

# Permitting Efficiency Study: Implementation Status and Updates

## Overview

In 2023, the City engaged Moss Adams LLP to evaluate the structure, processes, and systems involved in development permitting. This effort was undertaken in preparation for the Housing Production Strategy, which was adopted by City Council in 2025. Moss Adams conducted document analysis, staff interviews, interviews with members of the development community, customer surveys, process mapping, and peer benchmarking before preparing the Permitting Efficiency Study report. This handout outlines the implementation status of observations and recommendations from the study since 2023, along with suggested next steps for continued improvement.

In addition to implementing recommendations from the Permitting Efficiency Study, the City is strengthening engagement with the development community, closely monitoring state initiatives aimed at increasing housing production and improving permitting processes, and prioritizing actions identified in the Housing Production Strategy to enhance the overall permit experience.

### Next Steps:

- Survey priorities in February 2026
- Report back to City Council in April of 2026
- Complete resource Web updates in Summer of 2026
- Review State HAPO Reports in September of 2026



To provide additional input on Permit Process Improvements, please contact Robin Dalke at [rdalke@cityofsalem.net](mailto:rdalke@cityofsalem.net).

## Summary Matrix

Observation	Focus Area	Current Status	Primary Next Step
Observation 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Organizational Structure</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Refinement Ongoing</li></ul>
<b>Observation 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Change Management</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Framework evaluation</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Staffing Levels</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Dashboard Enhancements</b></li></ul>
Observation 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Planning Turnover</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Stabilized</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Retention Strategies</li></ul>
<b>Observation 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Cross-Training</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Fill vacancies</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Customer Service Culture</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Formalize standards</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Development Community Relations</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Expand Outreach</b></li></ul>
Observation 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Permitting Systems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monitor Performance</li></ul>
<b>Observation 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Design Standards</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Update schedule</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Submission Clarity</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Standardize Next Steps</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Plan Review Cycles</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Resubmittal controls</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Land Use Reviews</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Pending Dialogue</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Community collaboration</b></li></ul>
Observation 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Stormwater Reviews</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ongoing outreach</li></ul>
<b>Observation 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Platting Capacity</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>In Progress</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Recruitment</b></li></ul>
<b>Observation 15</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Off-Street Trails</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Pending Dialogue</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Indepartmental Review</b></li></ul>

## Summary Matrix

Observation	Focus Area	Current Status	Primary Next Step
Observation 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance Metrics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refinement</li> </ul>
Observation 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education/outreach</li> </ul>

Observations and recommendations were grouped into five domains: (1) Organizational Structure, Culture, and Collaboration, (2) Personnel, (3) Development Community, (4) Processes and Systems, and (5) Performance Monitoring. Observations and recommendations are summarized below in more detail:

## Organizational Structure, Culture, and Collaboration

Observation	Recommendation	Status	Next Steps
<p>Observation 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permitting functions split across departments and divisions</li> <li>Organizational separation creates silos</li> <li>Inconsistent customer experience results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate permitting functions within a unified department</li> <li>Conduct regular coordination meetings</li> <li>Facilitate leadership and staff collaboration meetings</li> <li>Appoint single point of contact for major projects</li> <li>Use pre-application conferences to coordinate expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All development functions housed within CPD</li> <li>Weekly internal coordination meetings</li> <li>Program Coordinator role implemented</li> <li>Pre-application conferences monitored and refined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue developing customized timelines</li> <li>Refine process expectations</li> </ul>
<p>Observation 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeated permitting improvement efforts</li> <li>Limited perceived tangible change among staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt standardized change management framework</li> <li>Promote communication and accountability during change initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work in progress</li> <li>Cross-divisional collaboration practices in place</li> <li>Formal framework not yet adopted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate change management frameworks suitable for municipal permitting</li> </ul>

