

City of Bridgeport

Assessment and Recommendations for Improvement

Version 2



Submitted by:

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Executive Summary

In recent years, the City of Bridgeport (City) has experienced a renewed interest in investment and new development. City staff are challenged to keep pace with demand, especially with certain complexities involved with building and redeveloping in the City, including historic structures, an aging building stock, coastal and environmental considerations, and requirements.

The City's full adoption of technology to support the development process has been slower than that of some communities. Users, both internal and external, have noted challenges with the current system, including the ability to access information within the system and through the public portal.

City staff include dedicated professionals with a range of expertise to address the development challenges of the community; however, inefficient processes and challenges in coordinating complex reviews across departments have stymied progress in the permitting process. The City would like to improve its reputation and become a more desirable place to develop and do business through improving efficiency of the permitting process to reduce the workload for staff and create a more streamlined process for applicants.

In May 2024, the City retained Berry Dunn McNeil & Parker, LLC (BerryDunn) to assist in a review of the City's permitting processes relating to development review. BerryDunn was tasked with assessing the City's development review process, including all involved departments, and providing recommendations for process improvement.

The primary goals for this project as expressed by City leadership include improving customer service, communication with the public, and efficiency in the review process.

The following pages describe the work BerryDunn completed, provide an assessment of current business processes, share best practices related to the City's permitting process challenges, and provide detailed guidance for 10 recommended initiatives to improve the City's permitting process. Below are some key observations from interviews, background information, and focus group meetings that guided the development of the recommendations for improvement:

- Overall oversight and leadership are needed for the permitting and development process.
- The City has made significant changes to implement new technology to facilitate the permitting process; however, departments have not fully leveraged the tools and technology currently available to staff.
- Departments are not coordinated in the permitting review process, either in communication to the public or internally to manage or improve processes.
- Limited information is available to the public on permitting processes or the status of pending applications.

1.0 Introduction

This section of the report describes the background of the project, format of the report, work performed, and common terms and abbreviations.

1.1 Project Background

The City has retained BerryDunn to review the City's permitting processes relating to development review. The focus of the project is to review, diagram, and evaluate the City's current business practices; prepare an analysis of the City's processes; solicit feedback from the development community; and provide recommendations for improvement.

1.2 Report Format

This report is composed of five sections and four appendices, as described below:

1. **Introduction.** This section of the report describes the background of the project, format of the report, work performed, and common terms and abbreviations.
2. **Current Environment Analysis.** This section describes the current processes and challenges and identifies opportunities for improvement. It also includes a summary of input received from external stakeholders.
3. **Trends and Best Practices.** This section includes trends and best practice considerations for the City based on BerryDunn's experience and research conducted in developing the recommendations contained in this report.
4. **Recommendations for Improvement.** This section identifies opportunities for improvement based on the assessment of current processes, fact-finding interviews, and external stakeholder feedback. This section includes prioritized recommended improvements and steps for the City to take to implement these initiatives.
5. **Next Steps.** This section describes the future activities of the project.

Appendix A: As-Is Process Diagrams. This appendix includes the Microsoft (MS) Visio diagrams developed to map the eight review processes.

Appendix B: System Recommendations. This appendix includes a list of recommended Enterprise Permitting and Licensing (formerly EnerGov) configuration changes or considerations to improve the use of technology for the permitting review process.

Appendix C: Internal Stakeholder Survey Analysis. This appendix contains a summary of results from the survey BerryDunn distributed to internal stakeholders.

Appendix D: External Stakeholder Feedback Analysis. This appendix contains a summary of results from the survey BerryDunn distributed to external department stakeholders and summary of feedback from the external stakeholder focus group session.

1.3 Work Performed

In May 2024, BerryDunn conducted an initial project planning meeting with the City’s project management team (PMT) to clarify project goals and objectives, identify known project constraints, and refine project dates and tasks. Following the meeting, BerryDunn requested information from the City to become more familiar with the current environment.

In June 2024, BerryDunn administered a web survey to external stakeholders. The purpose of this survey was to provide an understanding of the current challenges in the permitting process. To supplement this survey, in June 2024, BerryDunn held a series of fact-finding meetings during which the firm conducted on-site observations and interviews with City staff, documenting current processes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. In June and July 2024, BerryDunn conducted virtual discussions with external stakeholders and City leadership.

As follow-up to the fact-finding meetings, BerryDunn conducted an as-is diagramming process and documented the City’s process steps in MS Visio. The as-is diagramming helped identify challenges and opportunities in the current environment. During this process, BerryDunn also used data collected from the survey and fact-finding meetings to identify challenges and opportunities for process improvements. These process diagrams are included in Appendix A of this report.

1.4 Common Acronyms, Terms, and Abbreviations

The following table contains common acronyms, terms, and abbreviations used throughout the report, along with associated definitions and explanations.

Table 1.4.1: Common Acronyms, Terms, and Abbreviations

Common Acronyms, Terms, and Abbreviations	
Acronym/Term/Abbreviation	Definition/Explanation
BerryDunn	Berry Dunn McNeil & Parker, LLC
City	City of Bridgeport
CO	Certificate of Occupancy
CSS	Customer Self Service
Building	Building Department
EnerGov	Enterprise Permitting and Licensing (formerly EnerGov)
Engineering	Engineering Department
External Stakeholder	External stakeholders of the City’s development community that also may be previous, current, or future customers of the City
Fire	Fire Marshal Division
GIS	Geographic Information Systems

Common Acronyms, Terms, and Abbreviations	
Health	Environmental Health Department
IO	Intelligent Object
IOAA	Intelligent Object Automation Agent
Issue	A point or matter in question or in dispute, or a point or matter that is not settled and is under discussion or over which there are opposing views or disagreements
ITS	Information Technology Services
L&P	Licensing & Permits Division
MS	Microsoft
OPED	Office of Planning and Economic Development
PMT	Project Management Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SME	Subject Matter Expert
TCO	Temporary Certificate of Occupancy
WPCA	Water Pollution Control Authority
Zoning	Zoning Department

2.0 Current Environment Assessment

This section describes the current permitting processes. Strengths and challenges are summarized, and opportunities for improvement are identified. It also includes a summary of input received by external stakeholders.

2.1 Key Themes From External Stakeholder Engagement

The following table summarizes key themes from feedback collected via an online survey and focus group discussions with external stakeholders, including developers, property owners, architects, engineers, and contractors.

Table 2.1.1: Key Themes from External Stakeholder Engagement

Key Themes from External Stakeholder Engagement	
1	Applicants would like more information on the permit review process to guide them through the process (e.g., checklists, review requirements, estimated timeline for review).
2	Applicants would like more information related to project status (e.g., review status for each reviewer, steps completed and remaining in the process, inspection reports).
3	Many external stakeholders have had positive experiences with City staff and have noted staff professionalism and knowledge in their subject area.
4	The length of time for initial application review and the number of review cycles for plan review are challenges for applicants.
5	Coordination and communication among departments could be improved.
6	The online customer portal is not user-friendly.

2.2 Organization Assessment

This section describes the departments and divisions involved in the permitting process. Each table provides a description and assessment of the department or division, including strengths and challenges identified during the assessment process.

Table 2.2.1: Information Technology Services (ITS)

ITS	
Description	
Processes	ITS is responsible for maintaining and supporting staff use of EnerGov, iG Inspect, and the Park City Portal (portal). ITS was responsible for supporting the initial configuration and implementation of the system in 2020. ITS receives requests from staff related to technical issues with system use and from department directors or supervisors for system configuration changes. ITS staff handle requests for system changes on a case-by-case basis. ITS provided training during the initial rollout of the system and as system upgrades have been implemented or new system tools adopted.

ITS	
Internal Communication	ITS typically communicates with staff on technical issues via the ticketing system. General questions or inquiries are made via email or phone call to ITS staff.
Customer Interaction	ITS does not typically interact with customers.
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff reported there is a clear process for reporting issues to ITS. Staff reported substantial system training to end users during and after implementation and when specifically requested by departments.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff reported challenges across departments in acceptance of training on EnerGov. Staff reported there are individuals with EnerGov licenses in multiple departments that do not use the system. Staff reported requests for workflow changes in EnerGov are ad hoc and often not reviewed by a whole department prior to reaching ITS. Staff reported departments do not communicate regularly with each other before requesting workflow changes.

Table 2.2.2: Zoning

Zoning	
Description	
Processes	<p>The Zoning Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with the City's Zoning Code, which regulates how land is developed within the City. Zoning approval is required to enlarge, alter, repair, move, or construct a building or structure or to change the occupancy or use of an existing building or structure. Zoning officials review applications for zoning compliance prior to applicants submitting a building permit application to the Building Department (if required). Zoning officials also sign off on building permit applications to confirm that zoning compliance has been approved.</p> <p>In addition to zoning compliance, the Zoning Department provides support for the Historic District Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency, and the Zoning Board of Appeals. In this role, the department accepts and reviews applications for the four boards and commissions, prepares packets and agendas, assists applicants with zoning compliance issues, attends meetings, advises the boards and commissions on land use and zoning matters, and drafts decision letters.</p> <p>The Zoning Department also coordinates the pre-application review process, including concept review and technical review meetings with applicants. The design review coordinator coordinates with applicants and review staff in other departments to schedule meetings and review project information. Concept</p>



Zoning	
	<p>review meetings are required for certain larger projects, based on the project scope. In addition, meetings may be requested by an applicant or recommended by Zoning staff. Concept review meetings primarily focus on zoning and site design issues. Technical review meetings typically follow concept review meetings and provide an early opportunity for staff and the applicant to discuss submittal requirements, review process, regulations, design standards, and other issues before submitting a formal development application for review.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>Zoning is the first review during the building permit process. Coordination is required among departments for more complex projects or if plans are revised during review. Zoning staff communicate primarily with Building and the Engineering Department (Engineering) on application review via email, phone calls, through EnerGov notes or notifications, or in-person meetings. Zoning compliance plans and building permit applications are tracked in EnerGov. Staff can access project information through EnerGov.</p> <p>Concept review and technical review meetings are coordinated by email. Meetings and project submissions are tracked outside EnerGov through MS Outlook and on internal drives.</p> <p>Zoning also communicates with other Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED) staff on larger development projects.</p>
Customer Interaction	<p>Zoning compliance plan and building permit information can be accessed online by applicants (project contacts) via the online customer portal. When additional information is needed or if staff have questions about an application, communication with the applicant typically occurs via email or phone call and is logged in EnerGov under “Activities.”</p>
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some external stakeholders reported that Zoning staff are quick to respond to inquiries. • Some external stakeholders reported that Zoning staff are attentive to review and knowledgeable of requirements on projects. • Staff reported there is sufficient physical control over documentation in the board and commission process.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that board and commission meetings and decisions are not tracked in EnerGov. • Staff reported paper copies of board and commission applications are required. • Staff reported some resistance from board and commission members to reviewing project documents digitally, in part due to lack of appropriate equipment for viewing large plan sets. • Staff reported that zoning plan approval is often delayed because the fee is required to be paid upfront, and applicants do not send payments directly to



Zoning	
	<p>the Zoning office. The return address on invoices does not direct applicants correctly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that fees can be paid online, but staff do not receive a notification when fees have been paid. • Staff reported that meeting agendas are drafted manually in MS Word. • Staff reported that decision letters are saved to the I-drive and in paper files. EnerGov templates are not formatted to create decision letters and letters are not uploaded to EnerGov. • Staff reported that decision letters are sent to the applicant by both mail and email.

Table 2.2.3: Building

Building – Plan Review	
Description	
Processes	<p>The Building Department is responsible for intake, review, and issuance of building permits and trade permits. Permit processing requires prior zoning plan approval from the Zoning Department. The Building Department also participates in the technical review meetings during the pre-application process. For both building and trade permits, administrative staff verify that basic project information has been submitted when an applicant applies for a permit online or in person. They communicate directly with the applicant through email or in person if additional information is required. Administrative staff then change the application status to review, which allows EnerGov to auto-assign reviewers in the Building Department. They may also assign review to other departments as needed during the initial completeness check.</p> <p>EnerGov automatically assigns trade inspectors to trade permit review based on specialty and to the designated plan reviewer for Residential New building permits. Applications for Commercial New building permits are assigned by administrative staff on a rotational basis. The International Building Code governs plan review for Commercial New building permits and the International Residential Code governs plan review for Residential New building permits.</p> <p>For all building permits, once the application is ready for review, Zoning performs the first step of verifying existing zoning plan approval. If approved, the application advances to review and approval by Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), Licensing & Permits Division (L&P), and Engineering. The Environmental Health Department (Health) also reviews some commercial building permits. Once the building plan reviewer receives approvals from all review groups, the Building and Fire Marshal Division (Fire) reviews occur concurrently.</p> <p>Trade permit review includes the WPCA as a review group to verify that WPCA bills and fees are current. Once trade permits are ready for review, the trade inspector assigns other review groups if necessary, including Fire for electrical</p>



Building – Plan Review	
	<p>permits, Zoning for solar mounts and projects within a historic district, and Engineering for work within a floodplain.</p> <p>After plans are approved and the applicant has paid all fees, the building plan reviewer manually validates information and routes the permit to administrative staff for issuance. Administrative staff issue the permit by email to the applicant.</p> <p>A building plan reviewer also attends the technical review meeting during the pre-application process. The building plan reviewer reviews documentation routed by the design review coordinator. The building plan reviewer provides comments directly to the applicant in that meeting, but there is no internal tracking of projects or associated comments.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>The Building Department is responsible for the routing of review to various other departments during the permitting process. The system adds required reviewers to the application workflow, beginning with Zoning and including WPCA, L&P, Engineering, and Fire. Building plan reviewers add Health to the workflow manually, if required. Building plan reviewers also coordinate among departments by direct communication through email, phone, or in-person meetings. Each department is responsible for invoicing its own fees.</p>
Customer Interaction	<p>Applicants can apply for a building permit or trade permit through the online customer portal or on paper in person. Building plan reviewers and trade inspectors communicate with applicants by email regarding corrections, comments, or clarifications. Applicants pay fees through the online customer portal or in person by credit card or check.</p> <p>During the issuance process, administrative staff email applicants the permit with inspection requirements, additional instructions, contact information, and a link to download approved plans from the online customer portal. Administrative staff also routinely communicate with applicants who call the Building Department for general or record-specific information.</p>
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some external stakeholders reported that Building staff are responsive to inquiries. • Some external stakeholders reported that Building staff are attentive to review and knowledgeable of requirements on projects. • Some external stakeholders reported that review time has been gradually reduced from years prior. • Some external stakeholders reported that the system-generated emails are helpful. • Staff reported that the addition of a Code Officer in the commercial plan review process has eased staff workload and improved review times.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that applicants do not always know what application type is needed. If applicants apply for the incorrect permit, staff must void the application and direct the applicant to reapply.



Building – Plan Review	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that applicants often submit applications with incorrect information, including the project address, which may need verification by staff. • Staff reported that when WPCA fees are due, WPCA must confirm payment has been made. Other review groups cannot see if fees have been paid. • Staff reported that additional information is typically submitted via email to each reviewer separately. • Staff reported that each reviewer may approve a different plan set. • Staff reported that an applicant may submit different revisions to different departments. • Staff reported that fees are confirmed by the plan reviewer but must be invoiced by administrative staff. • Staff reported that departments invoice fees separately during plan review. • Staff reported they are not notified when fees have been paid. • Staff reported that if a contact does not have an online customer portal account, they cannot see permit information or documents. • Staff reported that trade permits are manually tied to building permits at various stages of the process if the applicant does not submit correct building permit information at application submittal. • Staff reported that trade inspectors are manually notifying Fire when a review is required. Inspectors may print paper copies of applications to submit to Fire for review. • Staff reported that the Building workflow is not automated after fees are paid. • Staff reported that issuance does not occur automatically after fees are paid for trade permits. • Staff reported that the customer permit form in the system does not generate the correct permit information.

Table 2.2.4: Engineering

Engineering	
Description	
Processes	<p>Engineering is responsible for reviewing zoning plans and building permits and conducting inspections related to storm and sanitary sewers, drainage, flood and erosion control, traffic impact studies, and necessary state and local permits. Engineering also reviews as-built drawings and documentation for map filings after construction completion and participates in technical review meetings, as needed.</p>

Engineering	
	<p>The L&P division is responsible for the review, issuance, and inspection of excavation permits and sidewalk, curb, and driveway apron permits, and review of traffic plans.</p> <p>For zoning plan approvals and building permits, engineers receive reviews in EnerGov from either Zoning or Building. Engineers typically review plans in Bluebeam or Adobe. Comments are drafted in a separate document and uploaded to EnerGov. Once approved, plans are signed, stamped, and uploaded to EnerGov. Engineering conducts final engineering inspections for building permits and conducts stormwater inspections and routine erosion control inspections during construction. Final engineering inspections are requested, tracked, and resulted in EnerGov, and serve as the department's final signoff on building permits. Stormwater and erosion control inspections are not tracked in EnerGov.</p> <p>Excavation and sidewalk, curb, and driveway permits are applied for through the portal or in person. L&P staff enter applications in the system (if submitted in person), review applications, and issue permits. Inspections are typically requested via phone call. L&P staff schedule and conduct inspections. Since L&P permits are often associated with a building permit, L&P staff communicate with Building on any issues or to confirm work has been completed.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>Engineering staff coordinate with Zoning and Building as needed during plan and permit review. Engineering staff communicate with building inspectors during the construction process on inspections and related to excavation and sidewalk, curb, and driveway permits. In addition, Engineering staff use internal notes in EnerGov to communicate project information and updates with staff.</p>
Customer Interaction	<p>During plan and permit review, Engineering staff typically communicate with applicants via email or through the portal.</p> <p>L&P permit applications may be submitted online through the portal or in person. L&P staff often assist customers in person at the counter. Inspection requests are typically made by contractors via phone call.</p>
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some external stakeholders reported that Engineering staff are quick to respond to inquiries. • Some external stakeholders reported that Engineering staff are attentive to review and knowledgeable of requirements on projects. • Staff reported that building permit reviews and L&P permit reviews are conducted efficiently.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that many contractors are submitting applications in person rather than through the online portal. • Staff reported that application types are not specified in the online customer portal.

Engineering	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that applicants often submit under the incorrect permit type, requiring the record to be voided manually and the applicant to resubmit. • Staff reported looking up contractors' licenses manually. License numbers do not appear on the permit page in the online customer portal. • Staff reported that fees are added and invoiced manually. • Staff reported that notification of fee payment is not distinguishable from other notifications. • Staff reported that the permit form in the system does not generate the correct permit information upon issuance. • Staff reported that L&P permits are not linked to the building permit. • Staff reported that contractors cannot request L&P inspections online, and they must call to request inspections. • Staff reported the permit expiration date is not configured correctly and requires staff to manually update it. • Staff reported that multiple permits for a project on a single property are tracked and inspected separately. • Staff reported that EnerGov does not currently allow automated recurring inspections. • Staff reported that a permit record does not automatically close when a bond is released. • Staff reported limited functionality of the iG inspect app, including not having the ability to search for permits within the app. • Staff reported a desire to have EnerGov integrated with MS Outlook for tracking email communication and access to contacts. • Staff reported a desire to share a list of permit requirements with contractors upon permit issuance.

Table 2.2.5: WPCA

WPCA	
Description	
Processes	<p>The WPCA is responsible for reviewing building permit applications that impact the wastewater system or involve a connection to the City's sewer system (all new construction). WPCA is responsible for verifying that sewer bills have been paid prior to the Building Department accepting a building or trade application for review, per City ordinance. WPCA issues sewer permits. This process is separate from the building permit process and not tracked in EnerGov. As needed, WPCA participates in technical review meetings.</p> <p>The WPCA General Manager checks the review list daily. All permit applications are referred to the WPCA Finance Director to verify that property owners are current with their sewer bills.</p>

WPCA	
	For new building permits, WPCA staff receive reviews in EnerGov. Staff review applications, verify that a sewer permit has been applied for, and sign off on the application in EnerGov.
Internal Communication	WPCA staff communicate with Building Department staff regarding sewer fees or issues related to a permit application review. This typically happens via email or phone call.
Customer Interaction	WPCA coordinates with applicants on application review by email or phone call, as needed. WPCA is not notifying applicants when fees are due.
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that the current process for verifying sewer fees works well. • Staff reported that building permit reviews are completed efficiently once received.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that when fees are due, WPCA must confirm payment has been made. Other reviewers cannot see if fees have been paid. • Staff reported that there is no notification to staff when fees are paid. • Staff reported that due dates for reviews are not reflective of project workflow status. • Staff reported that the online customer portal is difficult to navigate. • Staff reported that additional information is typically submitted via email to WPCA separately from Building. • Staff reported that sewer permits are not tracked in EnerGov. • Staff reported that there is no meeting documentation or follow-up for Design Review. • Staff reported that notifying the finance director of new applications and confirming the status of sewer bills prior to advancing an application is done manually.

Table 2.2.6: Fire Marshal Division (Fire)

Fire	
Description	
Processes	<p>Fire is responsible for reviewing commercial building permits and electrical permits for compliance with fire and life safety code requirements, conducting certificate of occupancy (CO) inspections when necessary, and attending technical review meetings during the pre-application process. Fire issues a Fire Certificate of Approval to advance commercial building and electrical permits in the review process. Fire system permits also originate in the Building Department but are subject to Fire review and approval.</p> <p>Plan review for commercial building permits begins in the Building Department. After review approval from Zoning, Health, WPCA, L&P, and Engineering, the</p>

Fire	
	<p>Fire review occurs concurrent with the Building Department review in the EnerGov workflow. Fire conducts plan review, communicates directly with the applicant by email if additional information is required, and applies fees to the record. Fire then invoices fees and stamps and uploads approved plans once fees have been paid.</p> <p>The Building Department also routes electrical and fire systems permit reviews to Fire. The trade inspector routes the permit to Fire in EnerGov and notifies Fire by email. Fire reviews the application and may request additional information from the applicant directly by email. After Fire review, administrative staff invoice fees and notify the Building Department when the applicant pays.</p> <p>During the pre-application review, Fire attends the technical review meeting. The Fire attendee to the technical review meeting reviews documentation routed by the design review coordinator. The Fire attendee provides comments directly to the applicant in that meeting, but there is no internal tracking of projects or associated comments.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>The Building Department routes plan review and inspection requests to Fire in EnerGov, each of which appear on the group task list. The Fire plan reviewer manually moves plans from EnerGov to FireWorks RMS (records management software) for review, enters comments and markup in FireWorks RMS, and manually moves comments back into EnerGov. Fire conducts inspections through FireWorks RMS for all processes except for CO final inspections.</p> <p>The Building Department and Fire routinely communicate by phone or email for tracking plan review and mutual notification of inspections.</p>
Customer Interaction	<p>Fire meets directly with applicants during the technical review meeting. Applicants request inspections through the online customer portal that routes to the Building Department, or they call or email either Building or Fire. Fire inspectors communicate in person with contractors during and after the inspection regarding corrections to any deficiencies.</p>
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some external stakeholders reported that Fire staff are attentive to review and knowledgeable of requirements on projects. • Some external stakeholders reported that administrative staff are responsive and helpful. • Staff reported satisfaction with inspection functionality in FireWorks RMS.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that practices and system permissions for invoicing fees are unclear. • Staff reported performing manual processes to move data between EnerGov and FireWorks RMS. • Staff reported a desire for more training on Bluebeam Revu. • Staff reported that Fire may stamp and upload a different set of plans than Building, which requires an additional review to reconcile plans by Fire.



Fire	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff reported that inspection results are logged on paper in the field and updated in FireWorks by the inspector and in EnerGov by the administrative assistant.• Staff reported that the department does not have sufficient plan review capacity to address the current backlog of permit reviews.• Fire must manually email Building when plans are ready. There is no automated notification on the Building side when Fire review is complete.

Table 2.2.7: Environmental Health

Environmental Health	
Description	
Processes	<p>The Environmental Health Department reviews building permit applications for businesses that require a license, including food service establishments, personal service businesses, public pools, day cares, and tobacco shops. The department also issues business licenses and conducts inspections, after the permit is approved, and separate from the permit review process.</p> <p>Health is added to the building permit review workflow as needed by Building. Health inspectors receive permit reviews in EnerGov. Inspectors review applications, communicate with applicants as needed, and sign off on the permit review.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>Health inspectors communicate with Building and Fire via email or phone on permit review issues. Often coordination is required when inspectors identify in the field when licensing a new business that Health was not included in the plan review workflow.</p>
Customer Interaction	<p>Customers often reach out to Health inspectors directly via phone. Inspectors communicate on permit review issues via phone, email, or in person. Applicants may submit additional documentation via email or in person.</p>
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported being responsive to applicant inquiries and inspection requests. • Staff reported assisting applicants who are unfamiliar with the process and requirements.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that additional information is typically submitted via email to Health separately from Building. • Staff reported that Health may approve a different plan section from other review groups. • Staff reported that the automated assignments are not assigning reviews to the correct inspector, and some are directed to a former employee. • Staff reported that a master record tracking licenses, permits, and COs in the absence of a building permit does not exist. • Staff reported that inspectors are performing inspections on paper and manually scanning paper inspection reports into EnerGov. • Staff reported a desire for better communication among departments. • Staff reported a desire for more information for applicants to understand all requirements associated with opening a business.

Table 2.2.8: Building – Inspections

Building – Inspections	
Description	
Processes	<p>The Building Department is responsible for conducting inspections for building permits and trade permits. The Building Department has two inspection groups, one for building permits and one for trade permits, including mechanical, electrical, and plumbing inspectors.</p> <p>Building inspectors self-assign inspections and may balance workload if necessary. Inspection records open in EnerGov automatically after a permit has been issued. Building inspectors communicate directly with applicants or contractors, typically by phone, to schedule an inspection. To schedule inspections, building inspectors schedule an Outlook calendar appointment, duplicate the appointment in EnerGov, and notify the contractor. Each morning, prior to leaving the office for the inspection route, building inspectors review project information in EnerGov. Building inspectors generate their routes manually on paper. Building inspectors use paper to record inspection results in the field and upload comments or photos into EnerGov in the office.</p> <p>For trade inspections, contractors submit inspection requests through the online customer portal and requests are routed to inspectors automatically based on inspection type. If a contractor calls or emails directly, trade inspectors self-assign inspections based on specialty or workload. Trade inspectors schedule an Outlook calendar appointment, duplicate the appointment in EnerGov, and notify the contractor. Trade inspectors schedule inspections to a specified hour on the inspection date. Each morning, prior to leaving the office for the inspection route, trade inspectors review project information in EnerGov. Trade inspectors generate their routes manually on paper. In the field, trade inspectors use the iG Inspect application through tablets to conduct inspections. EnerGov automatically populates inspections scheduled for the day into iG Inspect, and results in iG Inspect automatically populate into the inspection record in EnerGov.</p> <p>Project closeout occurs after all trade inspections and building inspections pass. For new construction and other projects requiring a CO, Building inspectors request project closeout in EnerGov, which routes the CO or temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO) review to the Zoning Department and, if necessary, Fire. After signoff from those departments, the Building Official reviews the project information and signs off on the CO or TCO. Administrative staff then email a copy of the CO or TCO to the applicant or provide a paper copy if requested. Additional inspections after TCO issuance follow the same process for initial inspections on the permit.</p>
Internal Communication	<p>Both building and trade inspectors typically communicate only within the Building Department on permits, or through EnerGov routing with Zoning and Fire during project closeout. Inspectors access EnerGov in the office to review project information, including plans, before conducting an inspection. Inspectors also periodically print complex plan sets from EnerGov for large residential or commercial projects.</p>

Building – Inspections	
	Inspectors rely on administrative staff to generate invoices for COs by manually delivering inspection reports that are marked as ready for final. Administrative staff also may communicate with inspectors on an outstanding request for a copy of an inspection report. Inspectors communicate internally by email, phone, or in person.
Customer Interaction	Applicants or associated contractors typically email or call the Building Department to request inspections, and individual inspectors may communicate directly with contractors for scheduling. Applicants can also request an inspection through the online customer portal. Both building and trade inspectors communicate in person with contractors during and after the inspection regarding corrections to any deficiencies.
Assessment	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some external stakeholders reported generally high satisfaction with the inspections process, including scheduling, response times, and inspectors' professionalism. • Staff reported that inspectors are consistently able to provide semi-regular or on-demand inspection scheduling for large projects (e.g., commercial-to-residential apartment building conversion).
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that automated notifications of an inspection request are not functioning in EnerGov. • Staff reported that some contractors call inspectors directly to schedule inspections. • Staff reported that notes for building permit inspections are logged on paper, while trade permit inspections are logged through the iG Inspect app. • Staff reported there are no fees for reinspections or no-shows. • Staff reported that after TCO issuance, applicants do not consistently notify Building that work is complete and ready for a CO inspection. • Staff reported that administrative staff manually email COs and TCOs to applicants. • Staff reported that some inspections in the workflow are only applicable to some projects, and only supervisors have system permissions to remove items from the workflow. • Staff reported there are no checklists in iG Inspect or on paper when conducting inspections in the field. • Staff reported that inspectors cannot open plans that have populated in iG Inspect from EnerGov. • Staff reported challenges viewing plans in EnerGov due to a lack of sufficiently large monitors in the office.

Building – Inspections	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reported that the GIS (geographic information systems) address layer the Tax Assessor’s Office maintains is often out of date, requiring manual updates to information in EnerGov. • Staff reported that inspectors manually route by geographic knowledge. • Staff reported that contractors often request inspections out of priority order.

2.3 As-Is Process Diagrams

Following fact-finding sessions, BerryDunn developed as-is process diagrams for eight processes across multiple functional areas. The diagrams include an overview of the process broken down into subprocesses. Each subprocess identifies task to be completed and the order of occurrence, associated systems and tools, and the departments and staff responsible for each task. As-is process diagrams were created for the following processes:

1. Zoning Boards and Commissions
2. Zoning Plan Approval
3. Building – Residential Building Permits
4. Building – Commercial Building Permits
5. Building – Trade Permits
6. Building – Inspections
7. L&P Permits
8. Pre-Application Review (Design Review)

As-is process diagrams are included in this report as Appendix A.

2.4 Primary Challenges

BerryDunn identified 11 primary challenges as a result of the project planning, fact-finding, process diagramming, and external stakeholder outreach activities completed to date. The challenges identified in Table 2.4.1 present the overall or primary challenges BerryDunn identified as themes from key functional areas in the City.

Table 2.4.1: Primary Challenges

Primary Challenges	
No.	Challenges
1	Better internal coordination of the review process could improve efficiency. The current process includes redundancies in review, including requiring a separate zoning plan approval process prior to building permit review. Each department conducts its review separately and often different plan sets are stamped and approved for the same project. External communication is siloed with each reviewer communicating with the applicant separately, and, in some cases, on a different platform.
2	Some processes are conducted outside the system. Certain processes are not tracked in EnerGov, limiting the ability to share information, coordinate reviews, and track workload history. These processes are only easily accessible by certain department staff who are responsible for the process.
3	City staff and external users have not fully adopted all technology that is available. The use of EnerGov, Bluebeam, iG Inspect, and the customer portal is inconsistent across and within departments. Staff knowledge of the system and its functionality varies among departments. There is no process for identifying and coordinating global system changes and no cross-departmental work group or other collaboration on addressing system issues or making system changes.
4	Applicants often have difficulty navigating the portal. The online portal can be confusing for applicants to navigate, especially for those who have limited technical knowledge and are inexperienced in the permitting process. Staff time is often consumed by responding to customer questions and providing assistance to applicants in navigating the portal.
5	The workflow process across departments is inefficient. Lack of notifications and inconsistent use of system functionality can result in delays in the review process. Workflow configuration needs improvement to allow linking records and to streamline the process of an application moving from one department to another.
6	Some tasks that are completed manually and on paper could be automated or completed within the system. Staff across departments are not consistent in how certain tasks are completed and how the system is used to support processes, including invoicing fees and issuing permits.
7	Public information to support applicants could be improved. External stakeholders noted the need for better information and communication during the review process and guidance documents, such as application checklists. Current documentation is specific to each department and not consistent in language, layout, or organization of information.
8	External communication with applicants is inconsistent. While some communication happens through the system or by phone call, most communication with applicants occurs via email. Documentation of communication in the system (using the Activities tab) is inconsistent across departments and users. The method for staff to send review comments is not consistent, and the process by which applicants submit revisions varies by reviewer and/or applicant. In addition, there is not consistency in format or language across departments for external documentation and communication.

Primary Challenges	
No.	Challenges
9	A significant backlog of applications for Building and Fire is contributing to the delayed turnaround time for permit review. Unanticipated staffing changes have contributed to this backlog of applications. With consistent intake of new applications, current staffing levels may not be sufficient to eliminate the backlog of reviews.
10	Consistency in processes within and across departments is lacking. Some inconsistency relates to the use of technology, as noted above, and includes standards for communicating with applicants and documentation.
11	Oversight and accountability in the permitting process is limited. Departments tend to operate independently from each other, and greater overall coordination among leadership is needed to provide guidance on process improvements, track progress, and help ensure procedures are followed and customer service expectations are being met.

3.0 Trends and Best Practices

This section includes trends and best practice considerations for the City based on BerryDunn's experience and research conducted in developing the recommendations contained in this report.

3.1 Public Portal and Application Guides

Several medium and large municipalities with complex regulatory environments have updated their customer portals to implement current technology available through Tyler Civic Access/Customer Self-Service (CSS). Integrating a well-organized municipal website with the CSS portal is a best practice for assisting customers in navigating a lot of complex information most efficiently.

The [City of Overland Park, KS](#), in addition to a development review process landing page, has a robust CSS portal that allows customers to submit permit applications, defines each permit type, shares daily inspections and routes, and includes a fee estimator.

The [City of Boulder, CO](#), has developed a user-friendly CSS landing page with cards (or links) to the most commonly requested information and services. When a user navigates to the "Apply" page, they are given an option to use the decision tree functionality to have the system assist the applicant in identifying the correct application type, rather than requiring applicants to scroll through a long list of application types.

In addition to leveraging CSS, some municipalities provide development review information and guides on their websites in a centralized location. Having easy access to information on the development review process can help applicants better navigate the process and reduce the chance that applicants miss information housed on different departments' websites.

The [City of Grand Prairie, TX](#), has a permitting landing page that includes information on specific permit types, licenses, and contractor registration information. Under each permit or license type, an applicant can view the specific information needed to apply for that permit or license. The city shares review requirements, including the application for the permit type, and information on how to apply for a permit in the city's CSS portal.

The [City of Des Moines, IA](#), has a centralized "Permit and Development Center" webpage that includes information from various departments included in the development process. There is a link to the CSS portal with an associated registration and application guide. The webpage also includes a GIS tool for jurisdiction validation, assessor information, right-of-way permit guides, payment and refund guides, a fee schedule and plan review fee estimator, contact information by department, and permit record archives.

The [City of Tulsa, OK](#), has a centralized "Permit Center" webpage that includes a link to the CSS portal. The webpage also contains links and attachments to commercial plan and residential plan guidelines, application tutorial videos, FAQs, contact information, and miscellaneous forms.

With a central online location for development review information, customers will be more likely to understand the full process and less likely to miss key information or requirements. For example, listing additional permits that may be required from other departments (Engineering, Fire, Health) for a new construction project will improve awareness of these requirements and streamline the process. Additionally, laying out a clear, step-by-step process for the applicant will provide an understanding of the sequence of steps required and the timeline for review, which will help to set expectations for the process.

3.2 Third-Party Review

Third-party plan review programs have been implemented in other communities to help address permit application backlogs or to address staffing shortages in municipal building departments. Numerous private firms provide code compliance review (and inspection) services for development projects by certified professionals. These firms are able to scale up to quickly review a large number of applications and typically have a range of certified plan reviewers (e.g., structural, energy, accessibility) to address more complex projects. There are different approaches to how communities have implemented third-party plan review.

Often a third-party plan review program is an optional path for applicants to potentially have their compliance review expedited. The applicant elects to use a third-party review agency and contracts directly with the agency. The agency provides documentation of review and approval to the municipal building department. [Washington, D.C.'s Department of Buildings \(DOB\)](#) administers an optional third-party program. Agencies are required to be certified by DOB and must participate in training. Agencies provide a plan review report to DOB. DOB periodically audits plan reviews by third-party agencies for quality assurance purposes.

The [City of San Marcos, TX](#) requires third-party plan review for certain permit types in the Fire Prevention Division. Applicants are required to submit plans for certain permit types to a third-party agency for review. The agency then submits documentation of approval to the City. This approach can be useful when there is a staffing shortage in one area or lack of technical expertise. Other communities have an optional third-party review program that is only applicable for certain permit types or based on a threshold for project scope or size (e.g., new commercial projects, projects over 20,000 square feet in floor area).

Third-party agencies are also used for short- or long-term direct contracting with municipalities for plan review and/or inspection services. This type of program has been implemented to assist with a backlog of permit applications, to expedite permit reviews for storm recovery, to review larger more complex projects, to conduct specific technical reviews, or to supplement staff capacity. In some cases, municipalities have outsourced part or all of their building department operations to a third-party agency.

To respond to a significant backlog of applications, the ongoing fast pace of development, and state-mandated plan review performance requirements, the [City of Dallas, TX](#), initiated an optional third-party plan review program in 2023. If the department fails to meet the 60-day review times mandated by state law, an applicant may submit development documents reviewed by a third-party agent that is contracted or approved by the department.

Some considerations for developing a third-party review program:

- Optional third-party review programs often refund a portion of the review fee to applicants who use a third-party agency. How should fees be addressed and how might revenues be impacted?
- What technical expertise or certifications should be required of a third-party reviewer, including State-specific knowledge or licensing?
- What type, size, or scope of projects should be allowed to or required to use a third-party review agency?
- What structure of program is appropriate for Bridgeport—an optional program where applicants contract with a third-party agency, or direct contract between the City and a third-party agency on an as-needed or project-specific basis?
- Who will be responsible for administering the program (e.g., reviewing credentials of agencies, managing contracts, auditing reviews)?
- How will a third-party review program impact current City staff?
- Are there current gaps in staffing that a third-party agency could fill with specific technical expertise?

3.3 Benchmarking

Peer comparisons, or benchmarking, can provide useful insights into how the City's permitting operations compare with those of other organizations. The environment in which the City operates is unique in many ways, including demographics, community characteristics, economic characteristics, geographic characteristics, and organizational and fiscal structure. That said, the selection of peers for comparison attempts to reflect as closely as possible the City's attributes, including population or volume of permits processed.

Peer communities were based on proximity to the City, total population, and/or similar number of building permits processed. Data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, information on an organization's website, or direct communications from an organization's staff. Annual data is from calendar year 2023, with the exception of the City's data, which is from July 2023 to June 2024.

Table 3.3.1: Peer Community Benchmarking

City	Population (2024)	Annual Permit Applications Submitted	Annual Permits Issued/ Approved	Annual Inspections Conducted	Inspections Staff	Permit Processing Staff
Bridgeport, CT	150,050	3,499	2,627	5,515	2 building inspectors; 4 trades inspectors	3 full-time equivalent permit processing staff
Hartford, CT	122,098	2,871	2,557	1,088	5 building inspector positions (3 vacant)	2 plan reviewers
Stamford, CT	138,997	5,863	7,237	11,561	7 building/trades inspectors	3 permit technicians
Springfield, MA	154,066	5,112	3,580	<i>Not available</i>	2 building inspectors; 4 trades inspectors	<i>Not available</i>
Worcester, MA	206,870	16,881	16,122	13,995	6 building inspectors; 7 trades inspectors	3 building permit technicians; 5 trade permit technicians
Overall Average	154,416	6,845	6,425	8,040	7 total inspectors	4 total staff members

Bridgeport’s population of 150,050 falls among that of the comparison communities, which have an average population of just over 155,000. Worcester is the largest of the comparison communities, with a population of 206,870. Building activity in Worcester was highest, with nearly 17,000 building permit applications submitted in 2023, and over 16,000 building permits issued. Worcester has the highest number of permit processing staff—a total of eight staff members.

The smallest of the comparison communities, Hartford had the lowest level of building activity, receiving just over 2,800 building permit applications in 2023. While Hartford has five total building inspector positions, three are currently vacant.

Stamford, CT, and Springfield, MA, are comparable in size to Bridgeport, CT. Between 5,000 and 6,000 building application permits were submitted in both Stamford and Springfield. Stamford and Bridgeport have a comparable number of permit processing staff.

Of the cities included in the comparison, Stamford and Worcester have the largest inspections staff, at 7 and 13 members, respectively. As a comparison, Bridgeport has six total inspections

staff members. Based on 2023 totals, in Worcester about 1,100 inspections were conducted per inspections staff member. In Stamford, nearly 1,700 inspections were conducted per inspections staff member.

The number of applications submitted in Bridgeport (3,499) was below the total submitted in Springfield (5,112), the most comparable community in terms of population. Similarly, fewer permits were issued in Bridgeport (2,267) than in Springfield (3,580).

In comparison to the average annual activity levels, permit applications and issuances in Bridgeport were below the comparison community overall averages, while staffing levels in Bridgeport are comparable to the average among the comparison communities.

4.0 Recommendations for Improvement













This section identifies opportunities for improvement based on the assessment of current processes, fact-finding interviews, and external stakeholder feedback. This section includes prioritized recommended improvements and steps for the City to take to implement these initiatives.

4.1 Recommendations for Improvement Approach

As a result of fact-finding, external stakeholder focus group meetings, survey results, information provided by the City PMT, and best practice research, BerryDunn has identified and recommended projects and initiatives to support the City’s development review process and address challenges identified in Section 2.4 of this report. Using the following four prioritization categories, BerryDunn developed a sequential list of projects and initiatives:

- **Priority Rank:** The overall prioritization based on the recommended timeline for implementation.
- **Relative Benefit:** The anticipated overall benefit to the City upon completion of the particular recommendation.
- **Ease of Implementation:** The anticipated ease of implementing the recommendation. Considerations for this category include anticipated resources needed for the project or initiative and the scope of the project or initiative.
- **Best Practices:** The established procedures to emerging trends, which will be identified for the recommendation.

Table 4.1.1: Prioritization Categories

Prioritization Categories			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
 <p>High</p>	 <p>High</p>	 <p>Difficult</p>	 <p>Bleeding Edge</p>
 <p>Medium</p>	 <p>Medium</p>	 <p>Medium</p>	 <p>Leading Edge</p>
 <p>Low</p>	 <p>Low</p>	 <p>Easy</p>	 <p>Established</p>

Based upon the application of the prioritization categories, BerryDunn developed the following 10 projects and initiatives, listed in sequential order. Each project or initiative has an associated table with a description, source information, related issues and challenges, prioritization category rankings, anticipated benefits, potential risks, action items to implement the project or initiative, and recommended timeline.

Table 4.1.2: Prioritized List of Projects and Initiatives

Prioritized List of Projects and Initiatives	
No.	Project/Initiative Name
1	Improve efficiency of the plan review workflow process
2	Consistently document and track development review processes in EnerGov
3	Enhance staff use of EnerGov and other technology
4	Expand use of the portal
5	Improve consistency in external communications
6	Expand capacity in the plan review process
7	Establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the review process
8	Develop detailed guidelines and materials for applicants
9	Establish performance metrics and methods for tracking and reporting
10	Establish a governance framework for the permitting process

BerryDunn has organized each project and initiative based on the template below:


Table 4.1.3: Recommendation for Improvement Template

Recommendation Name			
Description			
Description: <i>This section of the template will describe the challenges and recommendation.</i>			
Related Issue(s)			
<i>This section of the template will identify the challenges related to this recommendation.</i>			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
<i>Rating of Recommendation (High, Medium, Low)</i>	<i>Rating of the Relative Benefit (High, Medium, Low)</i>	<i>Rating of the Ease of Implementation (Easy, Medium, Difficult)</i>	<i>Rating Best Practices (Established, Leading Edge, Bleeding Edge)</i>
Action Items to Implement			

Recommendation Name
<i>This section of the template will list the action items needed to implement the recommendation.</i>
Anticipated Benefits
<i>This section of the template will list the anticipated benefits of the recommendation.</i>
Risks
<i>This section of the template will describe potential risks during implementation or if the initiative is not implemented.</i>
Implementation Timeline
<i>This section of the template will provide guidance on when the initiative should be implemented and dependency on other initiatives.</i>
Best Practice Considerations
<i>This section of the template will describe best practices related to this recommendation.</i>

4.2 Recommendations for Improvement

Table 4.2.1: Improve efficiency of the plan review workflow process


Improve efficiency of the plan review workflow process	
Description	
	<p>Description: The plan review process was not evaluated for efficiency as part of the EnerGov implementation effort. As a result, the inefficiencies in the process were carried over to the new system. In addition, the City has not taken full advantage of technology intended to streamline the review process and improve internal coordination.</p> <p>Most notably, requiring a separate zoning plan review is redundant and creates additional work for applicants and City staff. This process could easily be eliminated, and Zoning staff could conduct a full zoning review as part of the building permit review process.</p> <p>Implementing the eReview functionality in EnerGov could assist City staff in coordinating reviews, help ensure staff are reviewing the same plan set, and improve communication with the applicant and among staff.</p> <p>Other tasks in the plan review workflow process, including invoicing fees and issuing permits, are completed by different departments at different points in the process. There is no standardization in how these tasks are completed or coordination to reduce redundancy of efforts. For example, different departments invoice for their department fees at different points in the process (before review, during review, after review but prior to approval). Establishing a standard process for all departments to follow or combining the fee collection process to have all fees invoiced and paid at one time, could help eliminate confusion for applicants and reduce delays in the process due to unpaid fees.</p>
Related Issue(s)	



Improve efficiency of the plan review workflow process			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review process is inefficient and not coordinated. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 1: Modify the plan review process to eliminate the separate zoning plan approval for projects that require a building permit. Since Zoning is currently a reviewer on all building permits, eliminating the zoning plan approval would not require a workflow change but would allow Zoning staff to review for zoning compliance once a building permit application has been submitted. Currently, Zoning staff are signing off on all building permits to confirm that a project has zoning plan approval. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 2: Establish a procedure for all reviewers to use eReviews. Reviewers are currently communicating with applicants separately and typically via email to provide comments and receive revisions. Using eReview will require staff to establish processes for using the system to provide comments and/or share marked-up plan sets and will require applicants to upload revised files through the portal for staff review. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 3: Develop an SOP for the eReview process in coordination with implementation of the recommendation outlined in Table 4.2.7. This should outline roles and responsibilities in the process, including how the Review Coordinator role is managed, how and when review comments are issued, how applicants submit revisions, and the process for stamping and approving documents. This SOP should clarify an approval process for identifying and stamping one set of final approved plans that addresses all staff comments. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 4: Assess each department’s fees and invoicing processes and make modifications to standardize the process. Communication regarding fees and invoices should be standardized across departments, and applicants should be provided clear guidance on how to pay online. If possible, collection of fees should be consolidated to reduce the number of separate payments required by an applicant. For example, all review fees for all departments could be added to the permit application by reviewers (and made visible to the applicant) and combined into one invoice prior to permit issuance. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 5: Communicate workflow changes to external users. Key staff should work with the Communications Department to develop content to update external stakeholders on changes to processes. This could include a press release, email to contacts, and website announcement. In addition, temporary banner notifications or pop-up boxes built into the portal could be used to notify users of system changes. 			
Anticipated Benefits			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased efficiency and consistency in how City staff process and manage permit applications Increased communication and coordination among departments as there are identified hand-off points and documented next steps 			

Improve efficiency of the plan review workflow process	
Risks	
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued lack of coordination in the plan review process, which can create further frustration for applicants and loss of productivity and efficiency for City staff Continued inconsistency in how departments manage the plan review process and potential discrepancies in approved plans <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff would need to prioritize establishing processes for eReviews and provide and participate in training on using this module 	
Implementation Timeline	
<p>This initiative should be started immediately. Completion of this initiative will support the implementation of other initiatives in this report and help improve overall process efficiency. Tasks 1, 2, and 4 should be completed within six months, and Task 3 should be completed in coordination with the recommendation and timeline as noted in Table 5.2.7. Task 5 should be completed as (or just before) process changes are rolled out.</p>	
Best Practice Considerations	
<p>Making significant changes to workflow processes should be done in one effort and in coordination with all impacted departments. Implementing eReviews could help streamline the plan review process and improve communication among staff and with applicants. This requires coordination of staff in managing files and explicitly establishing roles and responsibilities for file management within the system. Tyler Technologies' Client Support and other resources provide some guidance for best practices in implementing this tool.</p>	

Table 4.2.2: Consistently document and track development review processes in EnerGov

Consistently document and track development review processes in EnerGov	
Description	
	<p>Description: Departments are not currently maximizing the functionality of EnerGov in the permitting review process. Departments should work with IT to understand how processes can be captured in EnerGov in a way that meets the needs of departments and improves efficiency.</p> <p>Currently, board and commission applications are logged in EnerGov but not tracked in the system. Similarly, pre-application meetings (concept and technical review meetings) are not tracked or logged in EnerGov. Other permit and inspection processes (e.g., sewer permits, stormwater and erosion control inspections) are not tracked in EnerGov and cannot be linked to related EnerGov records, such as building permits.</p>
Related Issue(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EnerGov is not being used consistently across departments and is not being used to its full capacity. 	




Consistently document and track development review processes in EnerGov			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some process steps and functions happen manually, which is time consuming for staff and can result in delays due to human error or inconsistencies due to lack of training. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 1: Include all permits and inspections in EnerGov. Individual departments that maintain responsibility for each permit or inspection should work with ITS to help ensure that permits and inspections are configured appropriately in the system, that the correct information is collected through the portal, and that City staff understand how to navigate the system. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 2: Establish standards and expectations for linking related records, and document this in the SOPs. To facilitate communication and information-sharing across departments and to help ensure that projects move through the process smoothly, building permits should be linked to plans, and subpermits and inspections should be linked to building permits, so all staff can easily view information related to a project. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 3: Establish a process for tracking board and commission and pre-application processes in EnerGov. Tracking should minimally include documentation of meetings (date, outcome, attendance), uploading approved or reviewed plans, project status, and basic project details. 			
Anticipated Benefits			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved access to linked records across departments More streamlined review process if staff and applicants have easy access to all project information 			
Risks			
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordination and limited sharing of information across departments will continue to result in inefficiencies that delay the process <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This initiative requires dedicated staff time to review and update processes within the system and time for system training to help ensure consistent use 			
Implementation Timeline			
<p>This initiative should start immediately, with Task 1 beginning in Month 1 and being completed in Month 3, in coordination with plan review workflow updates (Table 4.2.1). Task 2 should be completed in Month 4. Department and City leadership should determine when Task 3 should be completed based on the availability of appropriate technology and equipment to support effective implementation.</p>			



Consistently document and track development review processes in EnerGov	
Best Practice Considerations	
<p>San Luis Obispo County, CA, includes an optional pre-application meeting review process for site development applications. The county provides step-by-step instructions for the pre-application process on the website. These requests along with relevant documents are submitted via the online portal and tracked in the county’s EnerGov system.</p>	

Table 4.2.3 Enhance staff use of EnerGov and other technology

Enhance staff use of EnerGov and other technology	
Description	
	<p>Description: Use of EnerGov and other supporting technology (e.g., Bluebeam, iG Inspect app) is not consistent among and within departments in permitting processes. With varying levels of system knowledge and staff turnover, there is inconsistency in how different users interact with the system for the same processes. Improving consistency in the use of available technology will require improvements to system configuration to better support department processes and identifying certain staff to serve as functional leads to support system use.</p> <p>Departments should work with ITS to establish an EnerGov work group. This group should be comprised of functional leads representing each department or functional area within a department and a representative from ITS. All departments involved in the permitting process should be represented in the work group. Functional leads should be end users who understand the details of the department’s operations and have a strong understanding or the ability to understand system navigation and configuration. Members of the work group should be provided with more advanced system training and permissions to better support their departments’ needs, share system knowledge, and assist in the development of system trainings and materials.</p> <p>The work group should serve as the change control board to identify system updates needed and help ensure that changes make to the system are implemented appropriately, with consideration for potential impacts to all end users. Currently, individual users, through department heads, identify system changes and direct these requests to ITS, without an understanding of how changes may impact other departments’ use of the system. The work group will discuss and evaluate system changes and determine the best approach to address an issue. The work group will also coordinate training and sharing information on system changes or updates that will improve communication and support effective change management.</p>
Related Issue(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology is not being used consistently across departments and is not being used to its full capacity. • Some staff are completing tasks using the system or related technology (e.g., using Bluebeam for plan review and markup, resulting inspections in the iG Inspect app) while others are completing the same tasks manually. • Manually completing tasks is often more time consuming and can result in delays in the permitting process. 	




Enhance staff use of EnerGov and other technology			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: Establish an EnerGov work group. This group should be cross-functional and consist of representatives from all departments and divisions involved in the permitting process. The work group should also function as the change control board for system changes. Members should be familiar with their department/division’s use of EnerGov and related technology to support development review, and membership should include representatives from all departments that use the system. ☑ Task 2: Create a process for staff to identify issues or suggest system changes. The work group should determine how the group identifies and addresses issues. This process should be clearly articulated to staff, transparent, and allow any internal end user to provide feedback or recommendations to the work group on system issues. ☑ Task 3: Provide additional training and support for work group members. ITS should support the work group with additional training and help ensure that members have a strong understanding of system functionality. ☑ Task 4: Create a standard for reviewing, evaluating, approving or rejecting, prioritizing, and implementing changes. This process should consider impacts to all end users and prioritize process efficiency, transparency, and ease of use for applicants. ☑ Task 5: Implement a system for documenting change requests, decisions, and the changes implemented. Updates on changes requested and implemented should be shared with end users to keep staff informed about changes and their impacts. ☑ Task 6: Identify key staff to lead the change implementation process in coordination with ITS. Staff leads should work with ITS to test and validate changes and monitor the implementation process for any issues. ☑ Task 7: Continue to develop and implement technology training materials specifically tailored to staff needs. Materials should include documentation and/or video training for EnerGov, Bluebeam, and the iG Inspect app. Training materials should cover basic system navigation, workflow processes, and specialized training for functional leads, and should be updated to reflect new processes. These materials should be maintained and be easily accessible for all staff, with guidance provided on which trainings are required or recommended for different roles or departments. 			
Anticipated Benefits			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding of system changes across departments • Improved coordination of system changes to consider and communicate potential impacts to all end users 			







Enhance staff use of EnerGov and other technology	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A thorough change review process to help ensure that a system change has the intended impact and addresses the challenge staff identified, and that staff are aware when changes are made More consistent use of the system across all departments and improved efficiency in permitting processes 	
Risks	
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordination and communication on EnerGov changes will continue to create challenges for users and may result in increased frustration with the system <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This initiative requires consistent dedicated staff time, coordination of all involved departments, and regular support from ITS 	
Implementation Timeline	
<p>This initiative should be started immediately. Task 1 should be completed in Month 1. Training for the work group and development of a change management process (Tasks 2 – 6) should be completed by Month 6. Creating and facilitating training for end users (Task 7) should be ongoing, as needed.</p>	
Best Practice Considerations	
<p>The City and County of San Francisco, CA, Human Resources Department maintains an online employee training portal. The portal identifies trainings required for certain positions. Training materials consist of guidance documents (PDFs), links to additional resources, and web-based training through the training portal. Once the portal is established, it is an effective and efficient way to deploy training to a large number of staff and to keep end users up to date on new processes.</p>	

Table 4.2.4 Expand use of the portal


Expand use of the portal	
Description	
	<p>Description: City staff and external stakeholders noted challenges in accessing and sharing information, uploading documents, and navigating the portal. While the implementation of the portal has allowed applicants to apply for permits and receive information online without having to visit City offices in person, navigating the portal can be confusing, and applicants often need clarification about what permit to apply for or how to submit an application.</p> <p>Improvements should be made to support a more user-friendly interface, including providing more instructional information, tailoring application questions and information for each permit type, and modifying the page layout to facilitate navigation of the portal. In addition, greater support through instructional documents or videos to assist new external users is needed. Internal training is also needed to support City staff who are tasked with helping applicants navigate the portal.</p>
Related Issue(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on how to navigate the portal or the overall permitting process is not sufficient. 	







Expand use of the portal			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External users often contact City staff for assistance in navigating the portal, which takes significant staff time. In addition, staff are often unfamiliar with how to navigate the portal. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
			
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 1: Department leadership should collaborate with key staff to assess and consolidate permit and inspection types. A consolidated list of permit types should also document additional information to be collected at application intake that may impact review requirements (e.g., number of stories, curb cuts proposed) and which of these fields are required for submission for each permit type. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 2: Department leadership should collaborate with key staff to update portal information and instructions. Only information relevant to each permit type should be included, and clear instructions should be provided to assist users in completing portal applications. Where appropriate, links or references to other guidance documents, ordinances, or videos could be provided directly from the portal. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 3: The main page of the portal should be designed to highlight the most common service areas. Broad categories of application types (e.g., commercial, residential, subpermits, licenses) could be used to narrow the list of application types to make it easier for applicants to identify the correct application type and reduce the chance of a user selecting incorrectly. This page should include information about fees, payments, inspection scheduling, finding the status of a permit, applying for a permit, scheduling a meeting, and any other critical information. Configuring this page to call out key processes and services will help improve efficiency. For example, linking directly to guidance documents, application checklists, or other supporting materials will assist applicants in providing a complete application. In addition, portal features such as a fee estimator or dashboard of review times could help clarify the process for applicants and reduce the number of phone calls to staff. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 4: Key staff should work with IT to build decision tree functionality in the portal. By clearly guiding applicants to the correct application type, there will be fewer incorrect applications that need to be voided and resubmitted. This functionality would allow users to select from multiple options (e.g., commercial construction, residential construction) to guide the applicant to the correct application type(s) based on the options selected. 			
Anticipated Benefits			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer phone calls and emails to City staff regarding portal navigation and the application process Fewer applications submitted incorrectly that require staff to void the application and the applicant to reapply Easier communication between staff and applicants 			
Risks			

Expand use of the portal	
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued challenge of incorrect application types being submitted Continued frequent calls and emails from applicants for staff support in using the portal <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to the system portal should be completed in coordination with the EnerGov work group and after workflow changes have been updated (see Table 4.2.1) and permit types have been consolidated. 	
Implementation Timeline	
<p>This initiative should be started after implementation of plan review workflow process changes (Table 5.2.1) has begun. Tasks 1 and 2 should be completed by the end of Month 4. Tasks 3 and 4 should be completed by the end of Month 7.</p>	
Best Practice Considerations	
<p>The City of Boulder, CO, uses the decision tree functionality of EnerGov to help guide applicants to the correct application or service. This tool narrows the options through a series of questions/prompts (e.g., Residential Construction, Commercial Construction) and reduces the likelihood of an applicant selecting an incorrect permit type. Users are also given an option to bypass the decision tree tool if they know what permit type or application is needed. Selection options based on the prompts are also tied to the City's information library contained on the municipal website, directing applicants to the website for forms, instructions, regulations, or other information needed prior to submitting an application.</p>	

Table 4.2.5 Improve consistency in external communications

Improve consistency in external communications	
Description	
	<p>Description: Each department involved in the permitting process maintains its own forms and materials that are shared with the public. There is no standard format for these documents across City departments. In addition, in communicating with applicants during the review and construction process, staff often do so via their individual email accounts. There is no standard approach to how, what, or when information is communicated to applicants. The system generates some automated emails; however, these notifications are not generated consistently throughout the permitting process.</p> <p>Establishing standards for the format, language, tone, and frequency of communications with external stakeholders would help establish expectations for staff communications and make it easier for external users to recognize and understand. For example, all permits the City issues should follow the same format with different information based on the type of permit and project. In addition, the automated email associated with a permit issuance should generally follow the same format regardless of permit type or which department is issuing the permit.</p>
Related Issue(s)	








Improve consistency in external communications			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency is lacking in communication, responsiveness, and level of detail provided across City departments 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
			
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 1: Form a review team to work with the City’s Communications Department to develop standard formats for documents. This should include standard headings, fonts, contact information provided, and language. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 2: Each Department should update its own forms and documents to meet the standards established in Task 1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 3: Department staff should work with the Communications Department and/or ITS to review and update website information. This should include a review of information provided across department webpages to help ensure there are not inconsistencies in information and that the organization and navigation of different department pages is similar. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 4: The EnerGov work group should review all automated external system emails. Working with ITS, the work group should compile a list of automated emails and identify where additional automated emails are needed and where some may be eliminated. The group should then revise email language for consistency. 			
Anticipated Benefits			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication between the City and the public Improved responsiveness and understanding of City communication from external stakeholders Improved reputation of City staff and the permitting process 			
Risks			
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued challenges with customer service and public trust <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing standards and updating documents and materials will require significant staff time and resources 			
Implementation Timeline			
<p>This initiative should be started after implementation of other process changes has been completed. Task 1 should begin in Month 6. Tasks 2, 3, and 4 should begin after other process changes have been implemented and be completed by Month 12.</p>			
Best Practice Considerations			

Improve consistency in external communications






The City of New York, NY, creates Building Bulletins to update the public on code changes or clarifications to code interpretations. These are maintained on the department’s website along with notices on policy changes and executive orders that impact development review.

Table 4.2.6 Expand capacity in the plan review process

Expand capacity in the plan review process			
Description			
	<p>Description: There is currently a significant backlog of permit applications for review by Building and Fire. This has resulted from a combination of factors, including temporary staffing shortages due to position vacancies, an increase in volume of permit applications, and potentially an increase in complexity of applications to be reviewed. Based on discussions with staff, department leadership, and an analysis of peer communities, the application backlog is not likely to be noticeably reduced with current staffing. Addressing this issue will relieve pressure on staff who are responsible for plan review in addition to responding to customer inquiries. This will also allow staff to dedicate time to training and process improvement efforts noted in this report.</p> <p>Municipalities have taken several different approaches to implementing a third-party review program to have private sector firms assist in addressing workload for permit review. Firms typically have broad expertise in various areas of code compliance, including, structural, mechanical, life safety, electrical, and energy, and can quickly scale up to meet demand. The City could retain a firm or firms on an as-needed basis or establish the use of a (City-approved) third-party plan reviewer as an option for applicants to request.</p> <p>In addition to addressing the backlog in the near-term, Building and Fire should continue to evaluate staffing and trends in permit workloads (see Table 4.2.10) and adjust as needed over time. While many of the recommendations in this report will improve efficiency for Building and Fire staff, additional changes, such as adjusting roles, cross-training staff, or hiring additional staff, could be considered to increase capacity after an evaluation of performance indicators once recommendations have been implemented.</p>		
Related Issue(s)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant backlog of applications for Building and Fire is contributing to the delayed turnaround time for permit review. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
			
Action Items to Implement			

Expand capacity in the plan review process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: The Building and Fire departments should evaluate the current workload to understand the number and type of permit applications as well as how long the applications have been in the City’s work queue. ☑ Task 2: Coordinate with City leadership to evaluate the City’s budget to address the issue and potential costs for different options. With an opt-in program, some permit fees paid to the City would be reduced. Contracting directly with a third-party review firm, while more costly, will quickly address the backlog. ☑ Task 3: Implement a program or policy to address the permit application backlog. City leadership should work with department heads to make an appropriate decision on how to address the backlog. This should be clearly communicated to staff and external stakeholders, including the purpose, approach, and timeline for the program or policy. ☑ Task 4: Continue to evaluate staffing and workload. This should be done using consistent reporting and analysis of trends based on performance indicators (see Table 5.2.10).
Anticipated Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced backlog of permit applications and reduced overall turnaround time for application review and approval • Reduced number of phone call and email inquiries and complaints from applicants regarding permit application review time • Improved staff morale
Risks
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnaround time for permit application review will continue to be lengthy • There is the potential for staff to be overworked and for staff morale to decline <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In determining the best course of action, the City should be aware of legal considerations related to City policies and union contracts
Implementation Timeline
<p>This initiative should be started immediately. Tasks 1 and 2 should be completed by the end of Month 2. Timing of Task 3 will be dependent on the course of action identified in Task 2. The City should aim to substantially reduce the backlog of applications within six months. Task 4 should be ongoing.</p>
Best Practice Considerations
<p>The City of Dallas, TX, implemented an optional third-party plan review program that combines the opt-in approach with an as-needed approach, by allowing applicants to opt in if the department fails to meet the state-mandated plan review performance requirement of a maximum 60-day review time. An applicant may submit development documents reviewed by a third-party agent that is contracted or approved by the department.</p>

Table 4.2.7: Establish SOPs for the review process

Establish SOPs for the review process			
Description			
	<p>Description: The City should coordinate departments in the development review process by creating cross-department SOPs for development and permitting review processes. SOPs should encompass all department requirements and processes related to the review process and provide a sequential list of tasks and requirements from project initiation through construction completion. The City can build upon existing documentation, including checklists and forms, to coordinate and consolidate information into a complete document of all permitting review procedures. Using SOPs to internally coordinate the development review process can also help embed consistency and quality control in the process.</p> <p>SOPs can also include standards to be incorporated across departments for cross-departmental tasks, such as electronic plan review, closing out permits, and assessing fees. Clear and consistent standards for communication will help increase clarity and predictability for applicants, which can help with planning project schedules and resources. In addition, establishing formal SOPs will provide clear expectations for internal staff and help ensure consistency in managing and process applications across departments.</p>		
Related Issue(s)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal coordination and efficiency in the permitting process could be improved. • Consistency in the review process within and across departments could be improved. • Oversight over the permitting process is limited. • City staff and external users have not fully adopted all technology that is available. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
			
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: Identify subject matter experts (SMEs) from each department in the development review process. Staff members will participate in updating the existing SOP and guidelines and developing new documents. They will help coordinate department feedback on the development and updates to the documents. ☑ Task 2: Develop an internal SOP document that includes all policies and procedures related to the development review process. Department SMEs should work together to incorporate all tasks and policies into one internal SOP document. This development review SOP document should be organized sequentially and clearly indicate which department maintains responsibility for each policy or task. A standard format for policies and procedures should be used throughout the document to make it easy to navigate and to facilitate document updates. New procedures identified to be included in the SOP could follow the same format as the current 			

Establish SOPs for the review process
<p>SOP document. Creating the document could be done with the assistance of a consultant once staff have outlined processes and clarified roles and responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 3: Use visual aids to help supplement the SOP. Using visual aids, such as workflow diagrams and screenshots, can provide staff with visual navigation for the review process. Workflow diagrams should include each step of the development review process for each respective department. Workflow diagrams can also include narratives that describe the required documents for submittal, what happens during plan review, how fees are assessed, and what to expect during an inspection. ☑ Task 4: Share new SOP with departments for feedback before finalizing. Departments should provide feedback on the SOP to help ensure there are no gaps. This step can also be a beta test to help ensure staff can easily follow and understand the documents. ☑ Task 5: Finalize SOP. When these documents are finalized, all documents should be stored in a central location, digitally. This catalog should be centrally located and accessible to City staff. The internal SOP should be a living document revisited annually, or as needed, to be updated as processes and policies change. ☑ Task 6: Establish a process for updating the SOP. This could include revisiting the document annually and having the department SMEs review the changes to the SOP before finalizing it.
Anticipated Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased efficiency and consistency in how City staff process and manage permit applications • Increased communication and coordination among departments as there are identified hand-off points and documented next steps • Increased efficiency in training new staff
Risks
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued lack of consistency, clarity, and predictability in the permitting review process, which can create further frustration for applicants and loss of productivity and efficiency for City staff <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff would need to prioritize developing and updating SOPs. This may cause a shift or a reprioritization with other department initiatives in the review process
Implementation Timeline
<p>This initiative should take 10 months to complete. Tasks 1 and 2 should begin in Month 6, as workflow changes are being finalized. Tasks 3 – 6 should be completed by Month 10.</p>
Best Practice Considerations
<p>The City of Wilmington, DE, has created a development review process manual that lists all steps and necessary permit and approvals required in the residential development process. The process begins with due diligence tasks to be completed prior to submitting a planning application, such as determining zoning and status of utility service to a site and provides guidance through construction completion and submission of as-built drawings. The manual also provides an overview of fees required and references other approvals that may be required depending on project scope and site conditions.</p>

Table 4.2.8: Develop detailed guidelines and materials for applicants

Develop detailed guidelines and materials for applicants			
Description			
	<p>Description: The City could create guidance documents to support applicants in navigating the permitting process. A public-facing process document should encompass all department requirements and processes related to the permitting review process and provide a sequential list of tasks and requirements from project initiation through construction completion. Having this information in one place can assist applicants in planning project schedules and resources, help guide applicants in submitting complete applications, and establish expectations and clarify responsibilities for applicants and staff in the process. Guidelines can also clarify when county, state, and other external agency reviews may be required and at what point in the process these agencies should be engaged. Guidelines should be developed for project types and should incorporate existing documentation, such as submission checklists and forms.</p> <p>Creating guidance documents that are inclusive of all departments and divisions will help communicate clear expectations to staff and applicants and help ensure consistency in managing and processing applications. Guidance documents could also be enhanced by including reference to other resources, templates, or examples (e.g., sample site plan, additional resources for developing in a flood zone, or an example of a traffic plan).</p>		
Related Issue(s)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants often have difficulty navigating the portal. • External communication with applicants is inconsistent. • Public information to support applicants could be improved. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: Task 1: Identify SMEs from each department in the permitting process. Staff members will participate in identifying material to include in application guidelines. Staff will help coordinate department feedback on the development and updates to the documents. ☑ Task 2: Review existing guidance documents and identify any gaps as they relate to the permitting process. SMEs will identify department processes and tasks that should be added or clarified. ☑ Task 3: Identify the most common review processes. The City SME team should identify which permit or project types are most common to begin developing external guidance documents for (e.g., commercial alteration, single-family home). The guidance documents will pull together 			

Develop detailed guidelines and materials for applicants
<p>existing information (building permit checklists, board and commission instructions, subpermit application forms) to make the process and requirements easier for applicants to understand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 4: A universal guideline template should be used to create consistency in format among guidelines. Before creating guidelines, develop a uniform template for all guideline documents. This can help make navigating from one process to the next easier for staff and applicants and will facilitate the development of new guidelines. ☑ Task 5: Develop process guidelines that incorporate tasks and supporting information across all relevant departments and agencies. The staff members from the respective departments should be involved in developing new public-facing guidelines using the templates. Leverage the knowledge and experience of SMEs in each development review process to help ensure requirements and policies are accurately captured. Guidelines should be developed for applicants to use, and these guidelines should clearly illustrate the sequencing of steps and requirements in the review process. Guidelines should include (or direct applicants to) more detailed information, such as the building permit submission checklists, contact information for external review agencies, or how-to guides and videos. Each process guideline (e.g., new commercial building) will serve as the central point of information for the entire review process and link to or incorporate the City’s existing informational resources, including checklists, fee schedules, ordinances, and other relevant documents and resources. A consultant team could be retained to support staff in design and development of documents to reduce the amount of staff time required to complete this initiative. ☑ Task 6: Share guidelines with departments and external agencies for feedback before finalizing. Departments should provide feedback on new and updated documents to help ensure there are no gaps. This step can also be a beta test to help ensure the public can easily follow and understand the documents. ☑ Task 7: Finalize guidelines. When these documents are finalized, they should be stored in a central location digitally. This catalog should be accessible to City staff. Public-facing guidelines should be easily accessible and centrally located on the City website and linked to from the customer portal.
Anticipated Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved quality of application submissions, contributing to an overall reduced timeline for permit application review • Reduced number of phone calls and emails from applicants
Risks
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff will continue to experience a high volume of phone call and email inquiries from applicants • Quality of applications will continue to be a challenge and require multiple rounds of review and staff support for applicants <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant staff time is required or additional cost to hire an outside consultant to develop guidelines
Implementation Timeline

Develop detailed guidelines and materials for applicants	
This initiative should take 12 months to complete. Tasks 1, 2, and 3 should begin in Month 5, as workflow changes are being finalized. Tasks 4 – 6 should begin in Month 8 and be completed by Month 12.	
Best Practice Considerations	
The City of Denver, CO's Commercial Building Permit Guide provides step-by-step instructions for the permit process and also explains other reviews and approvals that may be required prior to or in conjunction with applying for a building permit.	

Table 4.2.9: Establish performance metrics and methods for tracking and reporting

Establish performance metrics and methods for tracking and reporting			
Description			
	<p>Description: Departments do not consistently track or report on performance metrics related to the permitting process. Tracking workloads and analyzing trends in permit volume, type, and other metrics can allow department leadership to evaluate staff capacity, resource allocation, training needs, and the impact of process changes. In addition, tracking other types of non-system tasks (phone call, emails, in-person meetings) where possible can help departments understand how staff resources are being used.</p>		
Related Issue(s)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant backlog of applications for Building and Fire is contributing to the delayed turnaround time for permit review. • The workflow process across departments is inefficient. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: Department leadership should coordinate with City Council and City leadership to understand goals for the permitting process. Having specific goals (e.g., complete a first review of all commercial permit applications within two weeks of submission, respond to all emails within two business days) will help guide department heads in identifying performance indicators. ☑ Task 2: Develop a list of key metrics or performance indicators to be evaluated. Department heads should maintain this list and confirm with ITS that these data points are being captured in the system and can be easily reported on. ☑ Task 3: Establish a process for regularly reporting on metrics and coordinate with other department heads on how this information is shared. Data can be extracted from the system through custom reporting or using the system's advanced search or dashboard functionality. A dashboard could be customized for each department or division leader to easily view these 			








Establish performance metrics and methods for tracking and reporting
<p>metrics. Department heads should work with ITS to develop an approach to reporting that works for each department. Performance data for all departments should be shared with City leadership and across departments regularly. This could be done through a combined report to leadership or via a web platform. In addition, department and City leaders should consider sharing basic performance data (e.g., applications received, permits issued, inspections completed) with the public to highlight work done by staff and to demonstrate improvements in efficiency.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 4: Department and City leadership should periodically evaluate performance data and trends and make adjustments as needed. Permitting trends, including fluctuations in application volume, types of permits being applied for, and complexity of applications as a result of changing codes or new materials and technology all impact workloads. Department and City leaders should be trained on how to access data from the system and run reports on key metrics. Carefully monitoring these data will allow departments to appropriately adjust staffing, resources, or training, as needed.</p>
Anticipated Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of staffing and resource needs and improved responsiveness to workload changes • Improved transparency in department operations
Risks
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued lack of accountability and oversight of the permitting process <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of all department heads and City leadership is essential
Implementation Timeline
<p>Task 1 should begin immediately and be completed by Month 3. Tasks 2 and 3 should begin after other process improvements have been implemented, in Month 7, and be completed by Month 9. Task 4 should be ongoing.</p>
Best Practice Considerations
<p>The City of Chicago, IL, maintains a public data portal that provides information on various city operations, including building permits. The building permit data portal allows users to filter data based on different metrics (e.g., issue data, permit type, processing time) and view results in a data table, chart, or via GIS.</p> <p>The City of St. Louis, MO, also shares building permit data via a dashboard webpage that is easy for users to filter and sort and provides options for downloading the data in different formats.</p>

Table 4.2.10 Establish a governance framework for the permitting process

Establish a governance framework for the permitting process
Description



Establish a governance framework for the permitting process			
	<p>Description: Currently, different functions within the permitting process are managed within different departments, with minimal oversight or coordination of the overall permitting process or systems. The City should establish a structure for governance of the permitting process. Regular meetings of department heads with City leadership should focus on the broader citywide goals to continue to provide excellent customer service and improve efficiency in the permitting process. This group should also coordinate with the EnerGov work group to address system challenges and change management concerns.</p>		
Related Issue(s)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination and efficiency in the permitting process could be improved. • Consistency in the review process within and across departments could be improved. • There is a need for oversight over the permitting process. 			
Prioritization Category Rankings			
Priority Rank	Relative Benefit	Ease of Implementation	Best Practices
			
Action Items to Implement			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Task 1: Department heads and City leadership should establish a quarterly or bimonthly meeting of the leadership team to address concerns related to the permitting process. Meetings should include decision makers from all involved departments and should involve a discussion of challenges, process improvements, and review of performance metrics. This group should include OPED economic development staff. ☑ Task 2: The leadership team should inventory all process improvements and develop an organized structure that states the process improvement, its purpose, responsible staff members, priority, and the status of the improvement. This inventory should be centrally and electronically located where the team will have access to it. ☑ Task 3: The leadership team should not only track the progress of improvements but also operate as a think tank. Department leaders should update the group on the progress of the improvements they are developing. In addition, the leadership team should provide an opportunity for staff to bring ideas to the team on how to work through challenges in process improvement. ☑ Task 4: The leadership team should develop a communication plan for the rollout of finalized process improvements. This communication plan should include how each improvement will be rolled out to staff members. Department leaders should also function as ambassadors who can reinforce the importance and purpose of the improvements with their divisions/sections and as liaisons who can provide support with implementing the improvements. Communication to external stakeholders should also be addressed to share process updates and successes with the public. ☑ Task 5: Continue to monitor implementation of process improvements. Department leaders should monitor performance against goals and help to ensure that SOPs are clear and followed consistently. This includes establishing accountability for staff to implement improvements and for 			



Establish a governance framework for the permitting process
<p>department and City leadership to help ensure that staff have the appropriate tools, resources, and training to meet performance goals.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Task 6: Foster a culture of continuous process improvement and support for staff. To foster a culture of continuous process improvement and team building, the leadership team should encourage City staff to make suggestions for process improvements. In addition, recognition of improvements should be a priority. This could be done through sharing performance data (permits issued, inspections completed) publicly on a regular basis, promoting process improvements through external communications, or celebrating completion of large projects and recognizing staff involvement in the process.</p>
Anticipated Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased accountability for leadership and staff • Increased communication and coordination among departments
Risks
<p>No Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will continue to be a lack of coordination among departments <p>During Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a commitment to process improvement and collaboration by City and department leaders
Implementation Timeline
<p>This initiative should be started once process improvements have been implemented. Tasks 1 and 2 should begin in Month 6. Tasks 3, 4, 5, and 6 should be ongoing.</p>
Best Practice Considerations
<p>The City of Portland, OR has established a Permit Improvement Team to address challenges in the permitting process. This team originated from a special project on process improvement with the purpose of providing better service to residents and the development community by responding to the critical need to support economic recovery, listen and respond to customer complaints, and address the challenges with staff recruitment and retention. The Permit Improvement Team is charged with leading, coordinating and building capacity for the city-wide permit improvement effort. The Permit Improvement Team supports projects, process improvement efforts, and works as a change management agent. The team works across bureaus to lead, advise, and maintain a city-wide awareness about permit improvement work to achieve efficiency and interconnectivity.</p>

5.0 Next Steps

This section describes the future activities of the project.

5.1 Upcoming Tasks and Deliverables

The next steps of the project are summarized in Table 5.1, below.

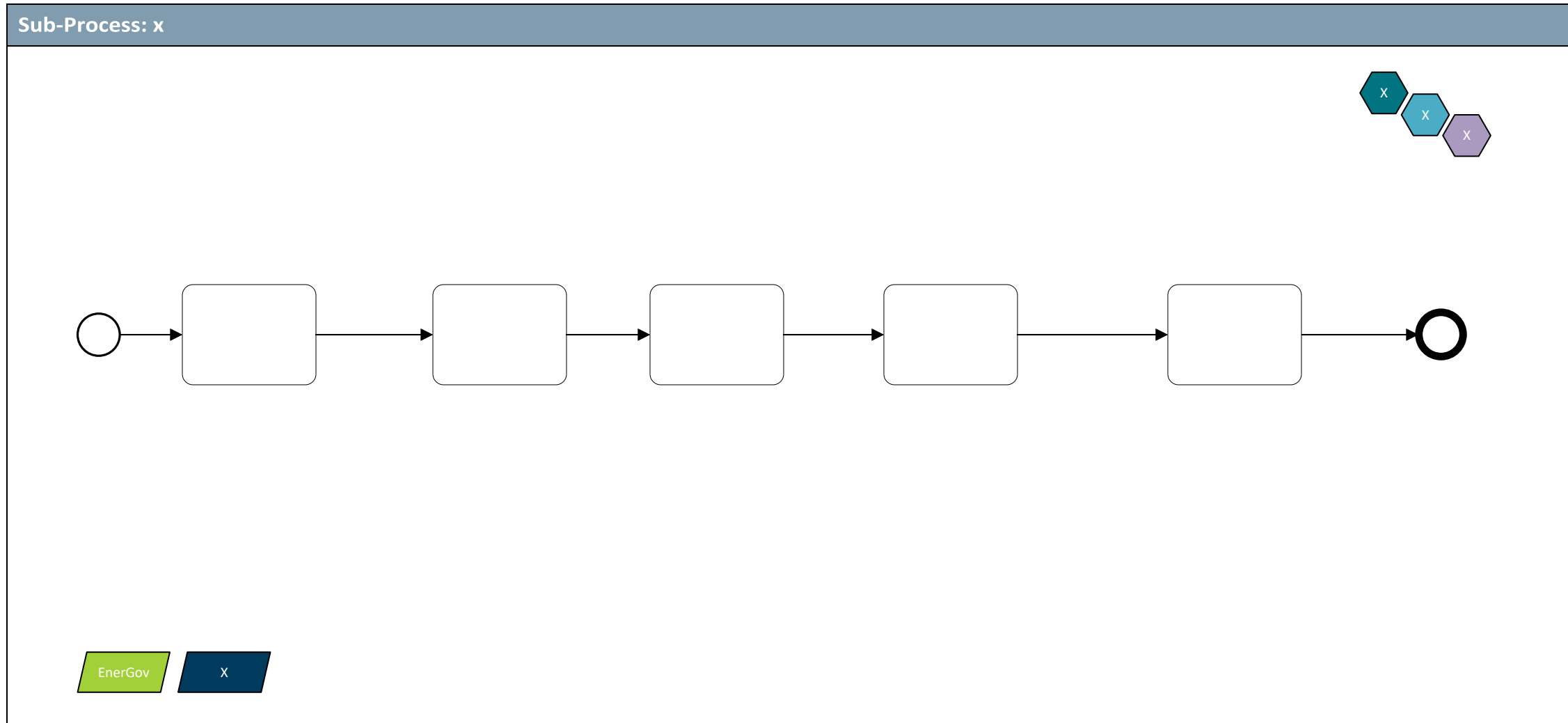
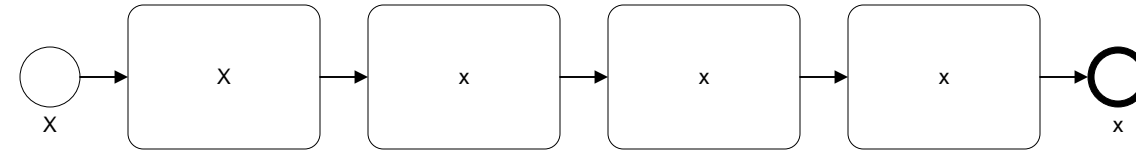
Table 5.1: Upcoming Tasks and Deliverables

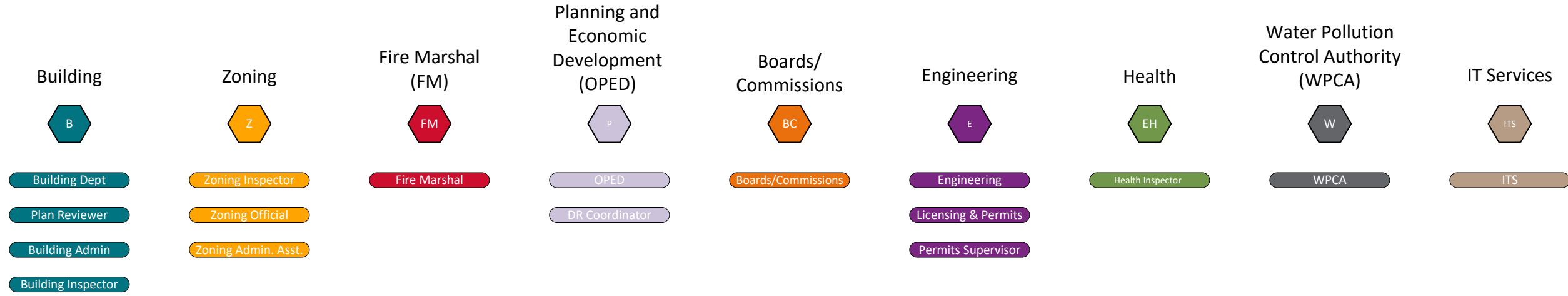
Upcoming Tasks and Deliverables	
Phase 2: Recommendations for Improvement	
Update Draft Report to Final	October 2, 2024
Develop Final Recommendations Presentation	October 2 2, 2024
Deliver Presentation to City Council	Week of October 7, 2024
Deliverable 5 – Assessment and Recommendations for Improvement Report	October 2024

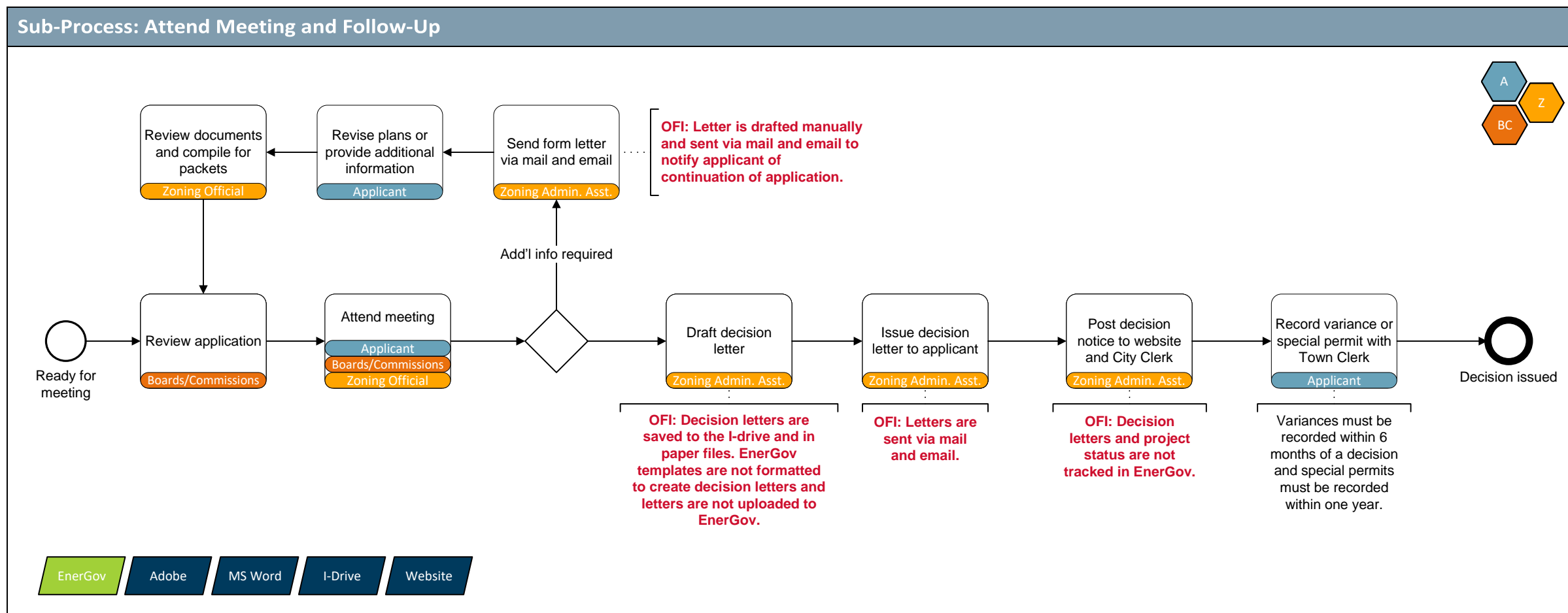
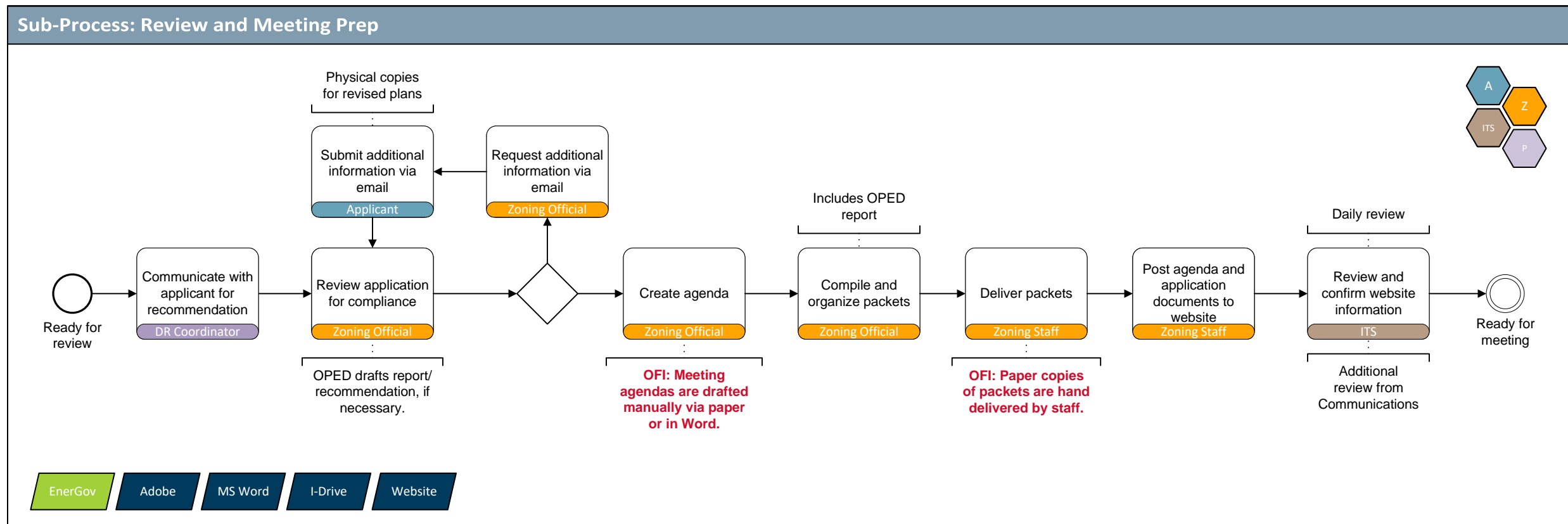
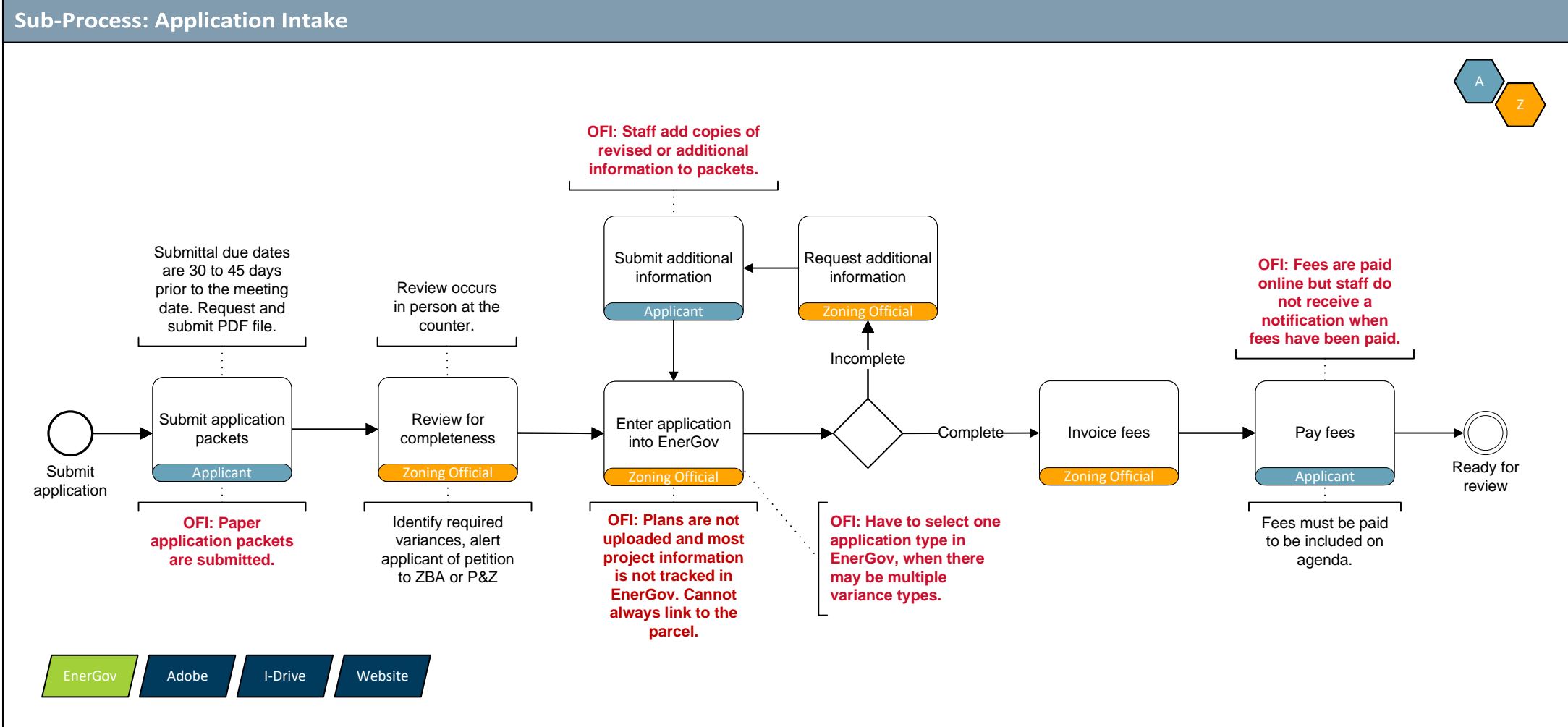
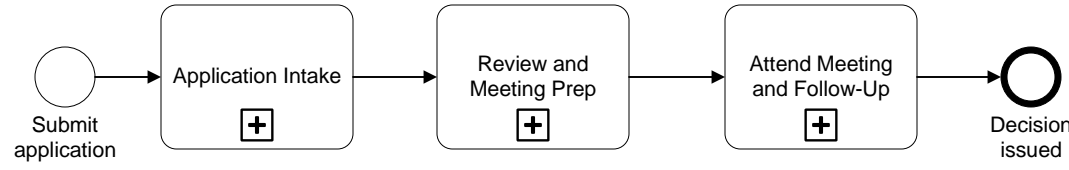
Appendix A: As-Is Process Diagrams

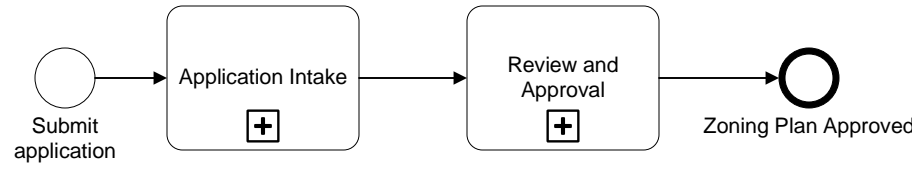
This appendix includes the MS Visio diagrams developed to map the eight review processes.

Please refer to the PDF titled Bridgeport As-Is Permit Process Diagrams - Final.

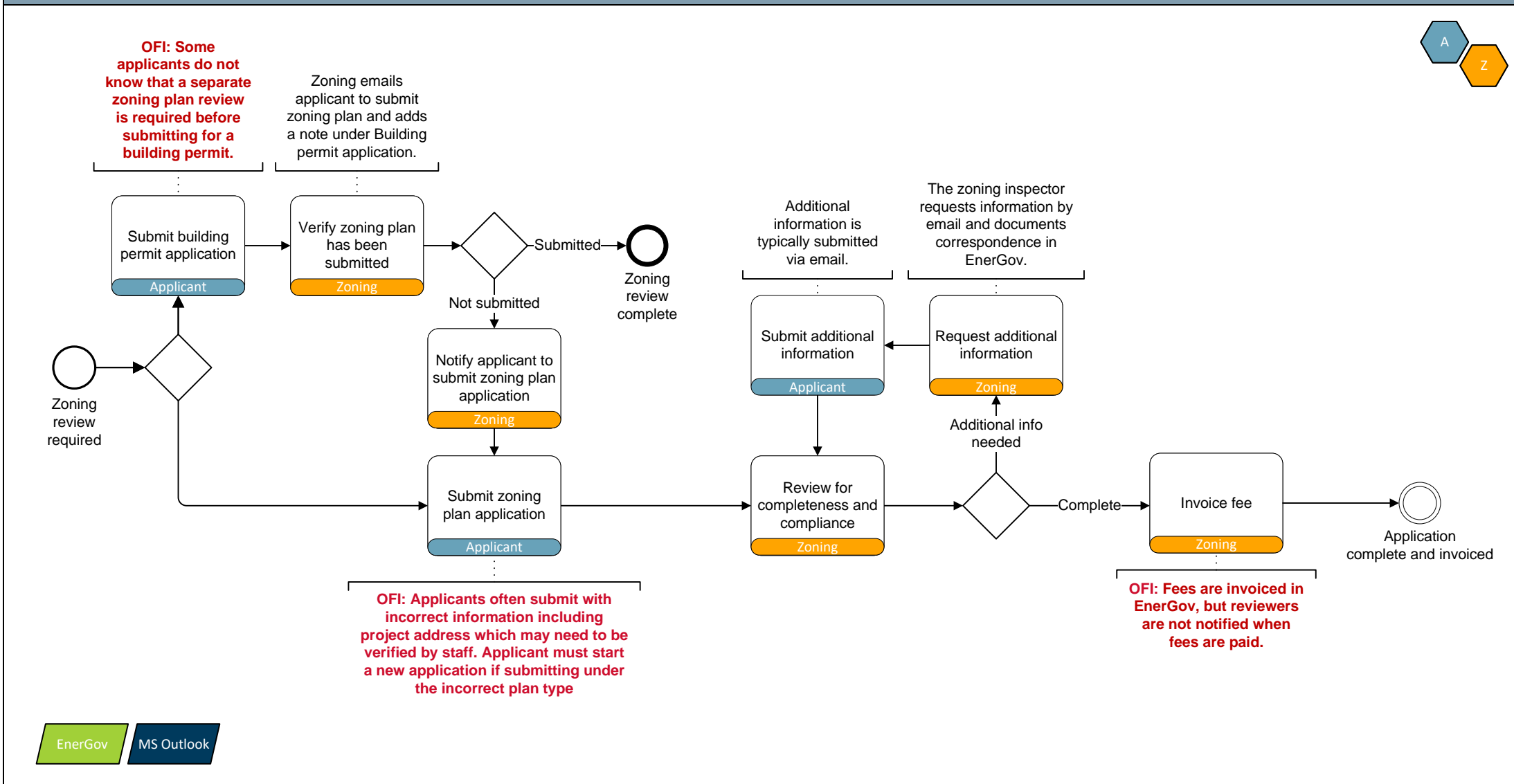




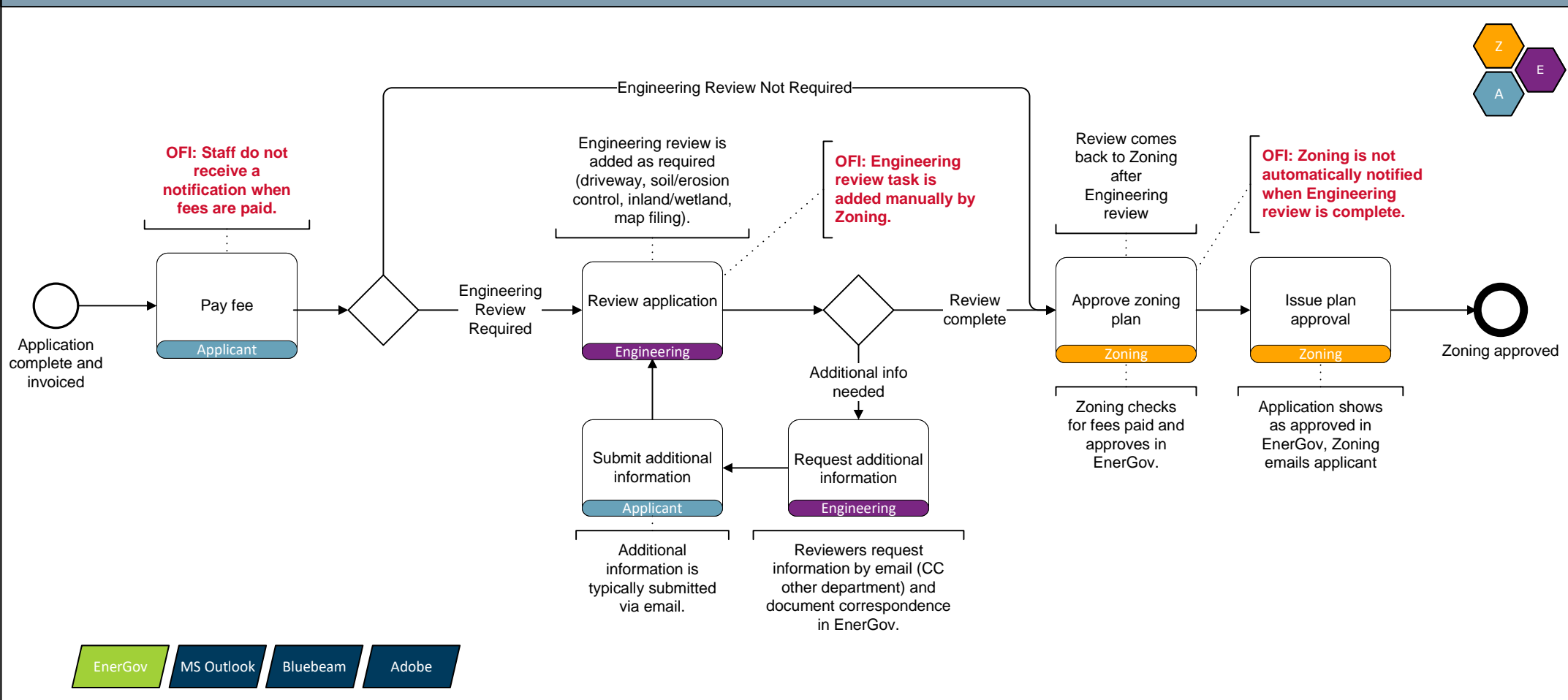


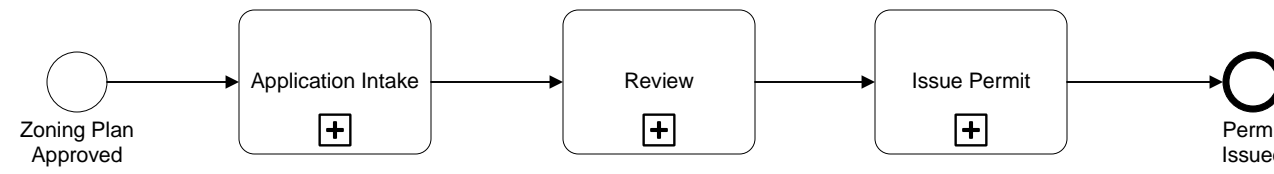


Sub-Process: Application Intake

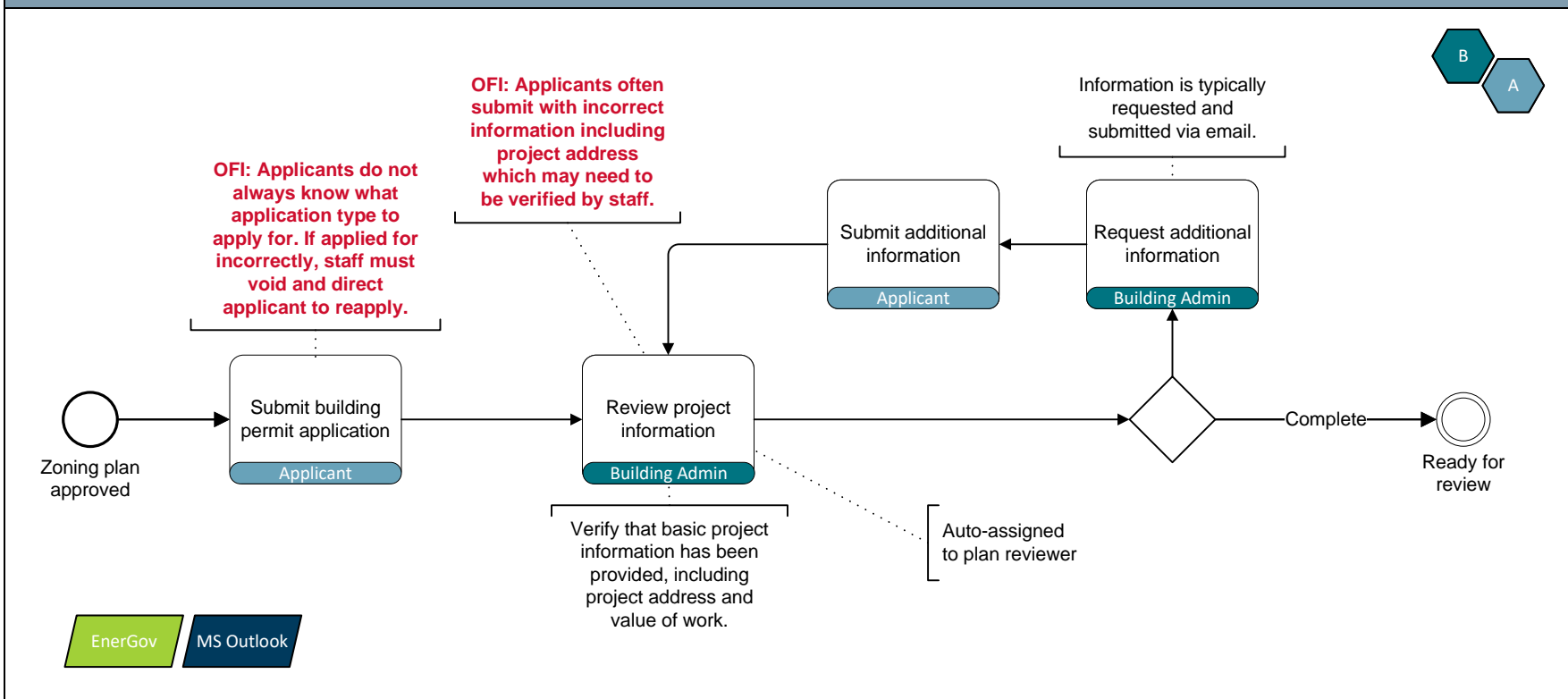


Sub-Process: Review and Approval

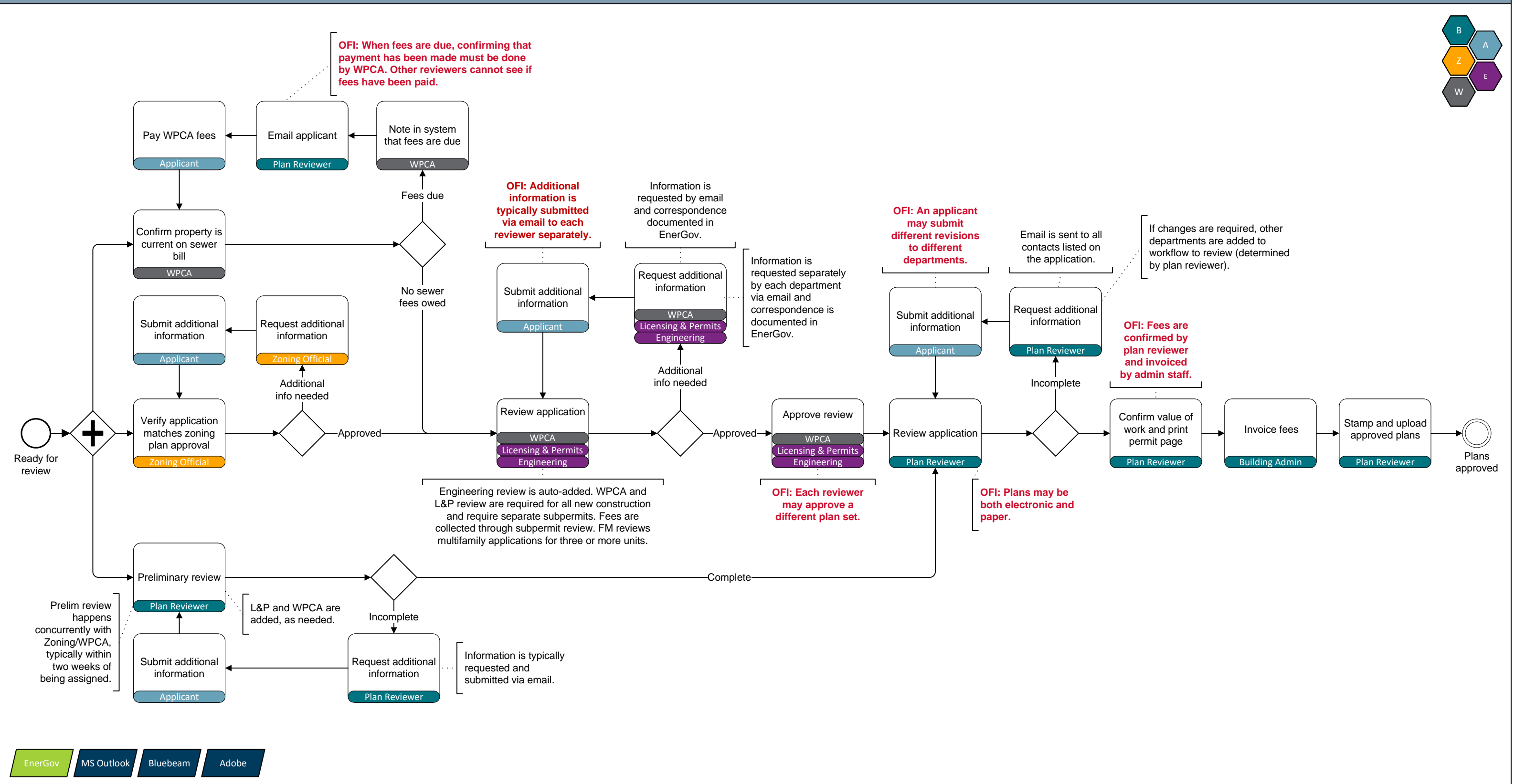




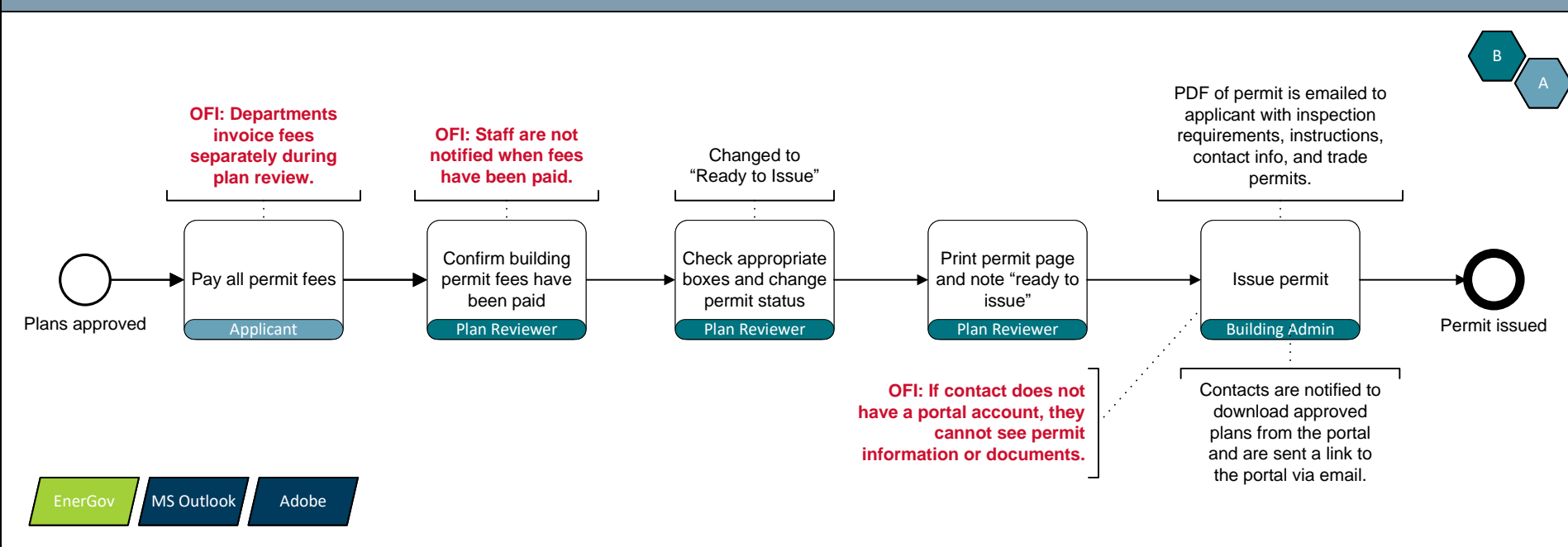
Sub-Process: Application Intake

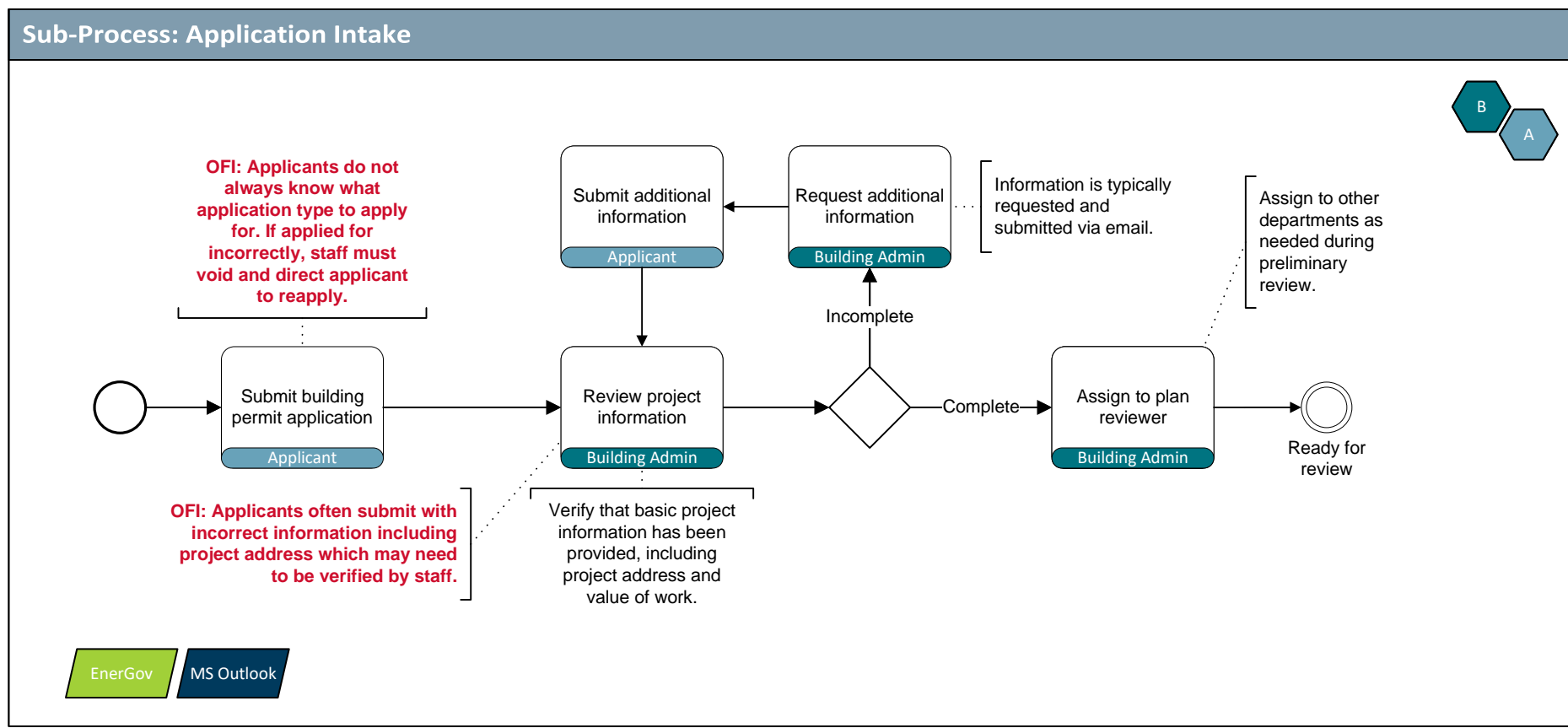
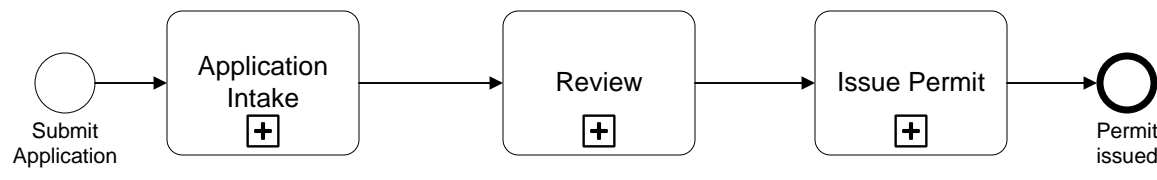


Sub-Process: Review

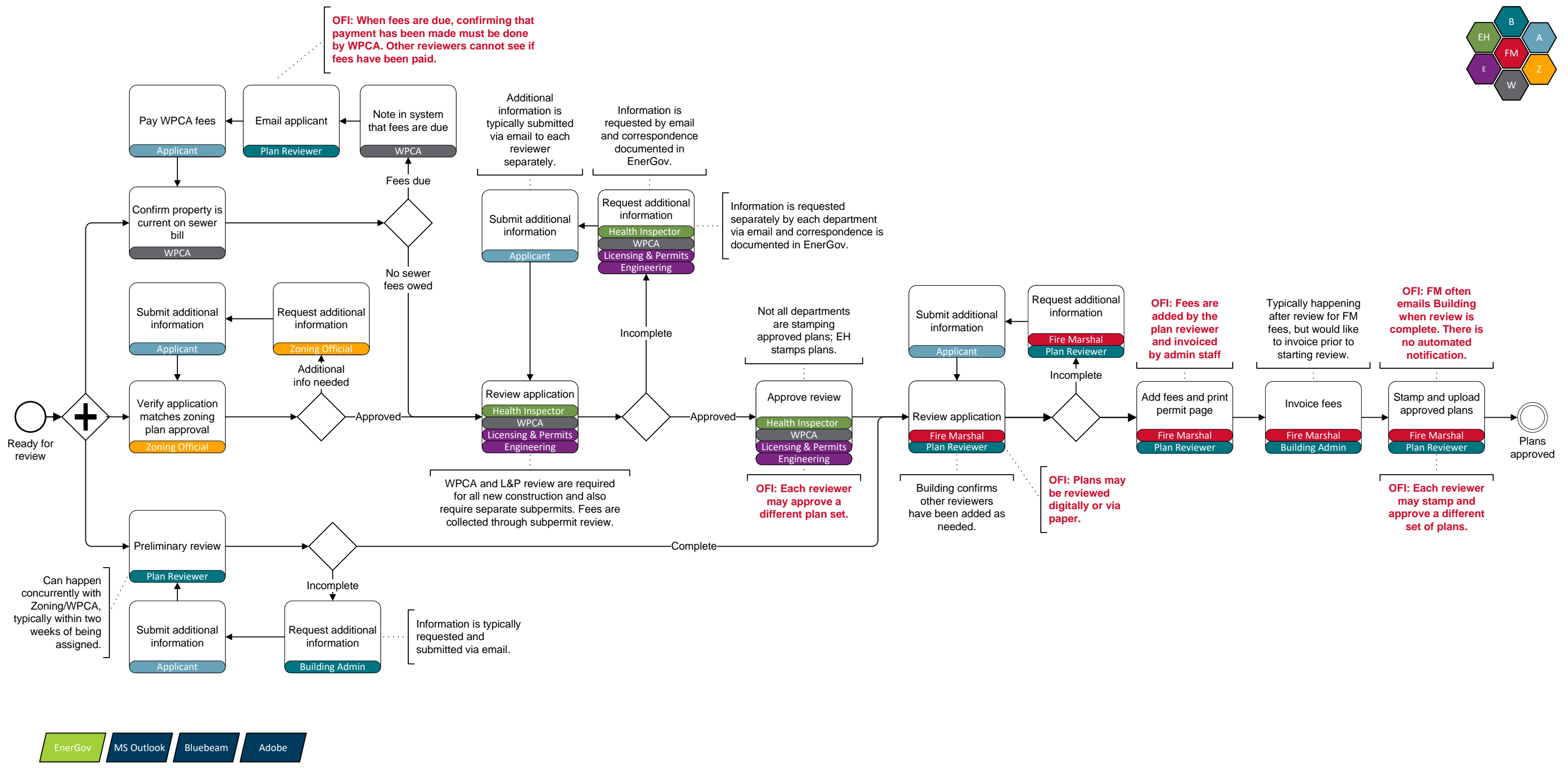


Sub-Process: Issue Permit

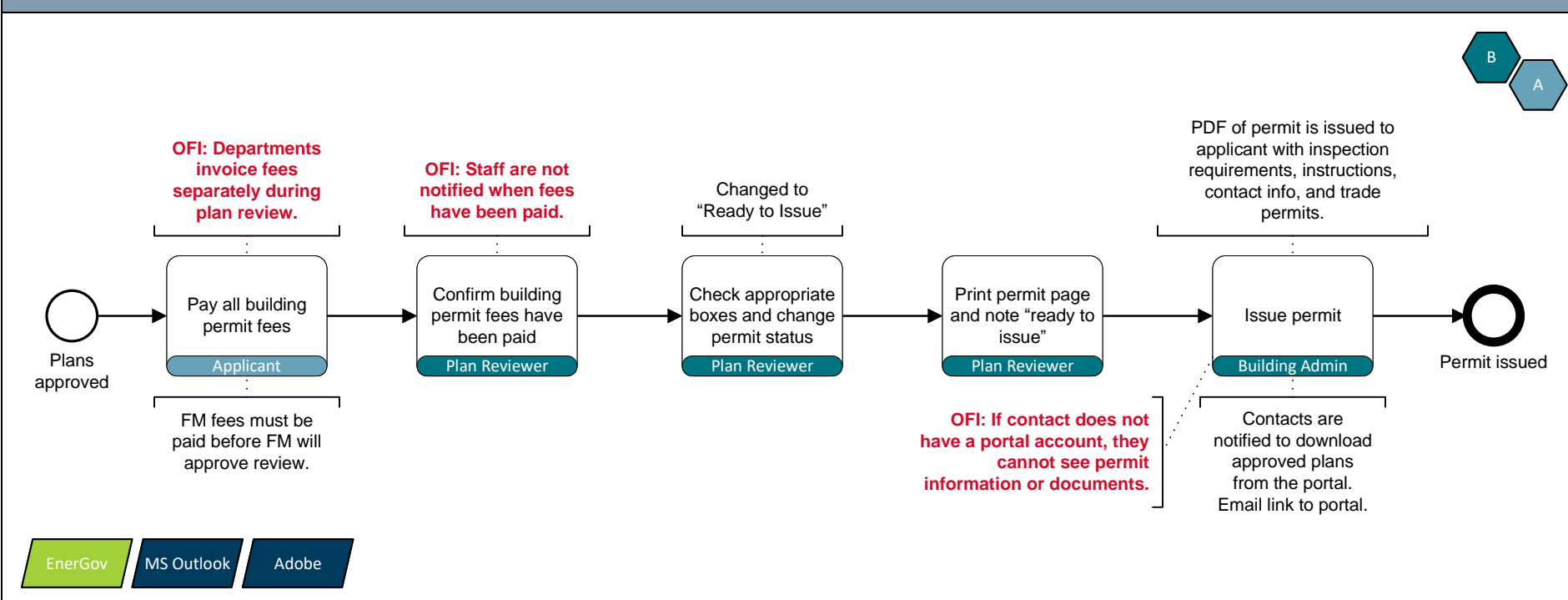




Sub-Process: Review

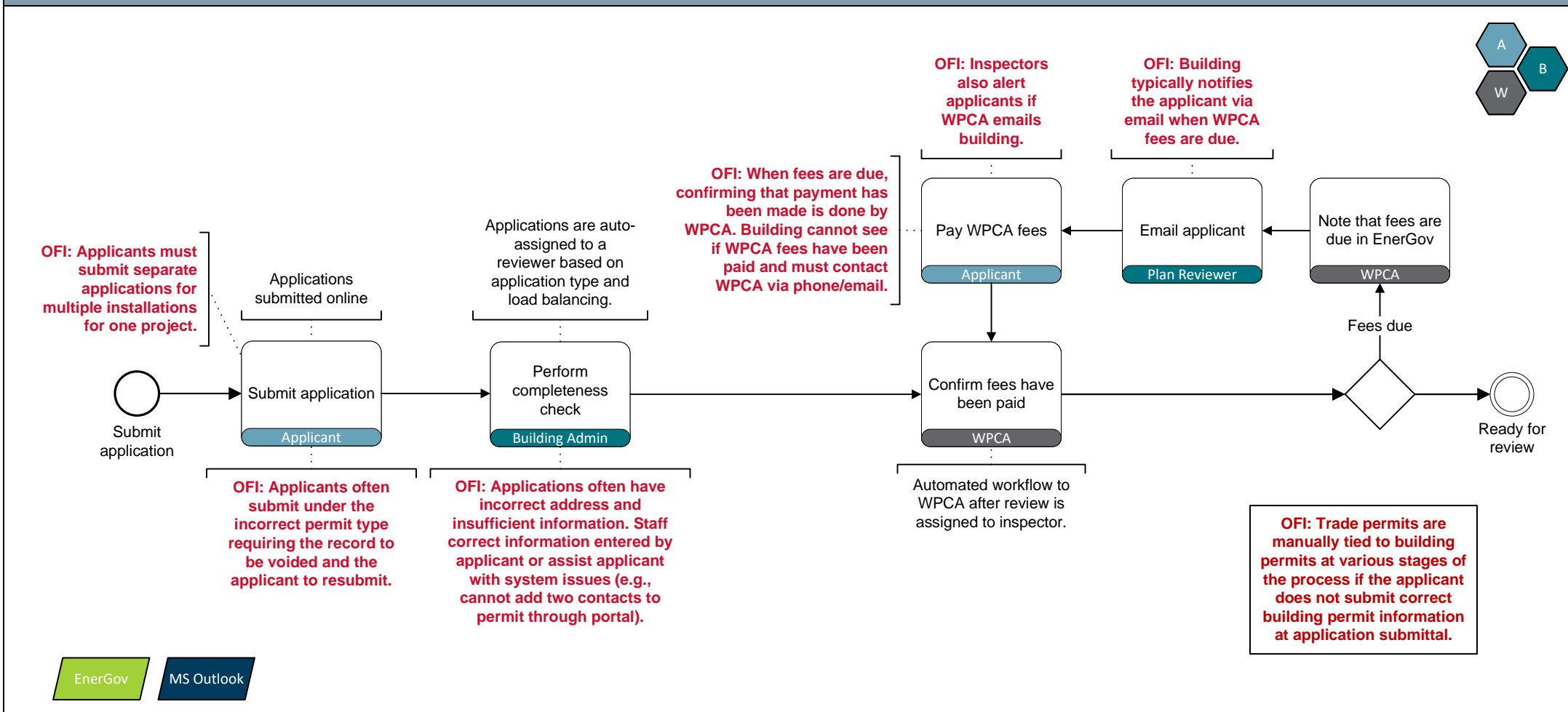


Sub-Process: Issue Permit

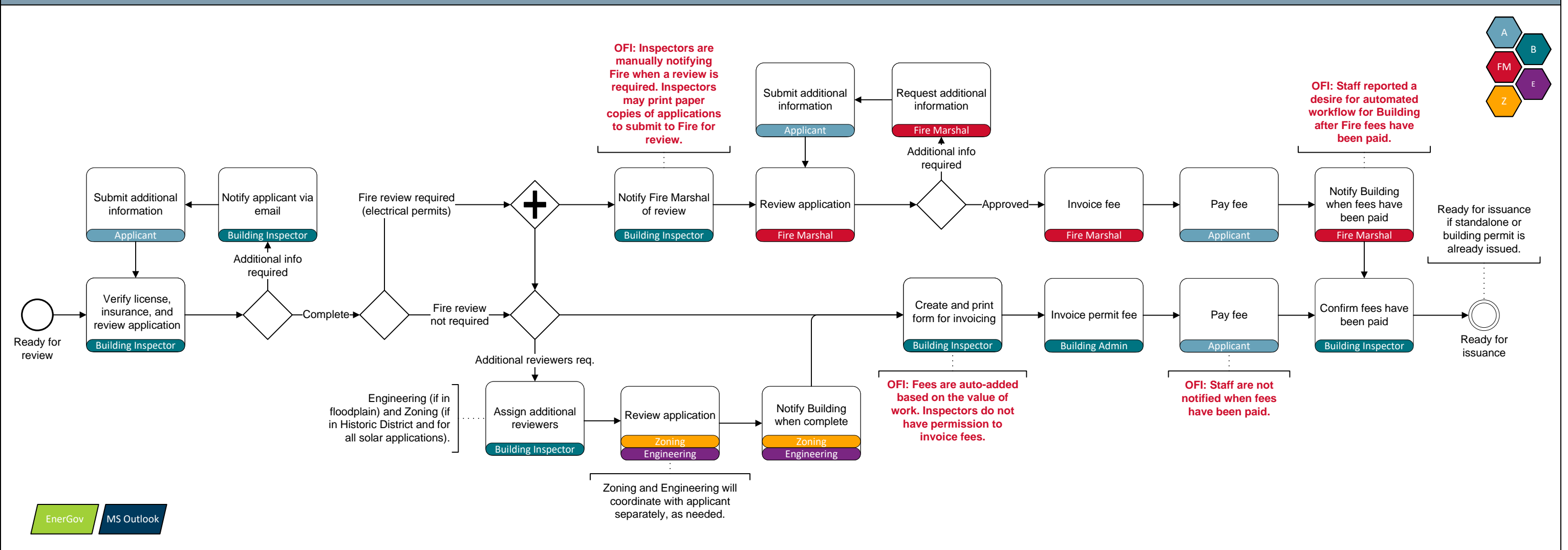




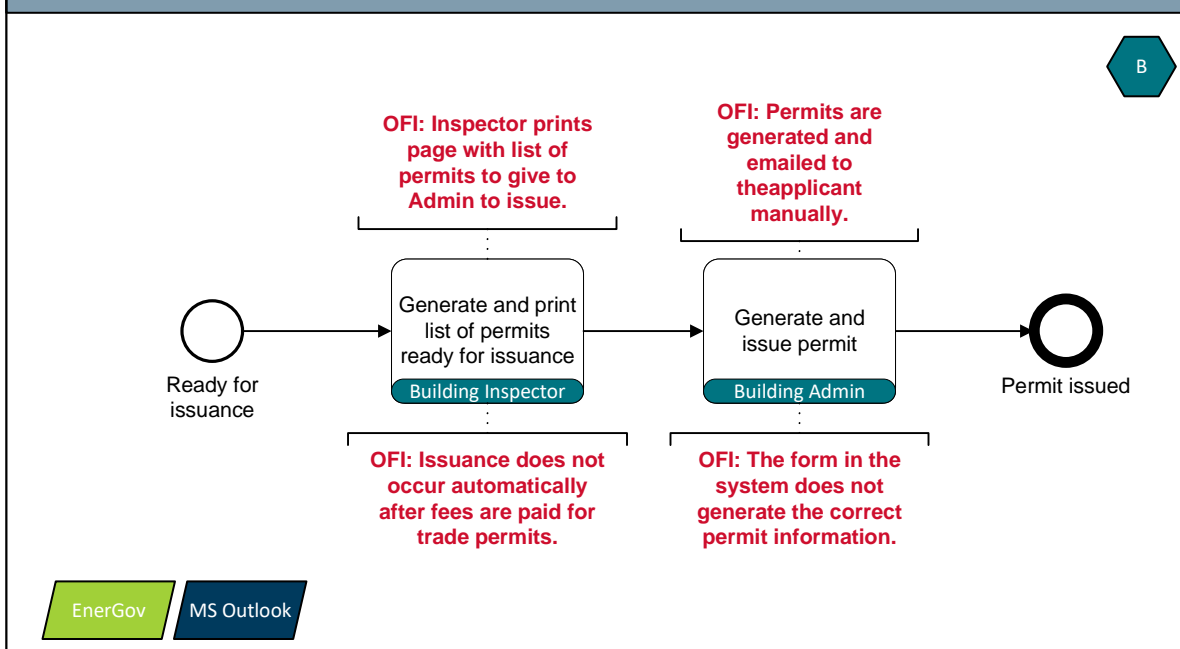
Sub-Process: Application Intake

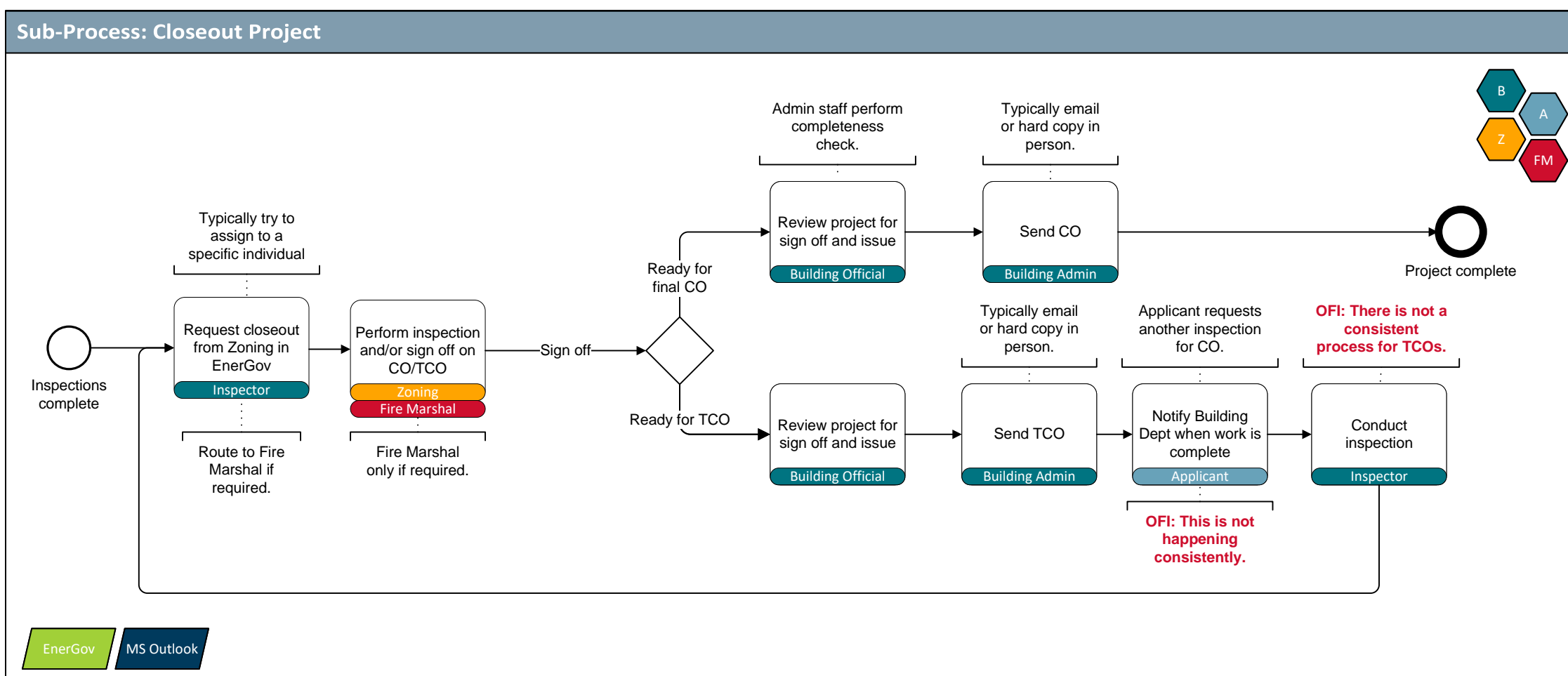
