

Performance Audit

**Department of Public Works**  
**BUREAU OF ADMINISTRATION'S**  
**PERMIT OFFICE**

Report by the  
Office of City Controller

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February 2015

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MICHAEL E. LAMB

CITY CONTROLLER

First Floor City-County Building • 414 Grant Street • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

February 25, 2015

To the Honorables: Mayor William Peduto and  
Members of Pittsburgh City Council:

The Office of City Controller is pleased to present this performance audit of the *Department of Public Works Bureau of Administration's Permit Office* conducted pursuant to the Controller's powers under Section 404(c) of the Pittsburgh Home Rule Charter.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works is comprised of four Bureaus; Administration, Street/Parks Operations, Environmental Services and Transportation & Engineering. The Bureau of Administration is responsible for permit management, budget and finance functions, personnel, enforcement of the public right of way, and confirming all work or use is done in accordance with City standards.

The Department of Public Works administers 27 different types of permits. Each permit requires an individual to bring in the completed application or complete an application in person at DPW's 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Permit Office.

### Findings and Recommendations

#### *Initial Impressions and Signage*

**Finding:** The DPW Permit Office is not marked on the large sign outside the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue building entrance nor are there directions as to where to park for access to the office. Once entering the building there is one sign stating "Permit Office second floor" located at the bottom of the steps. No signage exists indicating that an elevator is located through the garage.

**Finding:** There are not enough of free parking spaces available in the rear of the building if more than two customers need to purchase a DPW Permit.

**Recommendation:** DPW Management should try to provide more free parking spaces for its patrons. If no more space is available in the parking lot then free parking should be provided on the street directly in front of the building during non-rush hours of operation.

**Finding:** Once a person enters the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. building's rear entrance there are no arrow(s) or instructions on how to reach the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Permit Office/Counter.

**Recommendation:** Appropriate signage should be displayed so visitors can easily locate the Permit Office/Counter and where parking is available.

### ***Traffic Obstruction and Other Permits***

Each DPW Permit employee is trained to complete all permits except traffic obstruction. Only one employee is able to approve traffic obstruction permits.

**Finding:** If the employee who approves traffic obstruction permits is unavailable, customers are directed to walk up to the City-County Building (CCB), take the elevator up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Public Works Engineering Department, and seek permit approval. For some other permits after visiting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Permit Office customers must go to the CCB (1<sup>st</sup> Floor), Special Events Office, to complete the permit process.

**Recommendation:** DPW Permit management must train more than one employee to complete Traffic Obstruction Permits. Or when the employee who is currently responsible for Traffic Obstruction permits is off work, one of the engineers from the CCB should be required to report to the Permit Division Office at 611 Second Avenue to handle Traffic Obstruction

**Finding:** Requiring a permit customer to go to another building to complete the permit process is burdensome and time consuming.

**Recommendation:** DPW Management should work toward creating a “one-stop shop” approach to the DPW Permitting process. This should improve efficiency by shortening the wait time and making it easier to obtain any permit

**Recommendation:** The Special Events Office should be moved to 611 Second Avenue to complete the “one-stop shop” goal. The auditors observed that there are empty office spaces to accommodate the two employees from the Special Events Office.

### ***Customer Service Phone Calls***

**Finding:** Calls are not being answered or returned in a timely manner.

**Finding:** Approximately 60% of the time, 9 out of 15 calls, went to voicemail. The auditors left two messages on May 21 requesting a return phone call using their cell phone number. As of the end of August 2014, no return phone call has been received.

**Finding:** A “busy signal” occurred three out of 15 times, or 20% of the time. The telephone was answered 3 out of the 15 (or 20%) attempts.

**Recommendation:** The DPW Permit Management should make sure the phone is answered and messages returned even if it means hiring another person. This will improve customer service to City residents and save them a trip to the Permit Office to get their question(s) answered.

**Recommendation:** The DPW Permit Office should have the capability of receiving and answering questions by e-mail. All staff should have access to this e-mail so that they may answer questions when they have time.

### ***Online Permit Information***

**Finding:** DPW Permit information is very difficult to find on the City’s website. The general public would not know which department to look under for permit information.

**Recommendation:** The City of Pittsburgh’s primary website should list the type of permits required by DPW and then include a shortcut or button that leads directly to DPW’s Permit information page.

**Finding:** Only 15 permits out of the 27 available permits are listed on the DPW’s website with applications, explanations or requirements.

**Finding:** DPW’s website does not provide basic details needed for the public to obtain various permits.

**Recommendation:** DPW’s permit website needs updated to become more user-friendly. First, it should clearly state the location of the Permit Office and the hours of operation the permit counter is opened. Next, it should give directions to the Office and tell visitors where to park while getting a permit.

### ***Webpage Access***

**Finding:** Outdated information often remains on the website until someone in IP has time to change it.

**Recommendation:** Designated personnel in the Permit Office should be granted access to the permit webpage to update and change information accordingly. This will allow changes and updates to be made in a timely manner.

**Finding:** The DPW permit webpages are not uniform in format or in the types of information offered.

**Recommendation:** All DPW permit pages on the website should follow the same format and offer the same information. If information is not available online then the webpage should say so.

**Finding:** Permits can take anywhere from 1 day to 3 months for approval.

**Recommendation:** On the DPW Permit Office webpage, it should be made clear how long the process takes for each permit to be approved or denied.

**Recommendation:** DPW Permit Management should include the names and pictures of each shelter, information about the shelter (its capacity, a summer or year round shelter, cooking facilities, playground/pool availability etc.) and the shelter's location on the Permit webpage. In time a virtual tour could also be added.

### ***City's Contract for an Online Permit System--ACCELA, Inc.***

In 2009, the City hired ACCELA Inc. to install a software product. This contract was to develop and implement an online system that would automate the permitting process. To complete the online permitting process the City had to purchase and configure an Internet-enabled Merchant Account Payment engine to interact with ACCELA.

**Finding:** To date the City has not completed its obligations under the terms of the 2009 ACCELA contract and the Public Works Permit Office is not able to accommodate online permit applications or process credit card payments.

**Finding:** As of September 12, 2014, over one million dollars has been paid to ACCELA for work associated with the June 2009 contract.

**Recommendation:** The DPW administration needs to implement a credit card system and online application capabilities ASAP. This will make the entire process faster, easier and convenient. DPW Permit Office needs to work with the Innovation and Performance Department to get these applications up and running.

According to the DPW Administrator, the current Administration is reevaluating the ACCELA and RecPro software programs that are now being used.

**Recommendation:** The City has already invested over one million dollars in the ACCELA software system and should not waste this investment. Installing a VeriSign/PayPal payment engine is an easy fix to bring online application and credit card capabilities to the DPW Permit Office. To invest more tax dollars into another software system is a waste because the City did not complete its obligation under the 2009 contract terms.

