

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS



Agency Performance Public Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Brian J. Hanlon
Director
Department of Buildings

Before the
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

February 12, 2026
9:30 AM EST

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chair Lewis George, Councilmembers, and staff. I am Brian Hanlon, Director of the DC Department of Buildings (DOB). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Performance Oversight Hearing.

I will begin by thanking Mayor Muriel Bowser for her steady leadership and her focused positive energy as we enter the final year of her Administration. As the Mayor has said, this is a year to “run through the tape”—to finish strong, deliver results, and ensure that the systems we are responsible for today are positioned to serve the District well into the future. At DOB, that charge deeply resonates with the work we do every day.

I also want to thank the Council for its ongoing oversight, collaboration, and support. DOB’s work is complex, technical, and highly visible to residents, businesses, and visitors. We value the Council’s engagement and share the goal of ensuring that buildings across the District are safe, resilient, and responsive to the needs of our residents.

DOB’s mission is to protect the safety of residents, businesses, and visitors and advance the development of the built environment through permitting, inspections, and code enforcement. Our work is centered on three core goals: keeping the District’s built environment safe, green, and moving. This approach aligns with the Mayor’s vision to foster a vibrant and thriving economy for residents, businesses, and visitors and positions DOB as a key agency in enhancing the quality of life in the District.

FY 2025 Accomplishments

In FY 2025 DOB focused on maintaining core regulatory functions while improving transparency and consistency in service delivery. Key outcomes included:

- Issuing 53,514 permits, 2,725 of which were Certificates of Occupancy;
- Completing nearly 100,000 inspections across all complaint types, identifying over 41,000 violations—about 41% of which were confirmed abated in FY 2025;
- Reducing the average DOB-directed abatement process time from 32 days in FY 2024 to just 17 days in FY 2025; and
- Launching the Fast Track Fit-Out program, which issued 164 permits for office-to-office renovations in under 30 days.

While these results demonstrate that DOB maintained operational stability and delivered innovative programs, structural challenges such as legacy systems and manual processes continue to constrain efficiency. As a result, FY 2025 served as a transition year, one that allowed us to plan beyond incremental adjustments and define deliberate, system-level modernization that is necessary to support the Mayor’s Growth Agenda. The Department’s FY 2026 priorities reflect this shift, moving from planning toward implementation and long-term capacity building.

DOB operates through an integrated framework that aligns permitting, inspections, regulatory compliance, and administrative support functions. This structure is designed to balance the high-volume demands of daily regulatory operations with the technical rigor required to accurately assess program effectiveness while maintaining transparency for residents and the Council.

The Office of Construction and Building Standards, or OCBS, led by Chief Building Official Nicole Rogers, is responsible for permitting, construction compliance, building and construction inspections, green building, and third-party inspections. OCBS ensures that plans and projects comply with applicable construction codes, coordinates technical reviews, and supports safe, compliant building activity across the District.

As noted earlier, DOB issued more than 53,000 permits in FY 2025, maintaining the high productivity levels achieved in FY 2024. This strong performance also extends to both illegal construction enforcement and general construction inspections. Last year, DOB conducted 6,189 illegal construction inspections and 28,656 general construction inspections, both increases from FY 2024. Thanks to internal improvements that streamlined permit processing in the District, DOB maintained the strong momentum achieved in FY 2024 and continued to improve.

An example of process streamlining is the Fast Track Fit-Out program launched in FY 2025. Fast Track Fit-Outs accelerate plan reviews for interior renovations of existing office spaces, enabling faster approvals and permit issuances under 30 days. The agency reviewed 293 submissions and approved 164 projects with greater speed and efficiency.

OCBS also led the Department's implementation of Enhanced Intake Checklists to provide enhanced clarity upfront on the minimum building code and zoning requirements for an applicant's project. This standardization minimizes resubmissions, improves transparency, and leads to faster approvals.

Next, I'll highlight the Office of Zoning Administration (OZA), led by DOB's Zoning Administrator, Kathleen Beeton, which ensures all DOB-issued permits comply with the District's Zoning Regulations. OZA partners with agencies, residents, and businesses to provide

guidance on allowable development and uses, fostering transparency and supporting economic development across the District. In FY 2025, DOB reviewed 4,119 unique applications for conformance with DC Zoning Regulations, including building permits, Certificates of Occupancy, and Home Occupation Permits. More than 80% of permits for alterations, repairs, additions, and building construction were approved within two or fewer zoning review cycles.

