on hold for an extended period of time. In compliance with [Public Works Director's Order 182974](#), Public Works "conducts its operations so that no appearance or actual preferential treatment is given to any permit applicant while allowing for a policy that considers priority, necessity, efficiency, and practical feasibility in the issuance of permits" therefore with the exception of permits prioritized via legislation or Executive Directive, such as for affordable housing, permit applications are reviewed in chronological order of date and time received ("first come, first served") to ensure fair and equitable treatment to all applicants. Once the applicant submits the required Public Works permit application(s), the applications are assigned to the Public Works review queue in chronological order. On average, Public Works receives 2,100 BPAs for review and 19,000 Public Works permit applications annually. Additionally, Public Works receives 8,000 Street Space Permit Applications associated with BPAs.

Recognizing the importance of timely issuance of building permits, Public Works has evaluated and identified procedural reforms to allow for construction on private property, associated with BPAs, to commence while associated public right-of-way infrastructure, other construction and/or occupancy permit applications under the purview of Public Works are under review. It is vital that Public Works safeguard the public right-of-way, while at the same time establishing design review standards to allow for the timely release of BPAs that meet established minimum criteria. To accomplish this important goal, Public Works has created minimum submittal requirement tiers based on the BPA scope of work. A full table is available on Attachment A of this document. The four tiers of minimum requirements for a Public Works release are as follows:

- I. Submit Public Works application(s) and pay permit fee(s).
- II. Submit Public Works application(s), pay permit fee(s) and BPA Plans meeting MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DESIGN REVIEW FOR BPA RELEASE (Attachment B) which meet review criteria shown in PLAN CHECKER VERIFICATION LIST FOR BPA RELEASE (Attachment C).
- III. Submit Public Works application(s), pay permit fee(s) and Public Works Plans for plan check review for substantial compliance to permit requirements.
- IV. Submit Public Works application(s), pay permit fee(s) and Public Works Plans & Issuance of Public Works permit(s).

Projects that fall under Tiers I and II will be eligible for early BPA release. Tier II requires BPA plans show minimum information as required by Public Works, detailed in Attachment B “MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DESIGN REVIEW FOR BPA RELEASE” and in Attachment C “PLAN CHECKER VERIFICATION LIST FOR BPA RELEASE” included in this document. Note: A plan checker may request additional information to clarify specific items shown on BPA plans. If plans do not meet the minimum standards for review, the applicant shall resubmit revised plans to meet those standards prior to receiving a BPA release from Public Works. The Public Works release of BPA does not constitute approval of work in the right-of-way. Public Works permit must be approved prior to any work in the right-of-way.

Applicability:

All Building Permit Applications (BPA) showing construction, occupancy or features in the public right of way must be routed to Public Works. All BPA’s routed to Public Works will be reviewed to ensure applicants apply for all required Public Works permits. Projects requiring permits for right-of-way inspection or public improvements must comply with this Memorandum.

Updates to required information:

Accelerating Public Works review of BPAs will require that right-of-way design information be submitted as part of the BPA application. To ensure Public Works has sufficient information to determine that there are no major conflicts, compliance issues, and public safety is upheld in the right-of-way, all Tier II projects must show minimum information on the BPA submittal, as detailed in Appendix B, and associated Public Works plans. Furthermore, the designer should ensure that there is sufficient information on the plans for the plan checker to verify the items

listed in Appendix C. All requirements listed in Appendix C must be satisfied for the release of the BPA from Public Works.