**Recommendation:** If it is decided that the contract be continued with ACCELA, DPW Permit Office Management needs to meet with ACCELA staff to design the online application website.

### *ACCELA Permit Data Analysis*

**Finding:** There were 8,987 permits issued in 2012 that generated \$1,222,389.30 in fees and 8,893 permits issued in 2013 generating \$1,591,666.88.

**Finding:** In 2012, Utility Cut Permits had a total of 2,600 permits issued generating the largest dollar amount in fees of \$433,475.28. The second largest fee generator was Barricade Permits totaling \$270,427.15 with 294 permits issued. The third highest fee generator is Machinery Permits with \$204,916.00 with 823 permits issued.

**Finding:** In 2013, Utility Cut permits had a total of 2,543 permits issued generating the largest dollar amount in fees of \$534,604.40. The second largest fee generator was Barricade Permits totaling \$65,448.70 with 218 permits issued.

**Finding:** In 2012, Street Vacations was the smallest fee generator with 8 permits issued totaling \$1,200. In 2013, staging was the smallest fee generator with 3 permits issued totaling \$75.00.

### *Land Operations Permits*

A Land Operations Permit involves several City Departments and one Authority in various locations throughout the City. The process starts with a PDF application from the DPW Permit Office website. It is then taken to the Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI) which as of December 2014 became the Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections (PLI), then to Zoning, back to DPW Permits, then to the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) back to PLI where, after final approval, the permit fee is paid and the permit issued.

**Finding:** According to DPW staff, there is no category listed on ACCELA for Land Operations Permits because this permit is generated in PLI.

**Recommendation:** DPW Administration needs to decide whether to continue having the Land Operation Permits listed on the DPW webpage. The Land Operation Permit process starts and ends with PLI so the application and information about the Land Operation Permits should be under the PLI webpage.

**Recommendation:** The names of the permits listed in the ACCELA database, online or on permit applications need to be consistent. All permits should be listed in the ACCELA reports accordingly.

### ***Field and Shelter Permits***

Fields and Shelter permits are tracked in a different database called RecPro and provide separate data for DPW. Shelter permit season opens with the DPW Permit Office conducting a yearly Permit Day for City residents to reserve any of the City's 26 shelters from May 1<sup>st</sup> thru September 30<sup>th</sup>. Permit Day is the only day the Permits Office will accept cash. On average, the Permit Office issues 200 permits and collects approximately \$40,000 on this day.

**Finding:** No outside Department helps oversee the handling of cash at this event; only DPW staff.

In 2013 the Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority of Pittsburgh (ICA) had Gleason and Associates, PC access the Department of Public Works Cash Management Practices and release a report.

**Recommendation:** The 2013 Gleason Report recommended a member from the Finance Department should be present and assigned to oversee and verify the handling of cash if DPW continues with this type of Permit Day sign-up. If a member from the Finance Department is not available than a City Controller employee should be assigned to the job.  
Other Permit Day Options

**Recommendation:** An online lottery system should be implemented to eliminate the Permit Day. Something similar to the Pittsburgh Public School District could be used. A person could submit their name, date and shelter preference online giving a 2<sup>nd</sup> shelter choice. Several online lottery systems are available to accommodate this process.

**Finding:** Shelter permits are issued for one of the following eight hour periods: 11am-7pm, 12pm-8pm or 1pm-9pm.

**Recommendation:** An online calendar should be uploaded to the Permit Website, so people can see when a particular field or Shelter is available. If the permit staff had access to the Permit website, this calendar could be updated daily as payments are received. An updated online shelter calendar would eliminate many of the phone calls to the department asking about shelter availability.

### ***RecPro Field Permit Analysis***

**Finding:** Compared to 2012, fields in 2013 grossed 53% less revenue. The top 5 fields grossed \$44,470.00 less in 2013 than 2012 a 59 % drop in revenue. There was a 3% shelter revenue decrease from 2012 to 2013.

**Recommendation:** DPW Permits management should try and find out why there was a drop in revenue for Field Permits in 2013. Possible reasons could be weather related; another reason could be field condition. If field conditions are the cause than Permits management should inform Parks Maintenance so the situation can be corrected.

### ***RecPro Shelter Permit Analysis***

**Finding:** In 2012 and 2013, the Vietnam Veteran's Pavilion generated the largest dollar amount in revenue grossing \$37,110.00 (2012) and \$32,692.50 (2013).

**Finding:** The second and third largest revenue generating shelters in 2012 were the Activities Building in Riverview Park grossing \$17,583.00 and The Rhododendron Shelter grossing \$16,526.25. In 2013 the second and third highest revenue generating shelters were reversed with The Rhododendron Shelter grossing \$18,056.25 and the Activities Building in Riverview Park grossing \$17,703.00.

**Finding:** The smallest revenue generating shelter in 2012 and 2013 was the Sheraden Park shelter grossing \$750.00 (2012) and \$525.00 (2013).

### ***Public Works Inspectors***

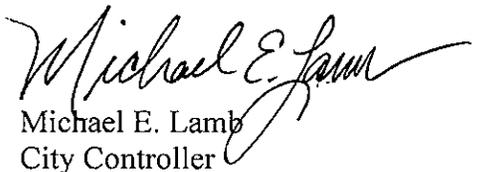
Permit Administration states that all permits issued by the Office require inspection by Department Inspectors. According to DPW Administration, there are 6 Inspector positions and 4 are filled. Being shorthanded with only 4 inspectors working, it is possible that some permit inspections are not being conducted or are not completed in a timely manner.

**Finding:** Logically when a contractor has to wait for a Permit Inspector it is not only frustrating to the contractor but increases expenses for the project.

**Recommendation:** Vacant Public Works inspector positions should be filled promptly. For an Office that generates approximately \$1.5 million a year to not have a full complement of Inspectors is negligent.

We are pleased that the Department of Public Works Bureau of Administration's Permit Office agrees with our recommendations and have begun the process of implementing them.

Sincerely,

  
Michael E. Lamb  
City Controller

## INTRODUCTION

This performance audit of the Department of Public Works Bureau of Administration's Permit Office was conducted pursuant to section 404(c) of the Pittsburgh Home Rule Charter. The audit examines the processes and procedures used by the Department of Public Works (DPW) for permit issuance. This is the first performance audit of DPW's Permit Office.

## OVERVIEW

The City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works is comprised of four Bureaus; Administration, Street/Parks Operations, Environmental Services and Transportation & Engineering. The Bureau of Administration is responsible for permit management, budget and finance functions, personnel, enforcement of the public right of way, and confirming all work or use is done in accordance with City standards.

The Department of Public Works administers 27 different types of permits. Each permit requires an individual to bring in the completed application or complete an application in person at DPW's 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Permit Office. Permits are required for: Banners, Design of New City Streets, New Street Name Requests, Street Address Assignments, Encroachments, Demolition Dumpsters, Vacations of City Streets, Traffic Obstructions, Land Operations, Curb Cut, Utility Cuts (Street/Sidewalk Openings), Valet, Pole, Machinery, Barricade, Bridge, Block Party, Extension of Premise, Minor Obstruction, Scaffold, Staging, Sidewalk Cafés (code 416.03 (e)), Sidewalk Repair, Stationary Vending, Shelter, Ball Field and General permits. At times, more than one permit is required for a certain request. The following is a brief description of each permit.

**Banner permits** are required to ensure banner guidelines are being met and designs are: effective, maintain aesthetics and quality.

**Design of New City Street, New Street Name Requests and Street Address Assignments** are all permits that require approval of new city streets, names and address assignments (upon review of survey information).

**Encroachments, Demolition Dumpsters and Vacations of City Streets** are permits concerned with the closing, selling, obstruction or elimination of access to any public right-of-way including sidewalks, streets, roads, alleys and/or highways.

**Traffic Obstruction permits** are used to safely and effectively maintain traffic flow after public right-of-ways have been obstructed.

**Land Operation Permits and Curb Cut Permits** are two separate permits but both involve some sort of modification. Both require approval before: alterations can be made to curbs or grading/excavation/filling, surface mining, removal of trees/vegetation/natural ground, surfacing and paving of land and transportation of material over public streets for disposal can occur.

**Utility Cuts permits** are required for any opening of a street or sidewalk.

**Valet permits** have only recently been acquired by the DPW department within the last two years from BBI and are required when spaces or streets are blocked due to business valets.

**Pole permits** are required for telephone poles.

**Machinery permits** are any vehicle or piece of machinery obstructing a street or right of way.

**Barricade permits** are required if any street or sidewalk needs barricaded, road needs closed or rerouting of traffic needs to occur due to work.

**Bridge permits** are less common but are required when bridges are placed over sidewalks when work is occurring or for any pedestrian bridge.

**Block Party permits** are required if the entire block is participating in a party requiring the street to be barricaded.

**Extension of Premise permits** are required if a shop wishes to extend a display outside; the display cannot exceed more than three feet.

**Minor Obstruction permits** are for various obstacles. Section 416.02 of the Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances lists these as: temporary barricades, walkways, curb cuts (over 36'), erecting, replacing or relocating utility poles and or anchors, erection of scaffold over roadways or sidewalks, repairing or reconstruction of sidewalk, temporary bridge, temporary placement of machinery, staging area, temporary commercial dumpsters, pole banners, banners across street, festivals, canopies, projected signs or awnings, block party obstruction and extension of premise. (For more detailed explanations see the Code)

**Scaffold permits** are required if scaffolding is used on any side of a building or on the sidewalk right-of-way.

**Staging permits** are required when work is being done on street and sidewalk openings. Sand and gravel take up parking spots on street or parking lot and the permit is required to hold those spots.

**Sidewalk Cafe permits** are required for any restaurant interested in a sidewalk café that already has a valid retail food license and occupancy permit.

**Sidewalk Repair permits** are any repairs made to the sidewalk.

**Stationary Vending permits** are required for any vending machine at a fixed location or sport's entertainment facility.

**Shelters and Ball Field permits** are required for the rental of fields and open/enclosed shelters throughout the City.

Finally, any permit that does not fall in an above category falls into **General permits**.

DPW permits should not be confused with the permits issued by the Department of Public Safety's Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI); the permits are entirely different in type and cost. The only things the Bureaus have in common are that they both use the ACCELA computer system and some DPW permits may go to the BBI for signatures.

#### Location, Personnel, Hours and Revenue

The DPW Permit Division Office is located at 611 Second Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh and consists of one supervisor and five employees with one being an intern. Permit counter staff processes and issues all 27 permits; however, some permits require other department's involvement like BBI, Zoning and the Special Events Office. The permit counter office hours are Monday thru Friday 7:00 AM -3:00 PM. In 2012, DPW Permit fees brought in \$1,222,389.30 and in 2013, \$1,591,666.88 a 30% increase.

## **SCOPE**

The scope of this DPW Permit Audit is all permits issued from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2013.

The on-site observations were performed on April 25, 2014 and May 15, 2014.

Customer service telephone evaluation was conducted on May 21, 22 & 23, 2014.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To assess the processes and procedures of the DPW's Permits.
2. To assess the ease and efficiency of current permitting procedures.
3. To assess whether or not the website and permit applications are user friendly.
4. To assess the Permit's Office customer service operations.
5. To make recommendations for improvement.

## METHODOLOGY

The auditors met with the Director of Public Works and the Operations Manager to discuss the permitting process and procedures.

Audit staff interviewed the Permit Department Supervisor to review the permitting process, operations, staffing and website management. The Permit Counter Staff was also interviewed to learn the permit issuance process for the various permits.

Auditors reviewed the permit information found on the City's website under Department of Public Works and its budget data. The City's 2009 contract with ACCELA was also reviewed.

A request was made for a list of all permits issued during the audit scope years 2012 and 2013, by type and amount of money collected. Data for 25 of the permits was entered into the ACCELA software program and given to the auditors in an Adobe PDF file. Then the information was converted into Excel spreadsheets by the Controller's Office for data analysis. DPW issued 8,987 permits in 2012 and 8,893 in 2013. The permits for shelters and fields were entered into a RecPro software program. DPW provided us with a copy of the RecPro data as well. It was also converted into Excel for analysis.

Auditors observed permit operations on April 25<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Auditors conducted an evaluation of customer service accessibility by randomly calling the Permit Office telephone number throughout the day on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Gleason and Associates, PC conducted an audit in December of 2013 of DPW's cash management practices. The auditors reviewed the data and recommendations presented in that audit.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### DPW Permit Office

#### Permit Process

When a customer approaches the DPW Permit Counter, the clerk assists them by either writing the permit or directing them to the appropriate staff member who specializes in that type of permit. Traffic Obstruction permits are a perfect example of this and these permit requests are sent to another office near the Permit Counter. However, most permits are issued at the Permit Counter.

The clerk enters the customer's name and other contact information into ACCELA Permits Plus. ACCELA Permits Plus is the computer software program that the City purchased in 2003 for several City Departments or Bureaus. In 2011 the program changed and was just called ACCELA.

ACCELA populates the selected permit (arranges the data appropriate to the permit) and indicates whether the individual will pay by either check or money order. Cash is only accepted on Permit Day for shelter permits. Five copies of the permit are printed; one copy is filed at the Permit Office, one is sent to the division, one is given to the customer, one is given to the Inspector and one is for billing along with the check.

