



HAMILTON COUNTY  
**Planning +  
 Development**

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Chris Monzel  
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To: Pat Daugherty, Executive Director, American Institute of Architects, Cincinnati Chapter

From: James Noyes, Assistant Director, Planning and Development

Subject: Planning + Development Department Technology Permit Fee

Date: October 5, 2016

**Background**

Like many other Hamilton County and City of Cincinnati departments and agencies, the Hamilton County Planning and Development Department has been utilizing Permits Plus for its automated permitting system for over 20 years. Specifically, the three permitting divisions in the Planning + Development Department (Building and Inspections, Storm water and Infrastructure, and Development Services) have been using the system to process and permit thousands of permits each year.

As much as Permits Plus has provided an essential backbone to our permitting process, Hamilton County was recently informed that the vendor who supports the Permits Plus system is beginning to phase out support. Furthermore, while it was once cutting edge technology, the Permits Plus system is limited in its capacity to allow for web based improvements and interfaces that our customers' expect.

**Accela Automation**

The system that will replace Permits Plus, Accela Automation, is a robust and customizable system that will allow all of Hamilton County's permitting, plan review, and inspections to be dramatically improved. There are several key benefits to this new system:

- 24-hour online access – Individuals will be able to submit, track, and schedule permits, inspections, and plan reviews. They will also be able to see, in real time, when permits are approved, requested follow up action items that may be delaying issuance of a permit, and pay for permits/inspections.
- Improved customer service – Turnaround time on permit approvals should decrease due to real time tracking and instant communication from the system to the customer. An added benefit is that individuals and contractors will no longer have to drive to a county office to submit a plan or permit as they can submit permits for review and pay for them from their home or office.
- Electronic Documentation – Fees can be calculated and paid online. In addition, the requirement for paper copies may be greatly reduced or no longer be required for submission. Plan review and inspections could occur through a mobile device and be submitted remotely to the developer or builder as they are completed.

- Multi-agency coordination – Upgrading to the Accela Automation platform will allow the County and City of Cincinnati to again have the same permitting software. This will provide the end user with greater ease, as they will be utilizing one system for permitting when working in the City of Cincinnati. In addition to Cincinnati, other municipalities are also considering upgrading from Permits Plus to Accela Automation.

### **Timetable, Costs and Fee**

While several years ago Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati through the CAGIS (Cincinnati Area Geographic Information System) Consortium had the forethought to purchase the base Accela Automation software package, each workflow for every permitting department or agency (including the City of Cincinnati) still requires resources to prioritize implementation. As such each department and agency requiring prioritized service will utilize an outside vendor to expedite and implement these specific workflows.

Based on an assessment by CAGIS, a switch to the Accela Automation system for the entire Planning + Development Department would take 12-18 months to fully implement and cost approximately \$1,650,000. Currently, the Hamilton County Commissioners are discussing the alternatives for funding this migration, including the implementation of a 5% technology fee on all Planning + Development permits (including subdivision, zoning, storm water, and building fees) to cover the cost. The new fee is contemplated to be effective sometime during the first quarter of 2017.

### **Fee Comparison**

The proposed increase should be straightforward and understandable, as fees will increase 5% across the board. For perspective, effective October 1, 2016, the City of Cincinnati will be implementing a 3% technology fee to help offset their Accela Automation migration costs. It should be noted that the City's overall permit fees are already higher than the County's; furthermore, the City will also be implementing a new fee increase along with the new technology fee. Thereof, the actual increases from the technology fee will be more substantial.

### **Improvements Now**

Although many of the improvements will be a year or so in the making, there will be several immediate improvements made during the meantime. Primarily, the Buildings & Inspection Division has already purchased new handheld inspection modules for each building inspector that will include wireless cards as of the beginning of 2017. These modules will allow an inspector to upload inspection results from the field to both the current and future permitting systems instead of waiting until they return to the office. This should help save our customers' time and money by reducing delays from reporting inspection results from the field.

### **Feedback**

As key stakeholders in our permitting process, we value the relationship and partnership with the Cincinnati Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and appreciate your input regarding the migration to a new permitting system and fee. Engagement around this issue is essential to ensuring the successful implementation of a new permit system and technology fee. We request your review and hope that you support the investment in our infrastructure so that we may provide better and more efficient services to our customers. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue.