Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

For immediate release
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Department of Buildings Can Reduce Risks of Dangerous Construction

Audit finds permits were approved without all construction plan documents, including neighbor notifications

October 30, 2026—A new audit by the Office of the D.C. Auditor has uncovered issues in the Department of Buildings (DOB) handling of permitting requirements, as well as insufficient oversight of safeguards for projects that warrant heightened scrutiny and the agency's annual oversight of third-party agency plan reviewers and inspectors.

DOB regulates construction in the District by enforcing the building code and regulations, including issuing permits, inspecting ongoing and completed construction projects, and investigating complaints of illegal construction. Recent demands on DOB are evident in the large and increasing volume of permits issued and construction inspections, both for routine and allegedly illegal construction.

"This is a top of mind, quality of life issue for many District residents, and it's evident that government protections can be vastly improved," D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson said.

"We appreciate DOB's response to our draft and its concurrence with most of our recommendations," Patterson added. "We're encouraged that DOB has implemented or plans to implement many of the recommendations."

Address	Ward
1111-1113 V St. NW	1
1713 Q St. NW	2
5122 Cathedral Ave.	3
5229 5th St. NW	4
1012 17th Pl. NE	5
1165 3rd St. NE	6
4501 Blaine St. NE	7
621 Forrester St. SE	8

The report's findings from reviewing eight sample properties, one in each ward, include:

- DOB approved permits without obtaining all required application elements or construction plan documents, including neighbor notifications, a lapse that reflects a lack of adherence to safeguards intended to ensure the safety and quality of new construction and to protect adjoining properties.
- DOB allowed an owner to act as a contractor, and therefore avoid the licensing requirement, on property that was not the owner's primary residence, potentially enabling an unlicensed individual to perform dangerous construction work on a property they may intend to rent or sell.
- DOB issued nine construction permits at six properties without ensuring that all special inspection requirements were met, resulting in insufficient oversight of safeguards intended for projects that warrant heightened scrutiny.

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- DOB did not conduct the required annual oversight audits of each third-party agency at the sample properties, nor did it retain their most recent required re-certification packages.

The ODCA report recommends DOB:

- Create permit review checklists that include key groups of Building Code requirements, require all reviewers to use them during the permit review process, and require supervisory review of the process.
- Develop policies and procedures that require property owners to provide evidence that the property is their primary residence when requiring an exemption from the licensed contractor requirement.
- Revise the Special Inspections Policy Manual to state the requirements and timing of the pre-construction meeting clearly, including who is responsible, when it must occur, and how to verify it occurred timely and as required.
- Establish an annual schedule that requires completing and documenting audits for all approved third-party agencies on projects for which they are providing inspection services, in addition to continuing complaint-based audits.

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The mission of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) is to support the Council of the District of Columbia by making sound recommendations that improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of the District government. Learn more at www.dcauditor.org.