In FY 2025, OZA partnered with the Office of Planning on the Omnibus Text Amendment—a package of roughly two dozen individual text amendments to the Zoning Regulations that align with the District’s planning and housing goals to support balanced growth and development. The amendments will remove barriers to housing construction, clarify regulations, and reduce the number of referrals to the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA). Examples include a change to the zoning regulations to allow homeowners to construct modest-sized decks without regard to lot occupancy limits, as well as an amendment to reduce parking requirements within half a mile of a metro stop. A public hearing was held on these text amendments and their incorporation into the Zoning Regulations is pending final action by the Zoning Commission.

OZA also prepared 47 BZA referral memoranda at the request of DOB customers. These memoranda are an important part of OZA’s work as they allow DOB customers without a land use attorney or architect on their project team to apply directly to BZA, saving time and resources. These proposals ranged from homeowners seeking approval to build a deck or an addition to their existing principal dwelling unit to proposals for operating a child development center in a house of worship. Together, these activities reflect OZA’s commitment to transparency, streamlining processes, and supporting diverse projects across the District.

OCSE

Lastly, the Office of Strategic Code Enforcement (OCSE), led by Strategic Enforcement Administrator, Keith Parsons, oversees the Department's code enforcement functions to ensure actions are consistent, fair, and effective. OCSE integrates enforcement pathways across inspections, civil infractions, and alternative resolution mechanisms, supporting timely case progression and compliance. It also oversees the Office of Residential Inspections, which ensures multi-unit residential buildings meet code requirements and works to bring vacant and blighted properties into productive use.

In FY 2025, DOB significantly expanded inspection activity under OCSE's oversight. The Department completed 22,687 complaint-based inspections and 22,467 proactive inspections, representing increases of 27% and 31% respectively, compared to FY 2024. These increases reflect deliberate focus on earlier intervention, stronger compliance monitoring, and more proactive identification of code issues before they escalate into serious hazards.

DOB also conducted 11,277 vacant and blighted property inspections, remaining consistent with FY 2024 levels. These inspections continue to be a critical tool for addressing properties that pose risks to public safety, neighborhood stability, and housing quality. Through targeted enforcement strategies and cross-agency coordination, OCSE works to accelerate compliance timelines while ensuring that property owners are afforded appropriate notice and due process.

Additionally, in FY 2025, DOB issued more than 16,000 Notices of Infraction (NOIs), a 21% increase from FY 2024, and these 16,000 NOIs comprised more than 38,000 housing and

vacant property code violations. Of the 38,000 violations cited last year, 17,275, or nearly 45%, were abated in FY 2025.

When DOB issues a NOI for a violation, it may assess a fine to the responsible party. Uncollected fines are referred to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer's Central Collection's Unit (CCU) after adjudication and a final order from the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), a process that typically takes about six months. In FY 2025, DOB improved the precision and efficiency of its process management. The Department collected nearly \$2 million in fines, and for the first time, more than \$1 million of that amount came from collections made before the conclusion of the OAH case. Additionally, in FY 2025, DOB's fine collections exceeded 27% of invoiced fines, marking a significant single-year increase and the first time this collection rate has exceeded 25%. In FY 2025, CCU referrals decreased by 4% compared to FY 2024, reflecting DOB's growing ability to resolve cases internally and avoid the traditional adjudication-judgment-referral track. DOB is successfully moving away from the time- and resource-intensive adjudication process and, instead, resolving violations more quickly and efficiently through settlements and alternative resolution methods.

DOB has also grown adept at using its data to apply targeted pressure where needed. In FY 2025 the Department conducted large-scale escalated enforcement efforts against two property portfolios:

- 1) DOB conducted 1,328 inspections across 81 properties associated with Sam Razjooyan and identified more than 2,000 violations; and
- 2) DOB conducted 275 inspections across 15 properties associated with Petra Development/Rashid Salem and identified nearly 500 violations.

The DOB team continues to work with the various receivers, subsequent purchasers, and lenders for these properties to return them to compliance and make sure the owners take responsibility for their actions.