Procedures:

BPAs will continue to be reviewed in chronological order at the Public Works station, unless deemed to be a priority permit as defined in [Public Works Director's Order 182974](#). Projects that are in Tiers I and II per Appendix A will be reviewed as follows:

1. The Public Works plan checker will review the plan set to determine which Public Works permit applications are needed for any proposed right-of-way improvements or encroachments, and determine if the BPA falls under Tiers I or II listed in Appendix A.
2. The Public Works plan checker will review the BPA for code compliance. At the same time, using the checklists in Appendix C, the plan checker will verify that the BPA provides the minimum amount of information needed for release from Public Works.
3. The Public Works plan checker will issue comments to the applicant. If additional information is needed the applicant will need to update the BPA and return to Public Works station. If there is sufficient information to release the BPA, the applicant will be notified to submit their Public Works applications and pay the associated fees, if they have not already done so.
4. PTS will be set to *Issued Comments* status and route the project back to the Building Department if the BPA is a paper application.
5. Once required Public Works application(s) and fee(s) are submitted, then applicant will be moved to step 6.
6. If a Public Works release has been granted or no work is proposed in the right-of-way, the Public Works Plan checker can sign off the building plans and application. Project's necessitating multiple Public Works permits will be subject to the highest-level Tier associated with proposed work for submittal and release requirements. For example, if the project proposes multiple features and/or construction elements in the public right of way which would qualify for Tier I and Tier II releases, then the project must comply with the requirements of a Tier II release.

90-Day Follow-up Obligations:

In accordance with these procedures, following the submittal of any required permit application(s) and fee(s), applicants have 90-days to submit a complete application, which must include plans showing all proposed work in the public right of way. If an applicant fails to submit a complete application with required plans within 90-days, then the permit application will be placed in 'INACTIVE' status.

Any INACTIVE permit may be reactivated following a formal request to the Department. Reactivation fees may apply.

Quality Assurance Procedures:

These procedures will be reviewed by San Francisco Public Works, Permit Section staff at least every 2 years to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures. This memorandum and the practices it establishes may be updated more frequently, including but not limited to public engagement and performance improvements, as deemed necessary.

References:

1. San Francisco Mayoral Executive Directives [13-01](#), [17-02](#), [18-01](#) and [23-01](#)
2. San Francisco Campaign and Government Conduct Code, Section 3.400, effective December 15, 2004 / Ordinance 115-04
3. Supplements the Permit Processing Code of Conduct adopted by the Ethics Commission on January 10, 2005
4. Building Department AB-004, Priority Permit Processing Guidelines
5. DPW Order 182,974

Attachments:

- A. Building Permit Application Intake and Review HOLD Release Matrix (Tier I-IV)
- B. Minimum Standards for Design Review for BPA Release Checklist (Tier II)
- C. Plan Checker Verification List for BPA Release Checklist (Tier II)

Attachment A

Table (I):

Type of Building Exterior Work from DBI G-20	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
ADA Actuator or Push Button		X			X			Street Improvement and/or Minor Sidewalk Encroachment
ATMs		X			X			Street Improvement.
Awnings, Marquees and Canopies								NO HOLD. If existing, Minor Sidewalk Encroachment may be required.
Concrete Paving or Landscape in front yard								NO HOLD. Routed to Urban Forestry if located in furnishing zone.
Curb Cuts		X	X		X			Street Improvement
Demolition of building								NO HOLD.
Doors & Gates Swings (exterior)		X	X	X				Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI. If allowed, Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Required.
Fire Escapes								NO HOLD.
Foundation								NO HOLD. Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI.
Garage (New)	*	X *	X *		X (at grade & no warping of sidewalk)	*		Street Improvement, Driveway and if warping proposed a Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Generator		X	X	X				Minor Sidewalk Encroachment (piping and/or fuel port).