Checks and money orders are immediately stamped with a "City of Pittsburgh" stamp after collection and the permit number purchased is written on each check. Checks are taken to the Department of Finance twice a week.

#### Initial Impressions and Signage

The auditor's first visit to the DPW Permit Office was through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue entrance. There was a small sign on the door to indicate that the DPW Permit Office was in the building. It was only because of past experience that the auditor's knew to go through the door and turn right into the garage to access an elevator that would take them up to where the offices were. Once on the elevator the second floor button is marked for the Permits Office/Counter. If one did not know where the elevator was you would have to walk up 2 flights of steps to reach the Permit Office on the second floor.

**Finding:** There is no mention of the DPW Permit Office on the large sign outside the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue building entrance or where to park for access to the office. One sign stating "Permit Office second floor" was at the bottom of the steps but no signage indicating where an elevator is located.

The auditor's second visit to the DPW Permit Office was through the rear entrance of the 2nd Avenue building. To reach the rear entrance one must walk or drive up a very steep hill. It is so steep that there is a possibility of scraping the bottom of your car unless you travel very slowly. At the top of the hill there is a parking lot. The building is on the right and is marked DPW Permits; 4 steps or a handicapped ramp will take you down into the building. Four (4) parking spaces are made available for visitors to the building; two of these are for customers with disabilities. Other parking can be paid for on street and at surrounding parking lots.

**Finding:** There are not enough free parking spaces available in the rear of the building if more than two customers need to purchase a DPW Permit.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 1:**

DPW Management should try to provide more free parking spaces for its patrons. If no more space is available in the parking lot then free parking should be provided on the street directly in front of the building during non-rush hours of operation.

Inside the building's rear entrance the floor looks empty and a receptionist is not available. There is a small sign at the end of the hall that reads "the permit office is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor".

**Finding:** The rear entrance has no arrow(s) or instructions on how to reach the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Permit Office/Counter.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 2:**

Appropriate signage should be displayed so visitors can easily locate the Permit Office/Counter and where parking is available.

**Traffic Obstruction Permits**

Each DPW Permit employee is trained to complete all permits except traffic obstruction. Only one employee is able to approve traffic obstruction permits.

**Finding:** If the employee who approves traffic obstruction permits is unavailable, customers are directed to walk up to the City-County Building (CCB), take the elevator up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Public Works Engineering Department, and seek permit approval.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 3:**

DPW Permit management must train more than one employee to complete Traffic Obstruction Permits. Or when the employee who is currently responsible for Traffic Obstruction permits is off work, one of the engineers from the CCB should be required to report to the Permit Division Office at 611 Second Avenue to handle Traffic Obstruction permits. It is inconvenient and time consuming for people needing permits to have to go to different buildings.

**Other Permit Requirements**

Certain Permits such as Traffic Obstruction, Street Openings and Closure permits require an off-duty police officer to be present on the job site to ensure that public safety and traffic controls are being met. Individual circumstances (such as street location, type of work to be done) of each construction project dictate the need for an off-duty police officer to be present on the job site. After visiting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Permit Office the individual must go to the CCB (1<sup>st</sup> Floor), Special Events Office, to complete the permit process.

**Finding:** Requiring a permit customer to go to another building to complete the permit process is burdensome and time consuming.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 4:**

DPW Management should work toward creating a “one-stop shop” approach to the DPW Permitting process. This should improve efficiency by shortening the wait time and making it easier to obtain any permit

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 5:**

The Special Events Office should be moved to 611 Second Avenue to complete the “one-stop shop” goal. The auditors observed that there are empty office spaces to accommodate the two employees from the Special Events Office.

**Customer Service Phone Calls**

During several visits to the DPW Permit Office the auditors witnessed the permit counter’s phone ringing and not being answered by available personnel.

Conversations with the Supervisor indicated that the employee who answered the telephone had recently retired. Phone calls go to voicemail and are written down on paper and called back by another employee when there is time. The auditors were shown a number of

sheets of paper for various days listing telephone numbers to be called back. Only a few on each sheet were crossed out indicating that the phone call had been returned.

**Finding:** Calls are not being answered or returned in a timely manner.

#### Customer Service Accessibility Testing

The auditors evaluated the accessibility of DPW Permit customer service by randomly calling the Permit Office telephone number throughout the day. For three consecutive days, May 21, 22, and 23<sup>rd</sup>, the auditors called the Permit Office using both a City phone number and a personal cell phone. Each day five calls were randomly made, a total of 15 telephone calls, and results recorded. The auditors found three possible outcomes when the Permit Office number was dialed:

- Outcome #1: After 4 rings the call goes to voicemail where you are asked to leave your name and telephone number, and your call will be returned within 24 hours.
- Outcome #2: A “busy signal” without the opportunity to leave a message.
- Outcome #3: Someone answered the telephone call and answered the auditor’s question. (The auditor’s questions were about shelter(s) price, capacity and availability.)

**Finding:** Approximately 60% of the time, 9 out of 15 calls, went to voicemail. The auditors left two messages on May 21 requesting a return phone call using their cell phone number. As of the end of August 2014, no return phone call has been received.

**Finding:** A “busy signal” occurred three out of 15 times, or 20% of the time.

**Finding:** The telephone was answered three times out of 15 attempts or 20% of calls were answered.

#### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 6:**

The DPW Permit Management should make sure the phone is answered and messages returned even if it means hiring another person. This will improve customer service to City residents and save them a trip to the Permit Office to get their question(s) answered.

#### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 7:**

The DPW Permit Office should have the capability of receiving and answering questions by e-mail. All staff should have access to this e-mail so that they may answer questions when they have time.

An online permit question e-mail will reduce the number of calls to the Permit Office and unnecessary trips to the Office for questions to be answered. Every one of the seven staff members should have access to this e-mail address. Responses can be made by anyone when time allows or when there is down time. This will result in more timely responses to clients.

## **Online Permit Information**

### Webpage/Website Information

DPW has a website that can be accessed through the City of Pittsburgh's website. To navigate the Permit information, individuals need to click on City Directory → Public Works → Permit Information.

**Finding:** DPW Permit information is very difficult to find on the City's website. The general public would not know which department to look under for permit information.

### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 8:**

The City of Pittsburgh's primary website should list the type of permits required by DPW and then include a shortcut or button that leads directly to DPW's Permit information page.

**Finding:** Only 15 permits out of the 27 available permits are listed on the DPW's website with applications, explanations or requirements.

The permits listed on the website are Banner, Shelters, Ball Field, Design of New City Streets, New Street Name Request, Street Address Assignments, Encroachments, Demolition Dumpsters, Vacation of City Streets, Traffic Obstruction, Land Operation, Curb Cut, Utility Cuts, Sidewalk Café, and Stationary Vending Permits. Twelve (12) permits are not listed on the website; Staging, Scaffold, Extension of Premises, Block Party, Bridge, Barricade, Pole, Valet, Machinery, Minor Obstruction, Sidewalk Repair and General Permits.