Together, these enforcement outcomes underscore the Department's commitment to improving compliance and prioritizing life safety while resolving violations quickly and reducing reliance on lengthy adjudication processes. At the same time, FY 2025 highlighted the need for modern, integrated systems to support enforcement staff, strengthen coordination with partner agencies, and sustain these gains as enforcement activity scales. These insights directly inform DOB's FY 2026 strategic priorities.

FY 2026 Strategic Priorities

Building on the lessons of FY 2025, DOB's FY 2026 strategic priorities are focused on implementation by deploying modern tools, streamlining processes, and strengthening coordination across the Department to improve safety outcomes, enhance customer experience, and increase accountability. These priorities aim to deliver tangible improvements for residents and businesses while positioning DOB to support the District's long-term growth and housing needs.

Safety First

DOB continues to improve the use of data to help identify where the greatest risks may lie whether in construction projects or in the rental housing marketplace. While most homeowners, developers, builders, and landlords may be acting in good faith, there are some which deserve higher levels of attention. Residential projects of three or more units and which involve the intent to excavate or underpin a foundation system require a higher level of scrutiny

to help ensure safety. Therefore, DOB made significant strides in refining project intake and plan review processes to identify underpinning and excavation risks early in smaller residential projects, enhancing safety before permits are approved. These refinements include a standardized checklist for reviewers, early engagement with design professionals, and a dedicated tracker to monitor projects and associated design engineers and contractors.

Similarly, in the rental housing marketplace, some landlords require enhanced attention to encourage abatement of violations. DOB employs a four-level “spectrum of force” for problem landlords, as follows:

- 1) Outreach and education—sometimes landlords are simply unaware of the District’s expectations, so our team reaches out to explain them;
- 2) Focused compliance assistance—sometimes landlords know our expectations, but have difficulty setting up responsive processes, so DOB’s team works with their management team to build a more responsive system;
- 3) Building-wide inspections and additional fines—landlords who are not cooperative may be subject to “blitzes” as we did last summer with two notable property portfolios; and finally,
- 4) Referral to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for receivership or other escalated enforcement.

Levels 3 and 4 are where we punch harder. The foundation of our work at levels 1 and 2 help build the case that more force is needed. This method works.

For example, DOB worked with OAG to place the property formerly known as Marbury Plaza into receivership and secure livable conditions for its tenants. The result was the largest

housing conditions verdict—\$41 million—in District history. In FY 2026, DOB will continue to focus on the safety of the District’s housing stock by punching harder against property owners who fail to respond to more gentle measures.

PUPS 2.0

In last year’s testimony, we highlighted the success of the Pop-up Permits (PUPs) pilot program administered by OCBS. This initiative was designed to help reactivate vacant properties by creating a streamlined path for customers to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for temporary use of previously vacant buildings—for up to one year—without navigating the traditional permitting process. DOB implemented a streamlined review process that prioritizes initial review to be completed in 15 business days while maintaining all required safety precautions.

To date, DOB has approved 16 PUPs across five wards. These applicants aim to activate nearly 63,000 square feet of vacant space for diverse uses, including arts and music, food, assemblies and gatherings, bars, and retail. One of the earlier Pop-Up Permits, Theatre Alliance in Southwest DC, recently signed a long-term lease in its original pop-up location, demonstrating that temporary activation can lead to long-term viability.

Given the program’s promise and its significant and immediate impact on revitalizing the city’s economic and cultural landscape, I am pleased to share that DOB will prioritize expanding PUPs in FY 2026 as one of our strategic priorities. We are currently gathering feedback from Business Improvement Districts and other stakeholders to inform the next iteration, PUPs 2.0.

DOB HUB

In 2026, DOB will launch the DOB HUB—Helping Uplift Businesses, a targeted initiative designed to streamline DOB services for businesses opening or expanding in the

District while maintaining safety and code compliance. The DOB HUB will establish a dedicated team to support prospective and existing business, with a particular emphasis on small businesses, restaurants, and retail establishments. The HUB will help businesses navigate DOB processes from permitting through occupancy, including support for Pop-Up Permit holders transitioning to permanent use.

Services will include pre-inspections, consultations, and centralized permit coordination for interior renovations, changes of use, and Certificates of Occupancy. The HUB will work closely with partners including the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, Business Improvement Districts, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection, the Department of Small and Local Business Development, and DC Health, to support a coordinated regulatory process. Through the DOB HUB, the Department aims to reduce delays, improve predictability, and support business growth while upholding safety standards.

Instant Permits for 1&2 Family Structures

In FY 2026, DOB will launch Instant Permits for one- and two-family structures. These were formerly called *Postcard Permits*, but this program widens the range of applicable project types. This initiative modernizes permit issuance for low-risk, non-structural work by allowing eligible projects to obtain certain permits with a single click. This approach eliminates unnecessary delays while ensuring compliance with all applicable codes and safety standards.

The first phase, launching this month, covers refined and new scopes, including solar installations. This phased rollout safeguards system integrity while incorporating feedback from homeowners and contractors. Later in FY 2026, DOB will expand Instant Permits to additional non-structural scopes, enabling homeowners to secure permits quickly and make improvements

without delay. By streamlining permitting for routine projects, Instant Permits reduce processing time, improve predictability, and allow staff to focus on higher-risk construction while maintaining DOB's commitment to safety and accountability.

Zoning Resource Library

In FY 2026, DOB will expand its public-facing, online Zoning Resource Library, a centralized portal that provides clear, accessible, and practical zoning information for residents, businesses, and the development community.

The Library will feature web-based documents covering common and complex zoning topics, consolidating written guidance, visual aids, and explanatory materials to reduce confusion, improve application quality, and accelerate zoning approvals. This effort began in September 2025 with the publication of detailed Dwelling Unit Covenant instructions, a revised Certificate of Inclusionary Zoning Compliance (CIZC) application and workflow diagram, and a primer on accessory apartments and flats. As the Library grows, it will promote greater consistency, clarity, and predictability for zoning reviews while improving customer experience.

Integrated Legal Case Management System

DOB plans to launch an Integrated Legal Case Management System in fall 2026 to modernize how administrative cases are tracked and resolved. This digital platform will streamline communication between DOB and OAH by automating case tracking, document sharing, and status updates across enforcement workflows.

By providing real-time visibility into violations, the new system will support faster hazard abatement, reduce administrative delays, and improve DOB's ability to hold property

owners accountable. This investment directly responds to enforcement challenges and enhances DOB's capacity to resolve violations efficiently while upholding due process.

The Agentic Workforce: AI-Ready Training Initiative

In FY 2026, DOB will invest in an internal AI-ready training initiative focused on training staff to work effectively alongside emerging technologies. This effort will emphasize workforce readiness, digital literacy, and responsible use of technology to support decision-making and service delivery. This initiative is designed to enhance staff capacity, not replace it, ensuring employees are equipped to use modern tools confidently, efficiently, and ethically as DOB modernizes its system workflows.

eRecords Modernization: Universal Document Access

DOB will upgrade its digital records system to simplify and expand public access to property records. This modernization will improve how staff and residents locate and use key documents, including permits, Certificates of Occupancy and Use, and NOIs. By integrating GIS and IBM Watson AI technologies, users will be able to conduct map-based searches for permits and Certificates of Occupancy. Transitioning to a cloud environment will further enhance search speed, while improvements to search fields will create a more intuitive and user-friendly experience. The enhanced eRecords system will reduce reliance on manual searches and paper records. Scheduled to launch in summer 2026, this initiative will strengthen customer service and boost internal efficiency.

Unified Customer Relationship Management

In fall 2026, DOB plans to launch a unified Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform to standardize how the Department receives, assigns, tracks, and resolves resident and

customer requests. This system will centralize customer interactions across programs, ensure consistent response times, and establish a reliable feedback loop for District residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. By improving visibility into request status and resolution timelines, the CRM will enhance transparency and customer confidence.

Conclusion

As DOB looks ahead to the coming year, we remain committed to running through the tape by delivering durable improvements that will continue to benefit District residents well beyond this fiscal year. FY 2026 marks a transition from planning to implementation, and we look forward to continued partnership with the Council to advance these priorities and strengthen systems that support safety, housing, and economic growth across the District. Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, Chair Lewis George, and Councilmembers. I am happy to answer your questions.