Type of Building Exterior Work from DBI G-20	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
New construction	*	X *	X *		X (City Standards design)	* (non-City Standards designs)		NO HOLD on Site Permit for X (City Standard Designs) *Entitlement approvals to be submitted for all non-City standard designs (Major Encroachment). Street Improvement and/or Minor Sidewalk Encroachment. Additional permits may be required.
Outdoor Seating or Eating Areas								None. Tables and Chairs / Shared Spaces Permit may be required.
Retaining Walls		X	X	X < 4'		X > 4'		Minor Sidewalk Encroachment. If over 4' then Tier III requirements apply (Plans and Structural review).
Security Gate		X		X				Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI. If allowed, Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Required.
Shoring or Tiebacks		X	X				X	Approved Minor Sidewalk Encroachment (no public notification); Requires additional Agencies review .
Signs (exterior)								NO HOLD. Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI.
Stairs (repair in-kind)		X		X				If plans do not comply with code, requires DBI recheck. Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Stairs (replacement)		X			X			If plans do not comply with code, requires DBI recheck / DBI Structural review and approval . Preexisting Encroachment Permit.

Type of Building Exterior Work from DBI G-20	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Storefront		X			X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment may be required.
Sub-Sidewalk Basement		X	X				X (with BLDG approval)	Approved Street Improvement (topping slab repairs) and/or approved Minor Sidewalk Encroachment (document existing space) - Structural review and approval.
Underpinning								NO HOLD.
Un-Reinforced Masonry Building (UMB)								NO HOLD.
Vertical and/or Horizontal addition (with no work in ROW)			X	X				Approved Inspection Right-of-Way Conformity.
Windows (Bay)	X	X	X					Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI.

Table (II):

Type of Building Interior Work from DBI G-20	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Change of occupancy or use								None
Dwelling Unit(s) Legalize or ADU								NO HOLD. Street Improvement permit required for curb cut removal.

Type of Building Interior Work from DBI G-20	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Fire Sprinkler		X	X	X				Minor Sidewalk Encroachment (Fire Department Connection (FDC)) / General Excavation Permit for underground utility lateral.
Generator		X	X	X				Minor Sidewalk Encroachment (piping and/or fuel port).
Interior Tenant Improvement		X		X				Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI. If allowed Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Required.
Seismic Retrofit including Soft Story		X		X				Must comply with code or will be routed back to DBI. If allowed, Minor Sidewalk Encroachment required.
Transformer Vaults	X	X	X			X		Vault Encroachment (if UCD) to meet PG&E requirements and entitlement process with Planning Department .

Table (III):

	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Type of Building Other Work from DBI G-20								Required Permit Type(s); Application(s) and Fee(s) submittal required for BPA Release
Grading								None
Lot Split or Merger								NO HOLD. However, must go through Mapping Division process.

Table (IV):

	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Miscellaneous Infrastructure Work								Required Permit Type(s); Application(s) and Fee(s) submittal required for BPA Release
Street Tree Irrigation			X		X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Pipe Barriers		X	X		X			Pipe Barrier.
Security Bollards		X	X		X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Existing non-conforming driveway with neighborhood pattern	X	X		X				If property lines are incorrect, applicant will need to revise building plans. Minor Sidewalk Encroachment required.
Trash Enclosure	X	X	X		X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.

	Types of DBI Permits			Tiers for Releases				Descriptions
	Hold (Site)	Hold (Full)	Hold (Addenda)	Tier I Apps + Fees	Tier II Apps + Fees + Minimum Standards on BPA Plans	Tier III Apps + Fees + Plans + Public Works Permit Review	Tier IV Apps + Fees + Approve Public Works Permit	
Miscellaneous Infrastructure Work								Required Permit Type(s); Application(s) and Fee(s) submittal required for BPA Release
Existing or New step (12-inches max)		X	X	X				Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Handrails		X		X				Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Accessible ramp or mechanical lift		X			X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Raised planter box	X	X	X		X			Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Fence	X	X	X		X			If higher than 4', may need CP-ZOC referral / no enclosure. Minor Sidewalk Encroachment.
Existing awning support poles		X		X				None
Sidewalk hatch		X			X			Existing only. Minor Sidewalk Encroachment. BPA plans must show location of hatch and sub-sidewalk basement.
Voluntary Sidewalk Repair								NO HOLD. Sidewalk Repair.
Voluntary Curb Cut (automobile driveway) repair or reconstruction								NO HOLD, Contractor must have A or C-8 and COA for BPA release. Street Improvement.