**Finding:** DPW's website does not provide basic details needed for the public to obtain various permits.

For example, the DPW Permit webpage does not specify the hours of operation for the permit counter or parking instructions. It also lists various addresses throughout the website that causes confusion as to the exact location of the Permit Office.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 9:**

DPW's permit website needs updated to become more user-friendly. First, it should clearly state the location of the Permit Office and the hours of operation the permit counter is opened. Next, it should give directions to the Office and tell visitors where to park while getting a permit.

Webpage Access

Webpage access has been controlled by the web masters in the City's Computer Information Services (CIS) Department, now the newly revamped Innovation & Performance Department (IP).

**Finding:** Outdated information often remains on the website until someone in IP has time to change it.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 10:**

Designated personnel in the Permit Office should be granted access to the permit webpage to update and change information accordingly. This will allow changes and updates to be made in a timely manner.

Most of the individual permit pages on the website have a different format and different types of information. Some pages include applications, requirements, steps to completion, addition information, etc. and some do not.

**Finding:** The DPW permit webpages are not uniform in format or in the types of information offered.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 11:**

All DPW permit pages on the website should follow the same format and offer the same information. If information is not available online then the webpage should say so.

To ensure that the website is user friendly, all permit pages should include: steps to obtaining a permit, required documentation, an online or a PDF application (if applicable), and the permit office hours. Ensuring as much information as possible on the main page eliminates the frustration of people showing up without the required documentation. The majority of permits do not require an application; rather they require documentation and/or verbal confirmation at the Permit counter. The website should make this clear.

Ten out of the 15 permits currently listed on the website display the turn-over time for approval. Five of the permits including: Banner Permits, Field Permits, Land Operations Permits, Sidewalk Café Permits and Stationary Vending Application Permits do not list the amount of time required for the process and approval.

**Finding:** Permits can take anywhere from 1 day to 3 months for approval.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 12:**

On the DPW Permit Office webpage, it should be made clear how long the process takes for each permit to be approved or denied.

Permit Office staff stated that the shelter permits are one of the two most popular permits. However, many people come in requesting shelter permits but they don't know the difference between the different shelters, their capacity, kitchen availability etc.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 13:**

DPW Permit Management should include the names and pictures of each shelter, information about the shelter (its capacity, a summer or year round shelter, cooking facilities, playground/pool availability etc.) and the shelter's location on the Permit webpage. In time a virtual tour could also be added.

**City's Contract for an Online Permit System**

ACCELA, Inc.

In 2003, the City hired ACCELA Inc. to install a software product called Permits Plus. Later that same year the contract was expanded to include additional software services of the system for various Departments and Bureaus throughout the City.

The City again, in June 2009, amended the ACCELA, Inc. agreement and signed a \$1.3 million contract which states that it will "implement ACCELA Automation Land Management and Licensing modules for use by . . . Department of Public Works . . .". For DPW this contract was to develop and implement an online system that would automate the permitting process.

ACCELA's website contains a press release from its annual User Conference dated August 4, 2009. This release states "ACCELA AUTOMATION software will provide the back-end functionality for an online infrastructure that will empower Pittsburgh's residents and businesses by allowing them to apply and pay for most permits online and to track the approval processes from start to finish".

In order for ACCELA to provide an “online infrastructure” for online payments etc. the June 2009 contract required certain action by the City of Pittsburgh or “the Agency”. The contract reads: “It should be noted that the Agency must purchase and configure an Internet-enabled Merchant Account Payment engine to interact with ACCELA. ACCELA interfaces directly with the payment engine used by VeriSign/PayPal.”

**Finding:** To date the City has not completed its obligations under the terms of the 2009 ACCELA contract and the Public Works Permit Office is not able to accommodate online permit applications or process credit card payments.

**Finding:** As of September 12, 2014, over one million dollars has been paid to ACCELA for work associated with the June 2009 contract.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 14:**

The DPW administration needs to implement a credit card system and online application capabilities ASAP. This will make the entire process faster, easier and convenient. DPW Permit Office needs to work with the Innovation and Performance Department to get these applications up and running.

According to the DPW Administrator, the current Administration is making the online permit applications and ability to process credit card payments a priority. The auditors were also told that the new Administration is reevaluating the ACCELA and RecPro software programs that are now being used.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 15:**

The City has already invested over one million dollars in the ACCELA software system and should not waste this investment. Installing a VeriSign/PayPal payment engine is an easy fix to bring online application and credit card capabilities to the DPW Permit Office. To invest more tax dollars into another software system is a waste because the City did not complete its obligation under the 2009 contract terms.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 16:**

If it is decided that the contract be continued with ACCELA, DPW Permit Office Management needs to meet with ACCELA staff to design the online application website.

**ACCELA Permit Data Analysis**

The auditors requested a list of the ACCELA based permits issued during the audit

scope period. The data received from this ACCELA database was converted to an Excel spreadsheet listing the following: permit number, permit type, address, file date and time, business name, contact name, phone number and permit fee amounts. This data was then summarized by permit type and permit fees.

There are 27 different types of Permits available through DPW Permits Office. ACCELA keeps track of 25 of these permits. The other two (2) permits, Field and Shelters, are tracked in another software program, RecPro, explained and analyzed later in this audit.

If a permit is not listed in either Table 1 or 2, it is because it was not issued in that year. For example, Design of New City Street, New Street Name Requests and Street Address Assignments are not listed in the Tables because they rarely happen.

**Finding:** There were 8,987 permits issued in 2012 that generated \$1,222,389.30 in fees and 8,893 permits issued in 2013 generating \$1,591,666.88.

Table 1 lists the various types of ACCELA permits issued and the total dollar amount generated in 2012.

**TABLE 1**

<b>2012 PUBLIC WORKS PERMIT OFFICE Number of ACCELA Permits Issued and Revenue Generated</b>		
<b>PERMIT TYPE</b>	<b>NUMBER ISSUED</b>	<b>PERMIT FEE DOLLAR AMOUNT</b>
Banners	33	\$110,672.00
Barricade	294	\$270,427.15
Block Party	211	\$4,925.00
Bridge	6	\$13,570.87
Curb Cut	148	\$23,235.00
Demolition Dumpster	904	\$88,355.00
Encroachment	22	\$10,330.00
Extension of Premises	24	\$1,275.00
General	98	\$4,530.00
Machinery	823	\$204,916.00
Minor Obstruction	15	\$2,250.00
Utility Cuts (Street/Sidewalk opening)	2,600	\$433,475.28
Pole	303	\$20,000.00
Scaffold	59	\$8,100.00
Sidewalk Café	39	\$1,977.00
Sidewalk Repair	389	\$23,151.00
Street Vacations	8	\$1,200.00
Traffic Obstruction*	3,011	0
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>8,987</b>	<b>\$1,222,389.30</b>

\*Traffic Obstruction Permits issued 3,011 permits with no fees. The fees related to Traffic Obstruction are generated in Utility Cut Permits.