Observation	Recommendation	Status	Next Steps
<p><b>Observation 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permitting teams perceived as understaffed</li> <li>• Turnover and recruitment challenges</li> <li>• Staff burnout impacts customer experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use data to measure and monitor workload</li> <li>• Communicate staffing needs using objective metrics</li> <li>• Utilize on-call services for short-term workload support</li> <li>• Develop internship and staffing pipeline programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participated in Bloomberg-Harvard Data Track 2024</li> <li>• B&amp;S fully staffed</li> <li>• Development Application Dashboard monitored monthly</li> <li>• Enhancements planned for summer 2026</li> <li>• Selective use of on-call services</li> <li>• Planning interns utilized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand workload tracking tools</li> <li>• Continue recruitment of vacancies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observation 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevated turnover in Planning</li> <li>• Impacts service, morale, and continuity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review compensation competitiveness</li> <li>• Strengthen communication and recognition</li> <li>• Support professional development opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning vacancies recently filled with entry level staff</li> <li>• Compensation less competitive than Portland metro and State</li> <li>• Flexible classification supports progression</li> <li>• Review timelines met or exceeded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor compensation competitiveness</li> <li>• Continue retention strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observation 5:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited cross-training</li> <li>• Reliance on sole contributors</li> <li>• Operational continuity risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify single-person-dependent processes</li> <li>• Establish backups and cross-training</li> <li>• Use on-call contracting or additional positions for specialized roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-training improved after vacancy fills</li> <li>• Some vacancies remain</li> <li>• On-call contracting used for stormwater and cost certifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize filling vacancies</li> <li>• Expand cross-training for redundancy</li> </ul>

Observation	Recommendation	Status	Next Steps
<p><b>Observation 6:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building and Safety, Public Works and Planning historically operated with distinct cultures resulting in inconsistent customer experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop unified customer service philosophy</li> <li>• Clearly communicate responsibilities and expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified culture initiated after 2023 merger</li> <li>• Weekly PAC manager meetings</li> <li>• Monthly management meetings</li> <li>• Bi-monthly meetings addressing service and process improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalize philosophy in written guidance</li> <li>• Incorporate into external-facing materials</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observation 7:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with development community have worsened</li> <li>• Outreach historically reactive rather than intentional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift to proactive relationship building</li> <li>• Regularly meet and communicate with development community</li> <li>• Improve clarity and accessibility of educational resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-annual Developer Bulletin</li> <li>• Final Plat Forum (Nov 2025)</li> <li>• Plan Review Responses Forum (April 2026)</li> <li>• Website updates in progress</li> <li>• Project-specific meetings available</li> <li>• Leadership meetings refined at HBA request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand educational forums</li> <li>• Evaluate feedback tools</li> </ul>

Observation	Recommendation	Status	Next Steps
<p>Observation 8:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ProjectDox negatively affected efficiency</li> <li>• Employee morale declined</li> <li>• Customers struggled adapting to system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate system effectiveness</li> <li>• Transition to alternative platform if necessary</li> <li>• Limit customer exposure to internal disagreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ProjectDox eliminated</li> <li>• AMANDA and PAC Portal enhanced</li> <li>• Comments screened prior to issuance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor system performance</li> <li>• Monitor customer experience</li> </ul>
<p>Observation 9:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential design standards may be outdated</li> <li>• Public works standards may conflict with housing affordability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with development community on problematic standards</li> <li>• Evaluate costs and public benefits</li> <li>• Work with leadership and Council on modifications</li> <li>• Develop modernization schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing engagement through forums and policy discussions is needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish phased update schedule</li> </ul>
<p>Observation 10:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion regarding submittal requirements</li> <li>• Unclear payment timing</li> <li>• Conditional approvals disrupt timelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue standardized Next Steps memoranda</li> <li>• Invite cross-functional meetings for larger projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved timeline clarification</li> <li>• Enhanced project meeting communication</li> <li>• Clearer process guidance in development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardize and broadly deploy Next Steps memoranda</li> </ul>

Observation	Recommendation	Status	Next Steps
<p><b>Observation 11:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers perceive excessive review cycles</li> <li>• Decisions viewed as arbitrary</li> <li>• Plans perceived as incomplete or substandard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote shared expectations through dialogue</li> <li>• Maintain reviewer continuity</li> <li>• Limit new comments to plan changes</li> <li>• Evaluate completeness standards and required meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach expanded February 2024</li> <li>• Comments screened to avoid new issues</li> <li>• Emphasis on thorough first-round reviews</li> <li>• Committee reviewing resubmittal interruption procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue structured dialogue</li> <li>• Refine procedural options</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observation 12:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use reviews challenging for customers</li> <li>• Conditional approvals and documentation concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve internal and external communications</li> <li>• Collaborate on conditional approval practices</li> <li>• Align internal exception guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional dialogue required</li> <li>• Fewer adjustments will be needed after zoning code updates made in 2026</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use future forums to advance collaboration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observation 13:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stormwater standards perceived as unclear</li> <li>• Comments viewed as overly meticulous</li> <li>• Lack of standardized submittal format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote understanding of requirements</li> <li>• Consider standardized hydrological model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stormwater Advisory Group formed</li> <li>• Code and standards updated March 2025</li> <li>• Phased outreach and transition</li> <li>• Standardized model not prioritized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue education and outreach</li> <li>• Refine stormwater guidance materials</li> </ul>

## Processes and Systems

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### Observation

### Recommendation

### Status

### Next Steps

#### Observation 14:

- Platting is time-consuming
- Survey staffing bottleneck

- Increase capacity through hiring or contracting

- Deputy City Surveyor reclassified and hired
- Additional reclassifications and recruitment expected spring 2026

- Complete recruitment and reclassifications

#### Observation 15:

- Off-street trail implementation reactive
- Disjointed approach risks system coherence

- Evaluate refinement studies
- Coordinate interdepartmental trail planning

- Further coordination needed among departments

- Evaluate alignment with master plans
- Assess long-term capital planning

## Performance Monitoring

### Observation

### Recommendation

### Status

### Next Steps

#### Observation 16:

- Metrics focus primarily on timeliness
- Lack sufficient granularity
- Metrics segregated by function

- Develop broader performance metrics
- Increase diagnostic granularity
- Establish cross-functional monitoring team

- Expanded metrics implemented after Data Track
- Development Application Dashboard in place

- Formalize cross-functional monitoring team
- Continue refining dashboard metrics

#### Observation 17:

- Metrics primarily used for compliance/internal management

- Publish performance measures publicly
- Use metrics as external communication tools

- Public-facing dashboards available
- Performance reporting implemented

- Increase outreach and education on metrics

In addition to the observations and recommendations identified in the Moss Adams Permitting Efficiency Study, staff have been collecting feedback from permit applicants regarding common frustrations related to application submittals and plan review comments. Below are several of the more recent changes that have been implemented:

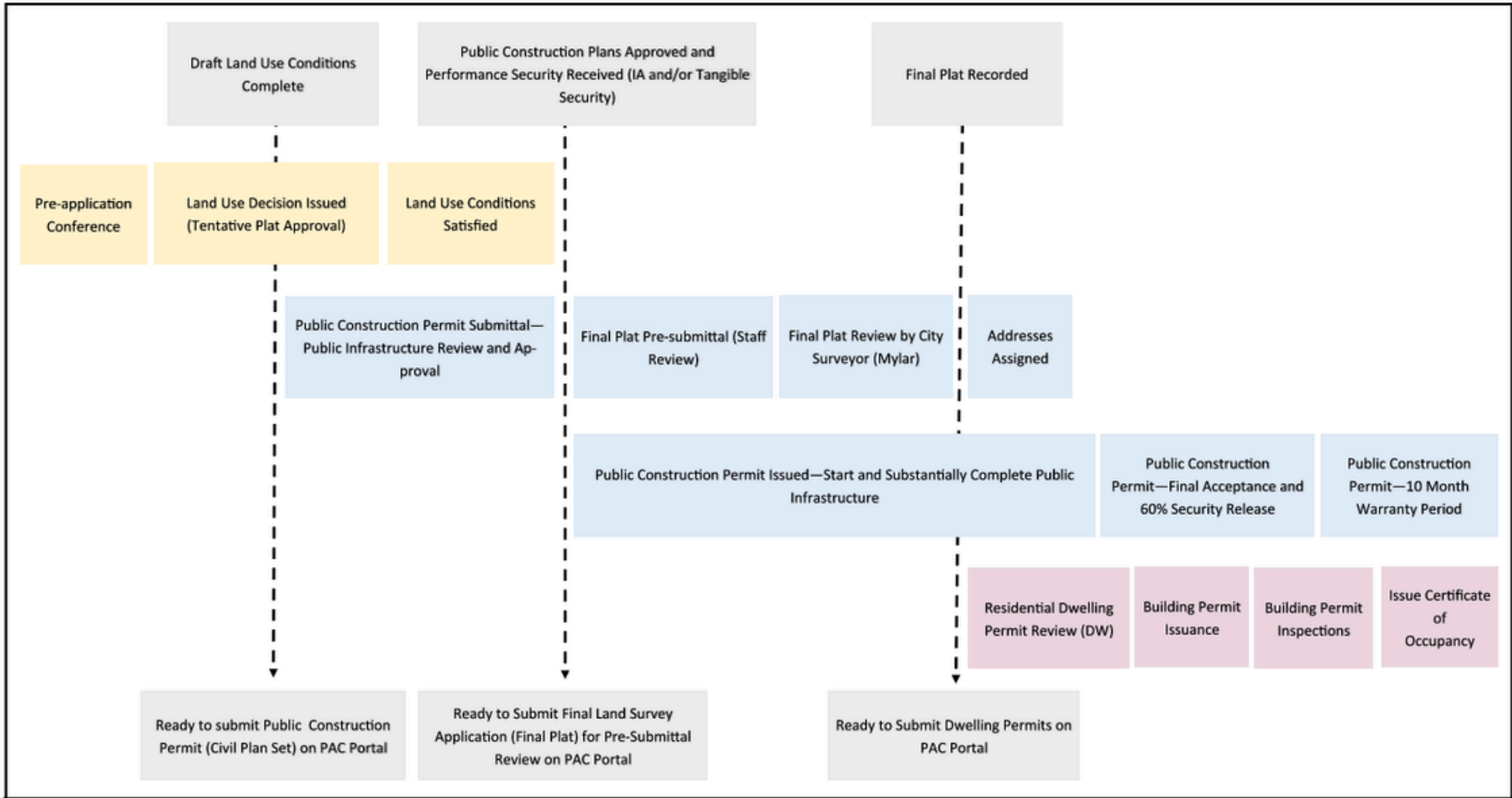
Issue	Changes Recently Made
Commercial Alterations and Tenant Improvement take too long	If the scope of a shell permit includes construction of suites and the shell has received a full or partial Temporary Certificate of Occupancy, tenants may now, on a case-by-case basis, move in and occupy the space while concurrently applying for an occupancy permit. This process allows landlords to actively recruit and secure tenants during construction and reduces the risk of losing potential leases while permits are being processed by the City.
Too Many Permits are Required	Multi-family developments constructed under the residential code that include five or more units on a single parcel no longer require separate permits for each individual unit.
Plan Review Comments not Available on the Portal	Recent system updates now allow plan review memos for Building, Dwelling, Fire Line, and Public Construction permits to be viewed in the PAC Portal. These memos are accessible only to users listed on the permit record and are visible when the document status is marked as "Waiting for Reply."
Building Permits waiting for Plat Approval	Staff have established concurrent timeline options that allow building permit applications to be submitted prior to final plat approval when certain milestones have been met. For commercial partitions and subdivisions, Memorandums of Understanding may also be used in some cases to allow building permits to be submitted and issued before final plat approval.