Attachment B

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DESIGN REVIEW FOR BPA RELEASE (MUST BE SHOWN ON BUILDING PLANS) (TIER II)

- Each sheet should have the designer(s) name, address, contact email, phone number.
- List the project address, including BLOCK and LOT number, and referenced building permit number (if available) on each sheet.
- North Arrow.
- The scale for drawings submitted digitally shall be no less than 1/8"=1' or 1"=10' and if applicable, enlarged detail for curb ramp details shall be no less than ¼"=1' or 1"=5'.
- Location of all proposed encroachments.
- Show the location of the front property line and dimension the legislated sidewalk width which is measured by starting from the face of curb and going towards the property. [See Grade Maps.](#)
- Show adjacent parcels as well as the front and side property lines.
- Show both existing (E) and proposed (N) spot elevations, in positive decimal feet, fronting the property and at least 15 feet into the adjacent parcels. Spot elevations shall be shown at:
 - Back of walk (BW), with corresponding elevations at the top of curb (TC) and at the flow line (FL). At an interval no greater than 25 feet
 - Existing (E) and proposed (N) ground finished floor spot elevations as (FF) at each entrance threshold and garage, with a corresponding BW
 - Along both edges of driveways
 - At grade breaks with corresponding BW, TC, and FL
- Provide both existing (E) and new (N) slope percentages in between each spot elevation(s) with the arrow symbol pointing in the direction of downward drainage.
- Dimension existing and/or new curb cut(s). Ensure curb cut wings are oriented correctly (See SFPW Standard Plan) and also indicate the required 1-inch lip and 18" wings within the curb cut.
- If applicable, show both existing (E) and proposed (N) spot elevations at the corners of all encroachments and changes in elevation. This includes but is not limited to the edges of landscaping features, retaining walls stairs, warpages, landings, transformer vaults, driveways and curb cut.
- If applicable, show existing curb ramps. For all corner lots, two (2) curb ramp evaluations and possibly reconstruction will be required per Public Works Order No. 184350.
- Denote type of curb: 1. Standard curb, 2. Combined curb and concrete gutter, 3. Combined curb and parking strip, or 4. Other existing non-conforming condition, be specific.

Attachment C

PLAN CHECKER VERIFICATION LIST FOR BPA RELEASE (TIER II)

With the understanding that a full right-of-way design may not be available and there may be issues that will need to be resolved, the following items will be verified by Public Works plan checkers to determine whether building permits can be released. Prior to Public Works permit issuance the design shall comply with all codes and standards.

All boxes must be checked for BPA release.

- The difference between the finished floor elevations and back of walk elevations are under 0.167' (2").
- Cross slopes are between 1% and 3.5% (Final PW approval will require a design of 1.67%).
- The difference between the top of curb and flowline is between 0.417' to 0.583' (5" to 7").
- There is a continuous clear path of travel at least 6' wide. If the existing clear path of travel is less than 6' wide, the plan checker shall verify that the path of travel is not reduced any further than the existing width.
- Retaining walls in the right of way shall be less than 4' high. (Retaining walls 4' or taller shall require for minor sidewalk encroachment review.)
- Driveways do not require warping. (Driveways with warping shall require full review of a minor sidewalk encroachment prior to BPA release.)
- Stairs shall only be in-kind only. (Stair replacement shall require full review of a minor sidewalk encroachment prior to BPA release.)
- There is no shoring or tiebacks. (Shoring or tiebacks shall require full review of a minor sidewalk encroachment.)
- There is no sub-sidewalk basement. (Sub-sidewalk basements shall require approval of a minor sidewalk encroachment.)
- There are no transformer vaults. (Transformer vaults shall require full review of a vault permit.)
- Roadway and sidewalk are designed to City Standards. (If a nonstandard design is proposed a full permit review shall be required.)