**Finding:** In 2012, Utility Cut Permits had a total of 2,600 permits issued generating the largest dollar amount in fees of \$433,475.28. The second largest fee generator was Barricade Permits totaling \$270,427.15 with 294 permits issued. The third highest fee generator is Machinery Permits with \$204,916.00 with 823 permits issued.

**Finding:** In 2012, Street Vacations was the smallest fee generator with 8 permits issued totaling \$1,200.

Table 2 lists the various types of ACCELA permits issued and the total dollar amount generated in 2013. There were 21 different permit categories used in 2013.

**TABLE 2**

<b>2013</b>		
<b>PUBLIC WORKS PERMIT OFFICE</b>		
<b>Number of ACCELA Permits Issued and Revenue Generated</b>		
<b>PERMIT TYPE*</b>	<b>NUMBER ISSUED</b>	<b>PERMIT FEE DOLLAR AMOUNT</b>
Banners	34	\$92,390.00
Barricade	218	\$265,448.70
Block Party	203	\$4,750.00
Bridge	14	\$37,019.78
Curb Cut	165	\$17,790.00
Demolition Dumpster	1,077	\$134,225.00
Encroachment	16	\$6,780.00
Ext of Premises	17	\$1,425.00
General	81	\$3,505.00
Machinery	775	\$202,557.00
Minor Obstruction	20	\$3,000.00
Utility Cuts (Street/Sidewalk opening)	2,543	\$534,604.40
Pole	423	\$79,200.00
Scaffold	45	\$8,687.50
Sidewalk Café	77	\$6,599.50
Sidewalk Repair	364	\$23,755.00
Staging	3	\$75.00
Street Vacations	13	\$163,575.
Traffic Obstruction**	2,777	0
Valet	27	\$6,030.00
Vending*	1	0
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>8,893</b>	<b>\$1,591,666.88</b>

\*No fee is required for this permit if it is a renewal.

\*\*Traffic Obstruction Permits issued 2,777 permits with no fees. The fees related to Traffic Obstruction are generated in Utility Cut Permits.

**Finding:** In 2013, Utility Cut permits had a total of 2,543 permits issued generating the largest dollar amount in fees of \$534,604.40. The second largest fee generator was Barricade Permits totaling \$65,448.70 with 218 permits issued.

Utility Cut and Barricade Permits were also the number one and two, respectively, generating permits in 2012.

**Finding:** In 2013, staging was the smallest fee generator with 3 permits issued totaling \$75.00.

### **Other Permits**

#### Land Operations Permits

The process to complete a Land Operations Permit starts on the DPW Permit webpage with printing the PDF application. Once completed, the application is taken to the Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI) (whose name, as of December 2014, was changed to the Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections or PLI), for an approval signature, then to the Zoning Office for a signature and notary. Both are located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of 200 Ross Street in downtown Pittsburgh.

The next step in the application process is to go to Second Avenue for DPW Permit Office approval and signature (1/2 block away), followed by a trip to the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) on Penn Avenue in the Strip District for PWSA signature and approval; this in another part of the City almost a mile away. For final review, the application returns to PLI with submission of an insurance certificate and bond. PLI reviews and when approved contacts the applicant with the amount of the permit fee. The fee is paid at the PLI license and cashiers counter where the permit is issued.

**Finding:** According to DPW staff, there is no category listed on ACCELA for Land Operations Permits because this permit is generated and paid for at PLI.

#### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 17:**

DPW Administration needs to decide whether to continue having the Land Operation Permits listed on the DPW webpage. The Land Operation Permit process starts and ends with PLI, so the application and information about the Land Operation Permits should be under the PLI webpage.

#### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 18:**

The names of the permits listed in the ACCELA database, online or on permit applications need to be consistent. All permits should be listed in the ACCELA reports accordingly.

## Field and Shelter Permits

There are 135 fields for baseball, softball, football, soccer, rugby and lacrosse throughout the City and 26 picnic shelters. Fields requests can be made for spring or fall sport seasons. The cost to rent any field is \$20 per hour for adults and free for youths 18 and under. The prices for picnic shelters vary. Table 5-A through 5-H list the cost of each shelter and the amount of money each shelter generated in 2012 and 2013.

Fields and Shelter permits are tracked in a different database called RecPro and provide separate data for DPW. Like the ACCELA permit information, RecPro files were converted to an Excel database for the auditors to analyze.

Youth groups are given priority booking for reserving Field permits before adults. The Permit Office sends letters out to youth groups and other organizations that have booked each field in the past as a reminder that if they want to secure the field again, they need to contact the Permit Office. Other groups can call the Permit Office or apply in-person to reserve a field, along with payment and a team roster.

Shelter permit season opens with the DPW Permit Office conducting a yearly Permit Day for City residents to reserve any of the City's 26 shelters from May 1<sup>st</sup> thru September 30<sup>th</sup>. Permit Day occurs on a Saturday in early spring and is held in the lobby of the City-County Building. Doors open at 8:00 AM but people begin lining up as early as the evening before.

The shelter Permit Day process is NOT first come, first serve. Each person in line is handed a randomly selected number. That number determines when one can get in line to purchase the desired shelter. Individuals bring family members and friends with hopes that someone in their group will get a lower number. This increases ones chance of securing the desired shelter on the day they prefer.

**Permit Day is the only day the Permits Office will accept cash.** On average, the Permit Office issues 200 permits and collects approximately \$40,000 on this day.

**Finding:** No outside Department helps oversee the handling of cash at this event; only DPW staff.

### **RECOMMENDATION NO. 19:**

The 2013 Gleason Report recommended a member from the Finance Department should be present and assigned to oversee and verify the handling of cash if DPW continues with this type of Permit Day sign-up. If a member from the Finance Department is not available than a City Controller employee should be assigned to the job.

Other Permit Day Options

The auditors researched alternative plans for DPW Permit Day. Austin, Texas Department of Parks and Recreation conduct an online lottery for rental of parks and shelters.

Locally, the Pittsburgh Public School District uses an online weighted lottery for admissions to magnet programs. Families choose 3 programs that they would wish their child to attend. There is a closing date, after which a lottery is conducted for each desired program. Families are notified if their child was accepted to their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice. If none of the 3 choices are successful then the child is wait-listed for each program.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 20:**

An online lottery system should be implemented to eliminate the Permit Day. Something similar to the Pittsburgh Public School District could be used. A person could submit their name, date and shelter preference online giving a 2<sup>nd</sup> shelter choice. Several online lottery systems are available to accommodate this process.