# Permit Process Improvements - Visual Timelines



## Standard Residential Subdivision Process

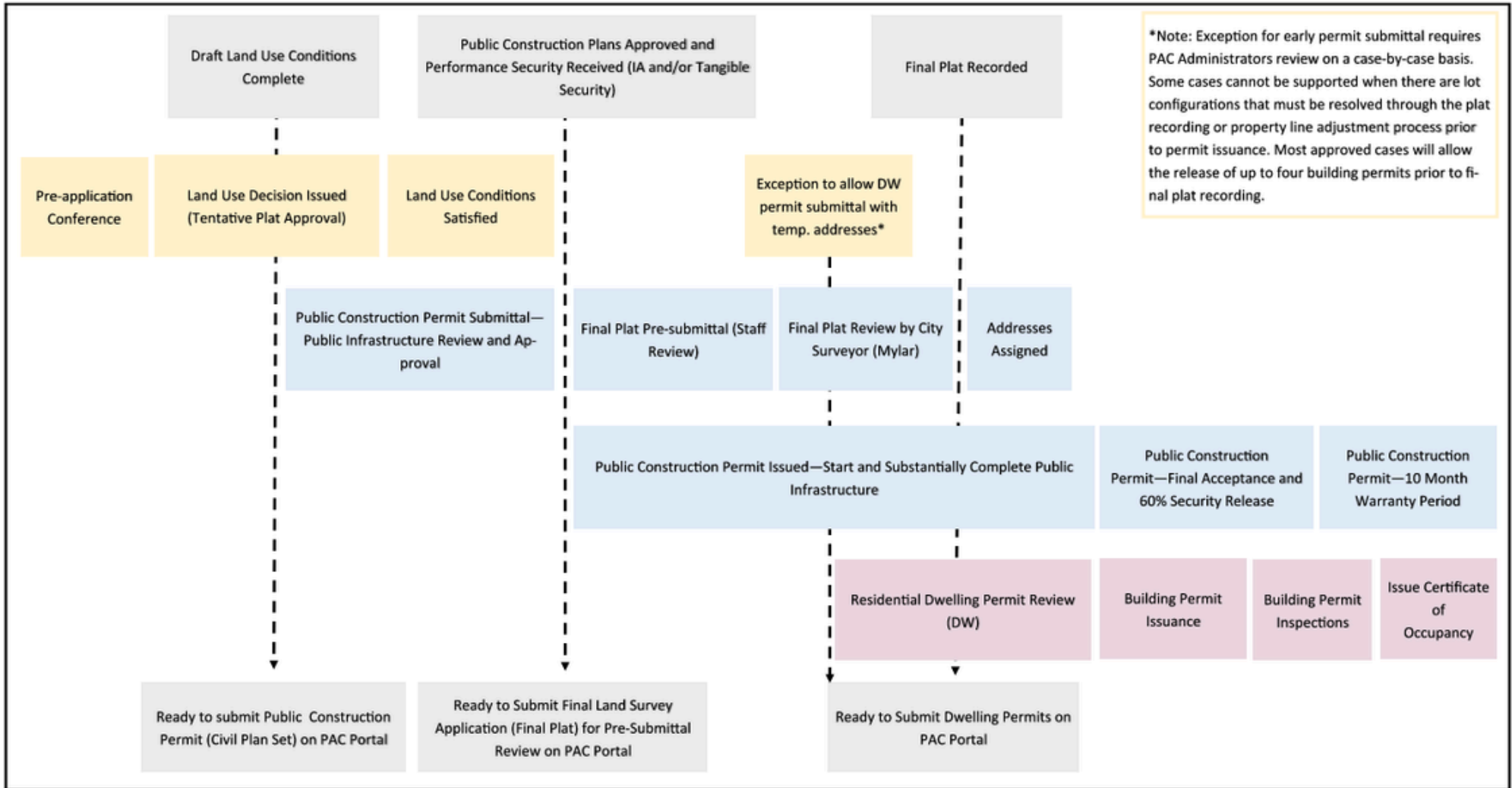
Planning Division: Land Use Process	Development Services Division: Infrastructure & Plat Review Process	Building & Safety Division: Building Permit Process
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Review Average Application Timelines with Salem's Development Application Dashboard ([hyperlinked here](#))

