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Inspectional Services Department to Launch E-Plan Submission

New system should facilitate City's building permit review and speed up final approval time

The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) is preparing to launch an online development plan submission system in FY13 and phase out paper plans. The RFP and software demonstration steps have been completed and now ISD must select the vendor. Electronic submission, e-review of construction drawings and open access to the plan by each department involved in the permitting process are expected to help the City complete the process more efficiently and reduce the time to final approval. ISD processed \$32.5M in building-related permits in FY12, so the system should also reduce costs for owners and developers.

The Current System

Currently an owner or developer, whether building the John Hancock tower or a backyard deck, must submit to ISD, delivered during working hours, a building permit application that includes detailed paper blueprints. ISD keeps the plans on a shelf and labels them by hand. The plan reviewer must check each page and note conflicts with the building code. The plan is then returned to the owner/developer to read the inspector's notes, research the building code conflicts, edit the drawings so they meet code, print the revised plan and resubmit. The process is repeated if more issues are raised in the second draft. Once a plan becomes final, plan reviewers stamp it and keep a copy for the archive. Owners/developers must keep a copy of the stamped plan at the construction site at all times. This system costs owners/developers thousands of dollars in architect fees and printing costs.

The New E-Plan Submission

Since most architectural drawings are created in computer programs, the new plan review software will streamline the current process by allowing architects to simply upload those files through a website. The whole submission, review, and approval process can be completed electronically, which will reduce plan review and editing time. ISD's requested changes will be highlighted on the screen with a link to the relevant building code section located in the plan drawing file. The new program will be integrated with ISD's existing permitting software (Hansen 8) which stores and tracks permit applications and issuances. Each department involved in the permitting process will have access to the plan files and delay at any step in the approval process will be flagged.

After Vendor Selection

The cost of the new system will be determined by the selected vendor's proposal and ISD's FY13 budget does include funds for the contract. This new system represents a significant change in work requirement of the plan reviewers who will require extensive training with the software, as will their supervisors. As with any major software change, employees in ISD and all involved departments will need time to acclimate to the new procedures and integration with Hansen 8 will need to be managed. With proper training and good supervision, this system should improve the efficiency of city operations and speed up this phase of the development process in Boston.