After Permit Day, an individual can call the Permit Office at 412-255-2370 to inquire on the availability of a shelter and if the caller desires that shelter and time, the Permit Office staff will hold the reservation for 10 days. Before the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> day, full payment must be made in person at the Permit Office with a company check or money order. According to DPW staff the Permit Office no longer accepts personal checks because too many personal checks were bouncing. A calendar book for each shelter is kept to track the availability of shelters.

**Finding:** Shelter permits are issued for one of the following eight hour periods: 11am-7pm, 12pm-8pm or 1pm-9pm.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 21:**

An online calendar should be uploaded to the Permit Website, so people can see when a particular field or Shelter is available. If the permit staff had access to the Permit website, this calendar could be updated daily as payments are received. An updated online shelter calendar would eliminate many of the phone calls to the department asking about shelter availability.

**RecPro Field Permit Analysis**

One hundred and twenty (120) different kinds of fields are located throughout the City. Table 3 lists the top 5 field revenue generators for 2012 and 2013. Three fields, West Penn, Spring Hill, and Fineview, are among the top 5 revenue generator for both 2012 and 2013.

**TABLE 3**

<b>TOP 5 FIELD REVENUES GENERATORS for 2012 and 2013</b>			
<b>Field Name</b>	<b>2012 Revenue</b>	<b>Field Name</b>	<b>2013 Revenue</b>
West Penn Field	<b>\$18,455.00</b>	West Penn Field	<b>\$9,450.00</b>
Spring Hill Field	<b>\$15,500.00</b>	Fineview Field	<b>\$8,035.00</b>
Fineview Field	<b>\$14,780.00</b>	Dan Marino Field	<b>\$6,800.00</b>
Overbrook School Field	<b>\$13,480.00</b>	Arlington Field	<b>\$6,640.00</b>
McKinley Park Field	<b>\$13,180.00</b>	Spring Hill Field	<b>\$5,760.00</b>

**Finding:** In 2012 and 2013, West Penn Field grossed the highest revenue of \$18,455.00 and \$9,450.00 respectively.

Table 4 shows the total money collected for both shelters and fields for 2012 and 2013.

**TABLE 4**

<b>2012 and 2013 TOTAL REVENUE for SHELTERS and FIELDS</b>		
<b>TYPE</b>	<b>2012 REVENUE</b>	<b>2013 REVENUE</b>
<b>Fields</b>	\$175,336.00	\$83,002.00
<b>Shelters</b>	\$200,603.25	\$195,182.35

**Finding:** Compared to 2012, fields in 2013 grossed 53% less revenue. The top 5 fields grossed \$44,470.00 less in 2013 than 2012 a 59 % drop in revenue. There was a 3% shelter revenue decrease from 2012 to 2013.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 22:**

DPW Permits management should try and find out why there was a drop in revenue for Field Permits in 2013. Possible reasons could be weather related; another reason could be field condition. If field conditions are the cause than Permits management should inform Parks Maintenance so the situation can be corrected.

**RecPro Shelter Permit Analysis**

Tables 5A-5H list the 26 various Shelters, by their City Park location, capacity, rental fees and total revenues for 2012 and 2013. Table 5-H shows the 3 *enclosed* shelters which are available for rent year-round; Banksville Park, West End Park and West End/Elliott Overlook.

**TABLE 5-A**  
**2012- 2013**  
**Public Works Permit Division**  
**RecPro Permits Issued and Fee Revenue Amounts**

<b>FRICK PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Forbes &amp; Braddock</b>	30 (has electric)	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$4275.00	\$4250.00

**TABLE 5-B**

<b>HIGHLAND PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Bigelow Grove</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$2,400.00	\$2,713.00
<b>Elm Grove</b>	40	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,375.00
<b>Lake Point Shelter</b>	40	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$4,425.00	\$4,650.00
<b>Maple Grove</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$4,400.00	\$3,975.00
<b>Memorial Grove</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$3,225.00	\$2,775.00
<b>Pool Grove</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$4,500.00	\$4,575.00
<b>Rhododendron Shelter</b>	150 (has electric)	\$225.00	\$300.00	<b>\$16,526.25*</b>	<b>\$18,056.25*</b>
<b>Sycamore Grove</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$3,375.00	\$3,825.00

**TABLE 5-C**

<b>MCKINLEY PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Mckinley Park Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	150.00	\$1,050.00	\$750.00

**TABLE 5-D**

<b>MELLON PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Mellon Park Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$4,100.00	\$4,512.50
<b>Wall Garden</b>	**	\$125.00**	\$125.00**	\$2,750.00	\$2,000.00

\*\*The Mellon Wall Garden rental fee is a flat rate of \$125.00 for a two hour period. The capacity has not yet been determined.

**TABLE 5-E**

<b>SCHENLEY PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Anderson Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$6,375.00	\$5,805.00
<b>Bartlett St. Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$7,650.00	\$6,712.50
<b>Camp David Lawrence</b>	75 (has electric)	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$11,250.00	\$9,675.00
<b>Oval Shelter</b>	10	\$40.00	\$115.00	\$1,305.00	\$1,175.00
<b>Overlook Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$5,965.00	\$5,625.00
<b>Vietnam Veteran's Pavilion</b>	30 (has electric)	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$37,110.00*	\$32,692.50*
<b>Westinghouse Shelter</b>	30	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$2,325.00	\$2,925.00

**TABLE 5-F**

<b>SHERADEN PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Sheraden Park Shelter</b>	100	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$750.00	\$525.00

**TABLE 5-G**

<b>RIVERVIEW PARK</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Activities Building</b>	300 (has electric)	\$270.00	\$345.00	<b>\$17,583.00*</b>	<b>\$17,703.00*</b>
<b>Chapel (Inside/Outside)</b>	44/ 50 (has electric)	\$270.00	\$345.00	<b>\$17,510.00*</b>	<b>\$16,445.60*</b>
<b>Valley Refuge</b>	50 (has electric)	\$75.00	\$150.00	\$5,736.00	\$5,625.00

**TABLE 5-H**

<b>SHELTERS OPEN YEAR ROUND</b>					
		<b>RENTAL FEE</b>		<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	
<b>SHELTER NAME</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>W/O ALCOHOL</b>	<b>WITH ALCOHOL</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Banksville Park Shelter</b>	70	\$150.00	\$225.00	<b>\$17,568.00*</b>	<b>\$17,090.00*</b>
<b>West End Shelter</b>	100 (has electric)	\$150.00	\$225.00	\$7,350.00	\$7,300.00
<b>West End Elliott Overlook</b>	56/29 (Inside/Outside) (has electric)	\$270.00	\$345.00	\$8,100.00	\$10,440.00

\*Dollar amounts in bold are one of the top five revenue grossing Shelters.