# Residential Subdivision Exception Process

Planning Division: Land Use Process	Development Services Division: Infrastructure & Plat Review Process	Building & Safety Division: Building Permit Process
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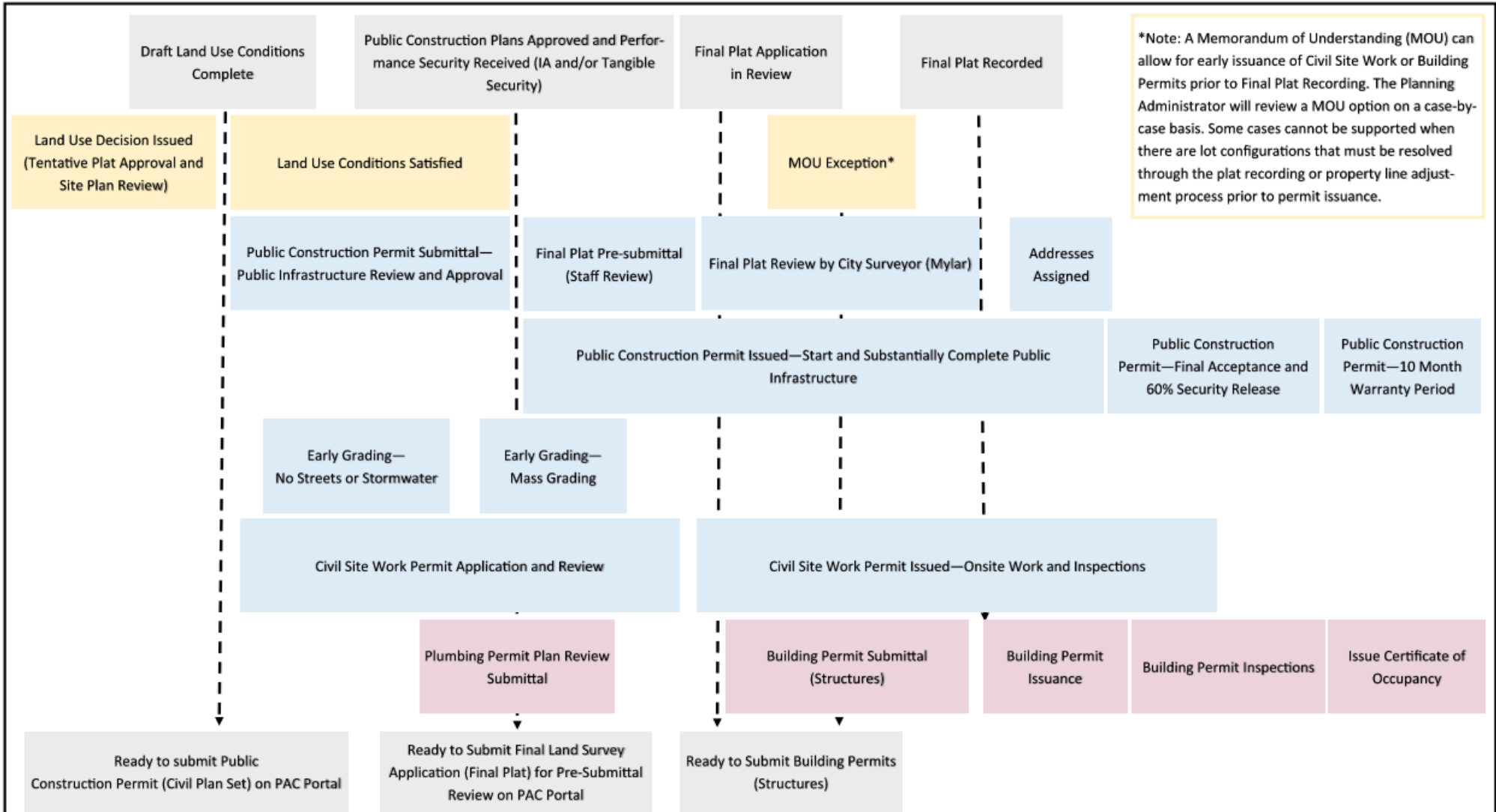
Review Average Application Timelines with Salem's Development Application Dashboard ([hyperlinked here](#))

# Commercial/Multi-Family Development with Land Division Process

Planning Division:  
Land Use Process

Development Services Division:  
Infrastructure & Plat Review  
Process

Building & Safety Division:  
Building Permit Process



Review Average Application Timelines with Salem's Development Application Dashboard ([hyperlinked here](#))