**Finding:** In 2012 and 2013, the Vietnam Veteran’s Pavilion generated the largest dollar amount in revenue grossing \$37,110.00 (2012) and \$32,692.50 (2013).

**Finding:** The second and third largest revenue generating shelters in 2012 were the Activities Building in Riverview Park grossing \$17,583.00 and The Rhododendron Shelter grossing \$16,526.25. In 2013 the second and third highest revenue generating shelters were reversed with The Rhododendron Shelter grossing \$18,056.25 and the Activities Building in Riverview Park grossing \$17,703.00.

**Finding:** The smallest revenue generating shelter in 2012 and 2013 was the Sheraden Park shelter grossing \$750.00 (2012) and \$525.00 (2013).

**Public Works Inspectors**

Permit Administration states that all permits issued by the Office require inspection. The 2014 City of Pittsburgh Operating budget under DPW Operations has nine (9) positions listed for inspector; *6-Inspector 1, 2-Inspector 2 and 1-Inspector 3.*

The inspectors are responsible for overseeing all street and sidewalk repair work in their perspective Division; this includes the PA One Call System. PA One Call System is required for contractors that are performing any type of construction work that involves digging or excavating. PA One Call System notifies all utility companies to go out and mark their “lines” so that the contractor knows exactly where they are located in order to avoid hitting them. Approximately 100 PA One Call System calls occur each day and inspectors need to check online for those located in their area.

According to DPW Administration, there are 6 Inspector positions, 4 are filled. Being shorthanded with only 4 inspectors working, it is possible that some permit inspections are not being conducted or are not completed in a timely manner.

**Finding:** Logically when a contractor has to wait for a Permit Inspector it is not only frustrating to the contractor but increases expenses for the project.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 23:**

Vacant Public Works inspector positions should be filled promptly. For an Office that generates approximately \$1.5 million a year to not have a full complement of Inspectors is negligent.

## **CONCLUSION**

During the audit scope period the DPW Permit Office collected \$2,814,056.18; \$1,222,389.30 in 2012 and \$1,591,666.88 in 2013. This was despite a 53% decrease in Field Permit purchases during 2013. This large amount of revenue demands attention to make the permit process automated, more user friendly, convenient and accessible; it also demands that personnel be hired to achieve these goals.



# CITY OF PITTSBURGH

## Department of Public Works

*William Peduto, Mayor*

*Michael Gable, Director*

January 2, 2015

Mr. Michael Lamb  
City Controller  
City of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Controller Lamb:

We have reviewed the performance audit of the Department of Public Works/Bureau of Administration Permit Office. Working with your staff this document reflects in red the changes my staff made to the original. Please find attached some additional comments and responses to the recommendations. Thank you for working collaboratively for the benefit of the residents of the City of Pittsburgh. If you need to discuss this further please email me or call me at 412-255-2726.

Sincerely,

Michael Gable, CPRP  
Director

MG:kah

Attachment

C: Marcelle Newman, Assistant Director  
Guy Costa, Chief of Operations/Mayor's Office

RECEIVED  
2015 JAN -5 AM 9:59  
CITY CONTROLLER'S OFFICE

**HEADQUARTERS**

Room 301 City-County Building  
414 Grant Street Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
412-255-8850 Fax: 412-255-8847

**BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION AND  
ENGINEERING**

Room 301 City-County Building  
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**BUREAU OF OPERATIONS**

611 Second Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
412-255-2790 Fax: 412-255-8981

**BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
SERVICES**

3001 Railroad Street  
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## COMMENTS TO AND RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS: PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF DPW/BUREAU OF ADMINISTRATION PERMIT OFFICE

- Page 7: Initial Impressions and Signage – Signage was in place before audit began however we will look into additional signage for public convenience.
- Page 8: Recommendations #1 & #2 – There is now a staff person assigned to the 3rd floor entrance (parking lot) to help direct visitors to the building. Also additional signage has been placed for direction to the 2nd floor (permit counter) and for visitor’s parking spaces in the parking lot.
- Page 9: Recommendation #3 – Additional staff has been trained to write traffic permits.
- Page 9: Recommendation #4 – The one stop shop has been discussed and explored for a number of years. The creation of the new Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections is the move in that direction.
- Page 9: Recommendation #5 – There have been discussions to incorporate the Special Events Office into the new Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections.
- Pages 9 & 10: Recommendation #6 – We had some issues with receiving calls and getting voicemail messages but worked with staff from the Department of Innovation and Performance to improve telecommunications at the office. Every effort is being made to answer phones and return messages with current staff. Also, going to online permitting for picnic shelters (and in the future other permits – fields, etc.) should reduce phone calls/messages.
- Page 10: Recommendation #7 – This is being worked on by the Administration & Regulation Manager and the Department of Innovation and Performance for a “linked” email address from the DPW website to several staff members.
- Pages 11, 12, & 13: Recommendations #8, #9, #10, #11, #12, and #13 – We are currently updating our whole website, including the permits information. It will detail all the permits we handle/issue and provide more information for the general public. We made some initial changes to the website and will finalize improvements before the end of January, 2015.
- Page 14: Recommendation #14 – We are ready to roll out online permitting using credit cards beginning in January, 2015. We had to work out the credit card payment fee for the ease and benefit of the permittees.
- Page 14: Recommendations #15, #16 – The driver on the Accela software is the new Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections. DPW has been involved in the process all along and ready to go once implemented, including using a payment engine.
- Page 17: Recommendation #17 – The Land Operation Permit will be removed from the DPW website and be handled by the new Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections (former Bureau of Building Inspection).

- Page 17: Recommendation #18 – We concur and will work with the new Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections to achieve this recommendation.
- Page 18: Recommendation #19 – We are discontinuing Permit Day in March since we will be doing online permitting including credit card payments so it won't be necessary to have a Department of Finance representative.
- Page 19: Recommendation #20 – We are implementing online permitting including credit card payments in January, 2015 so we will no longer need Permit Day in March. In addition, we are mirroring what Allegheny County Parks and Recreation has done for years with respect to securing permits a year in advance, not necessarily on a calendar year basis.
- Page 19: Recommendation #21 – Online calendar will be uploaded to our website so the public can see availability.
- Page 20: Recommendation #22 – The drop in revenue could be associated with the use of fields without permits in 2015. We intend to work staff during evenings to ensure adults using the fields have a paid permit and if youth permits are being used for that purpose. Another reason for the drop in revenue could be associated with fewer teams/organizations playing sports.
- Page 24: Recommendation #23 – We currently have four (4) Inspector vacancies with approval to fill one (1) vacancy, which is in process. We will request to fill the other three (3) vacancies in January, 2015 – there is currently a healthy eligibility list so we don't expect any problems getting back to full capacity before the end of January, 2015.