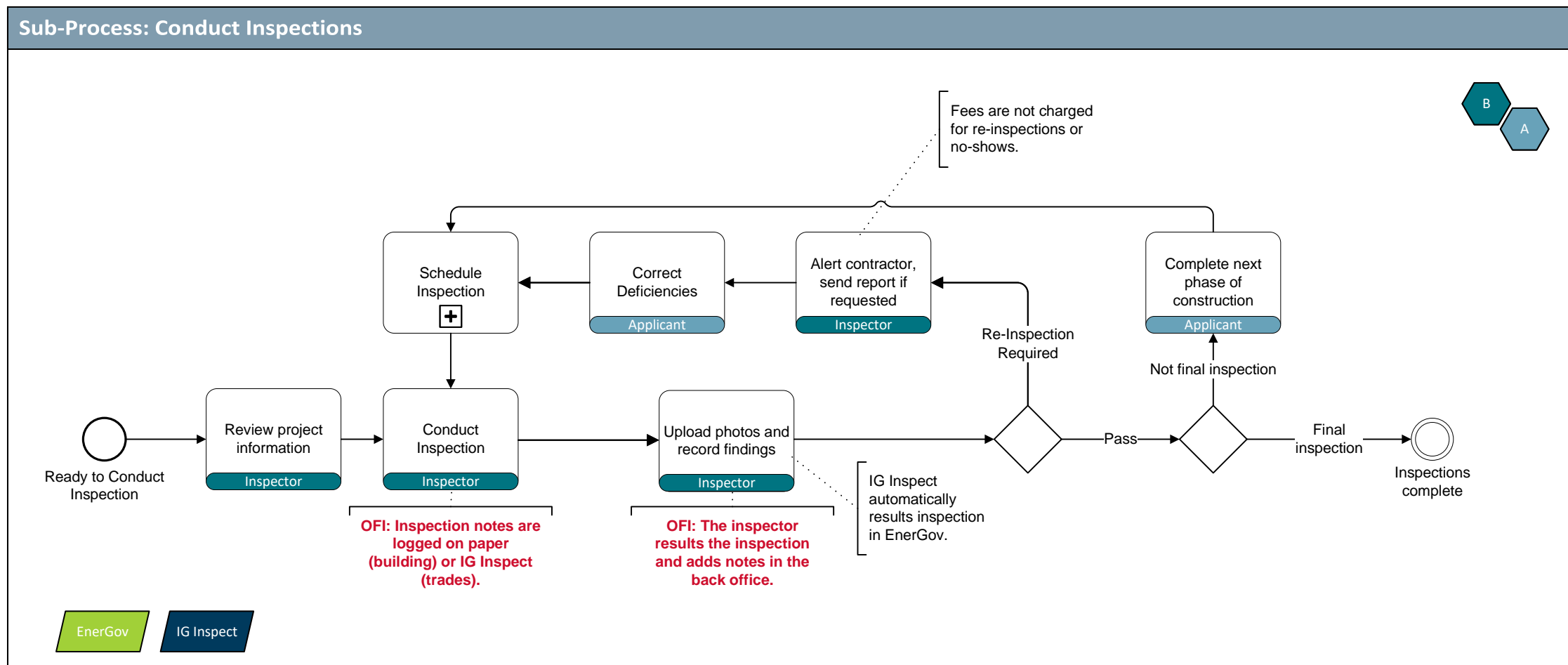
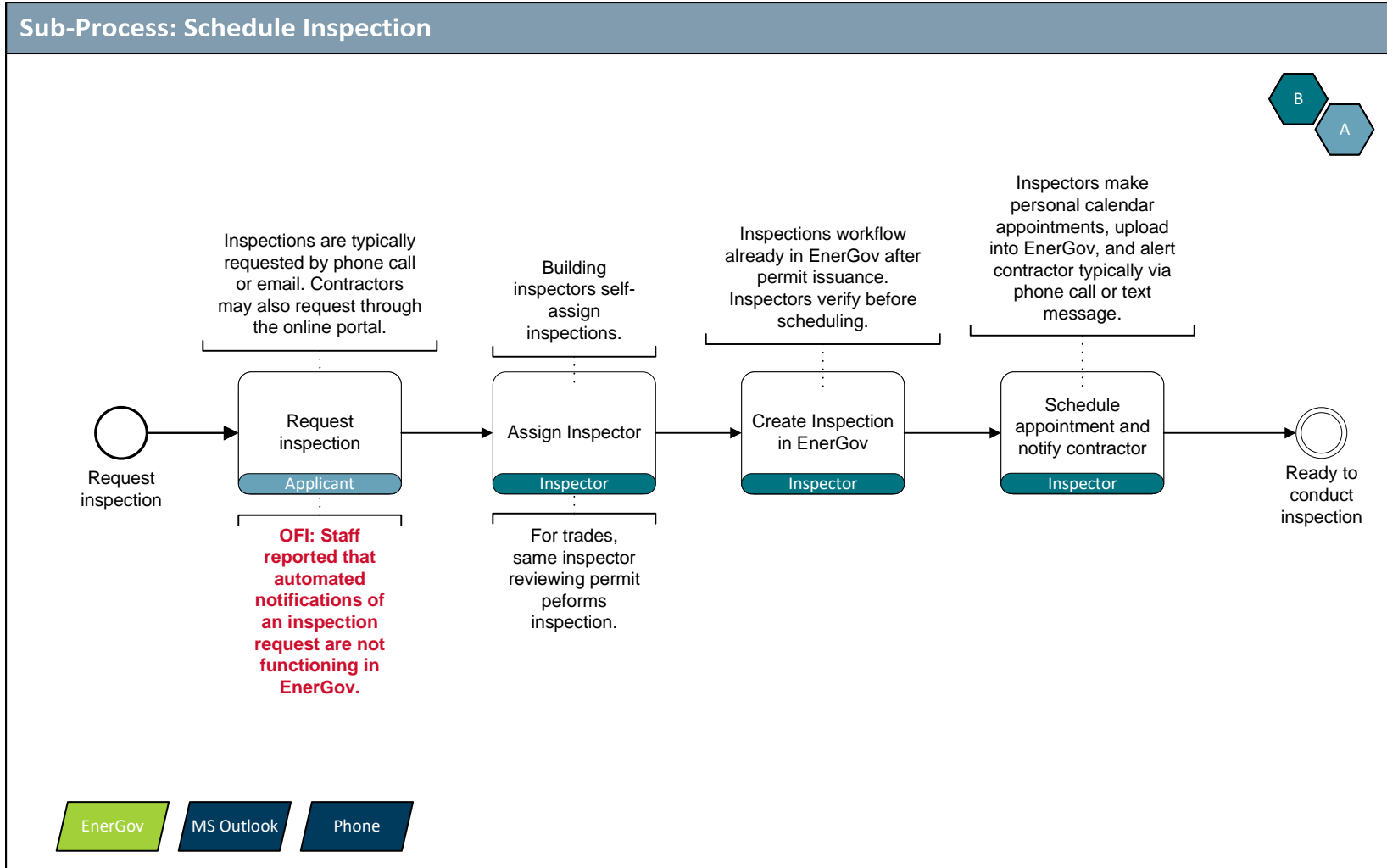
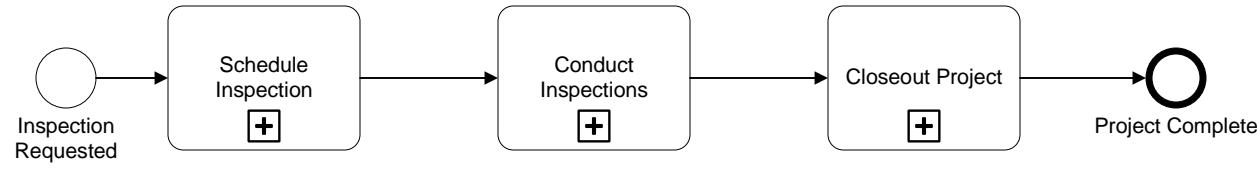


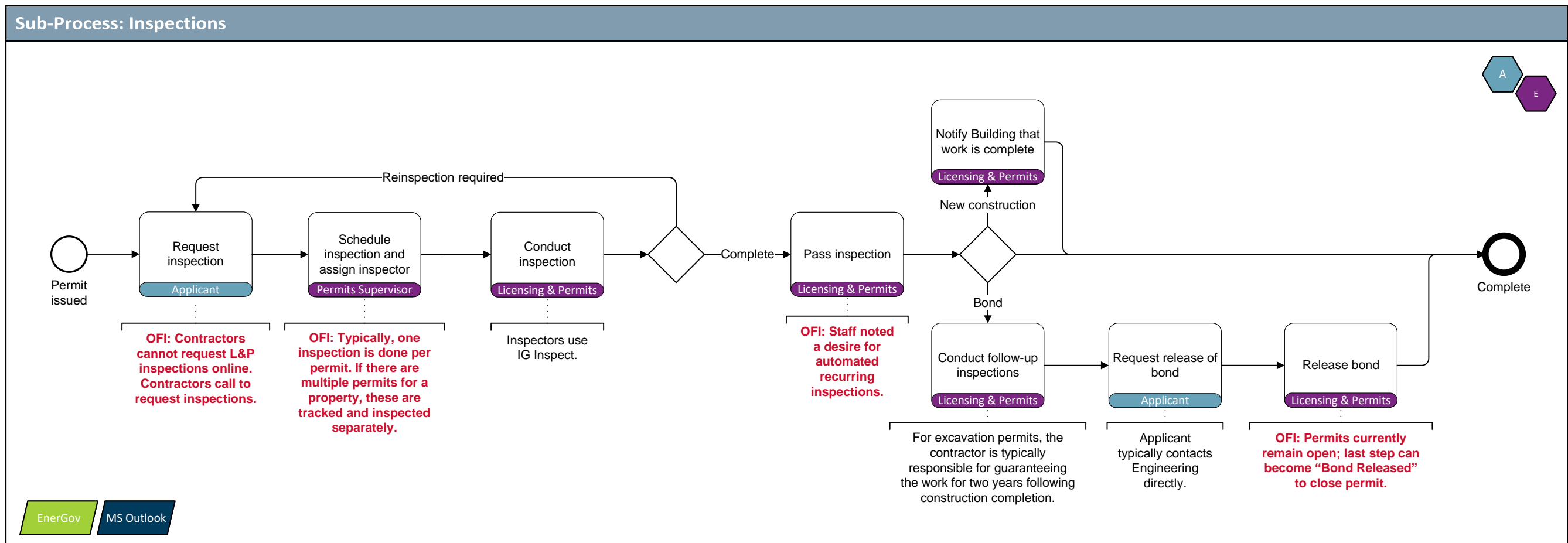
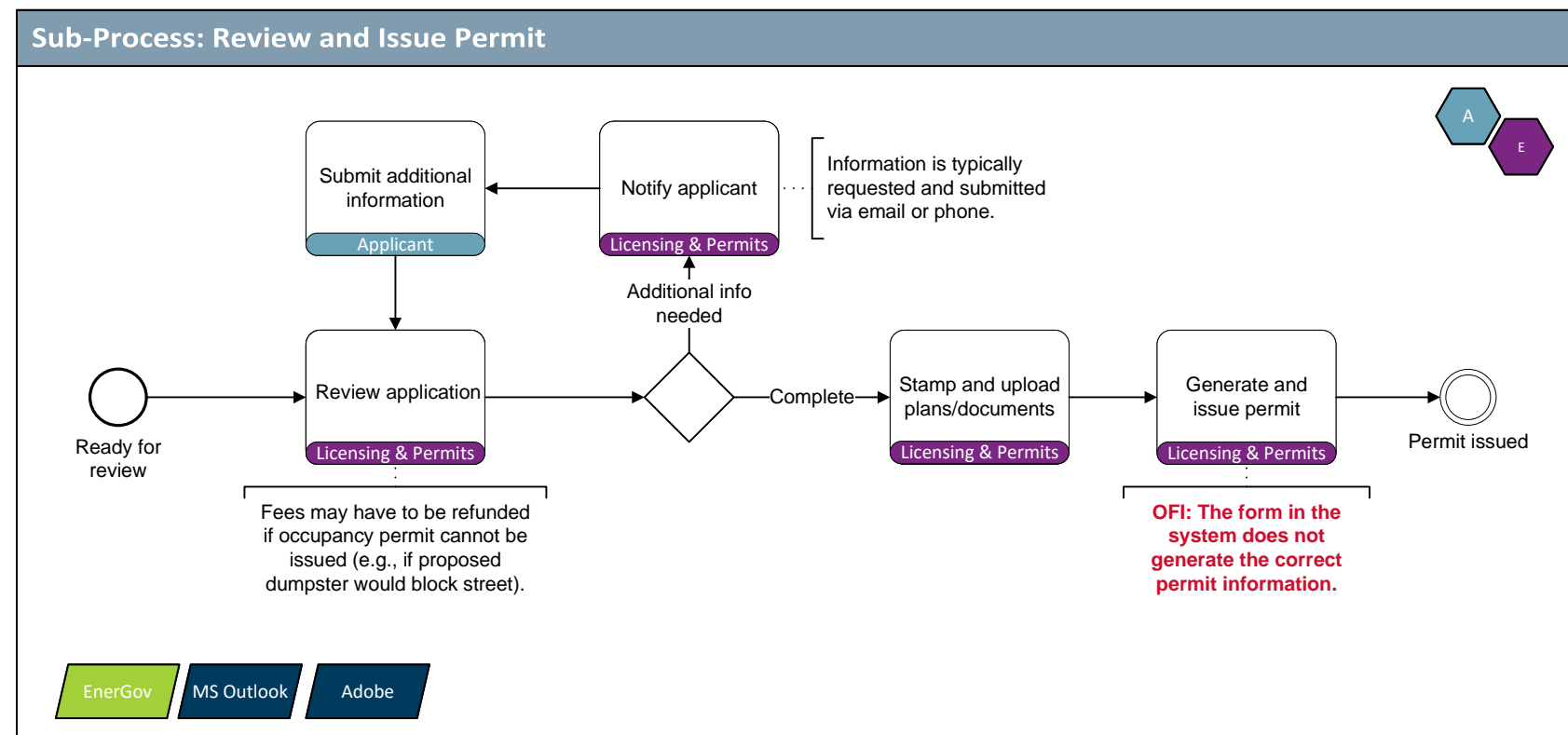
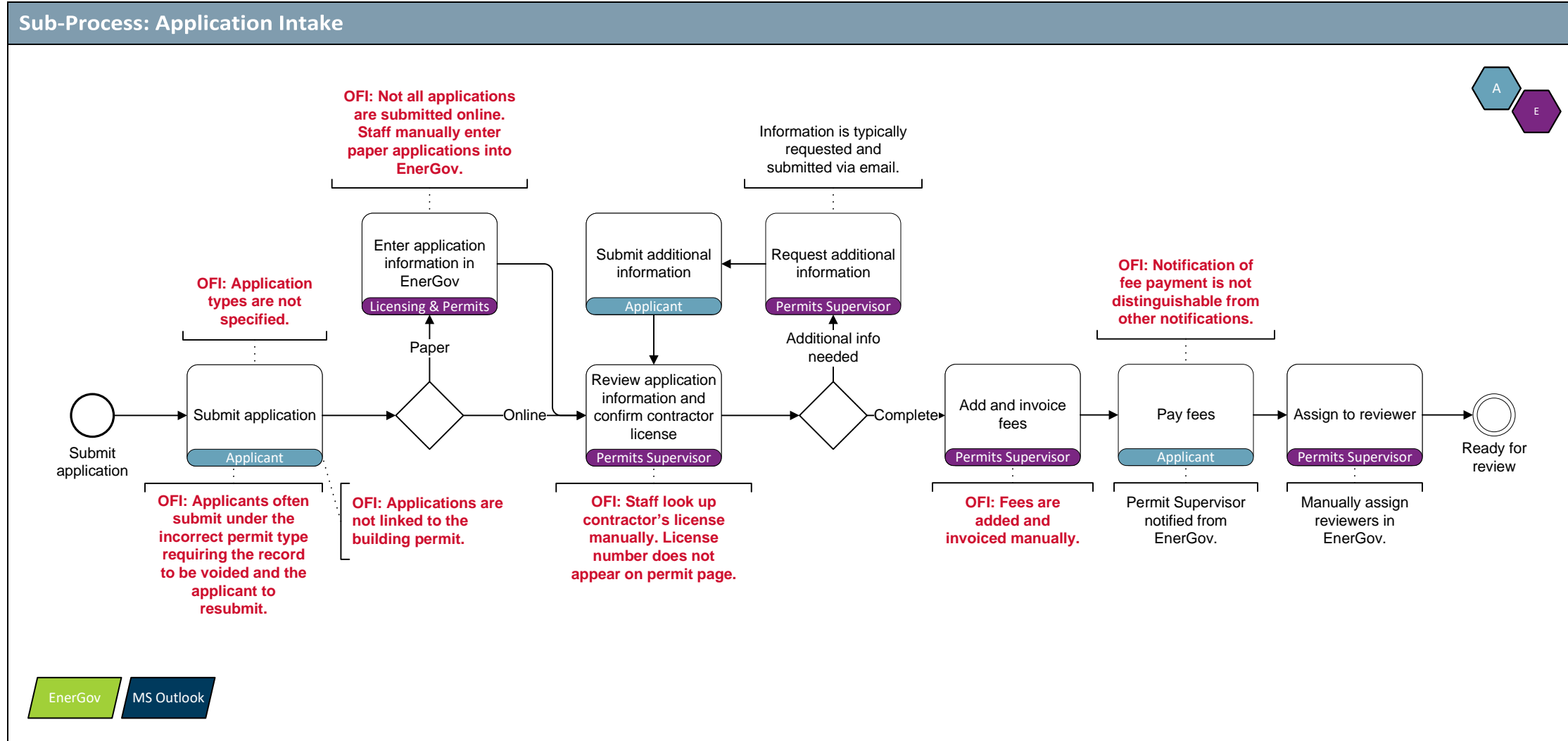
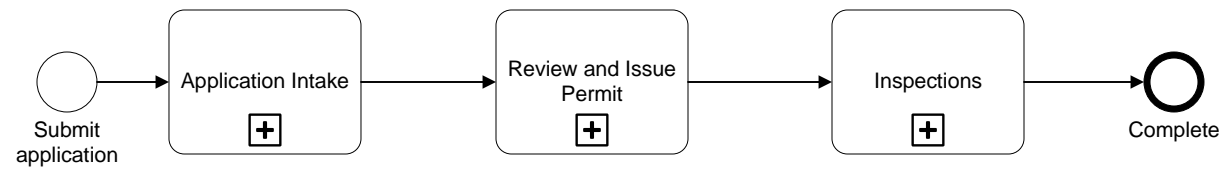
Sub-Process: Permit Review

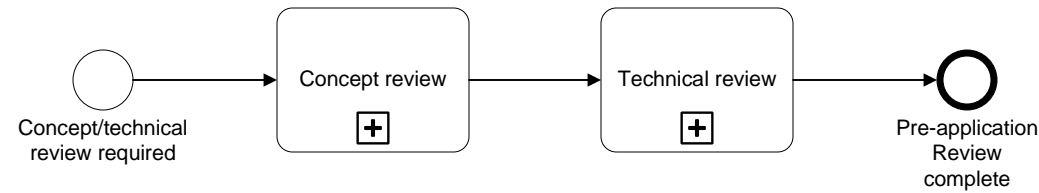


Sub-Process: Issue Permit

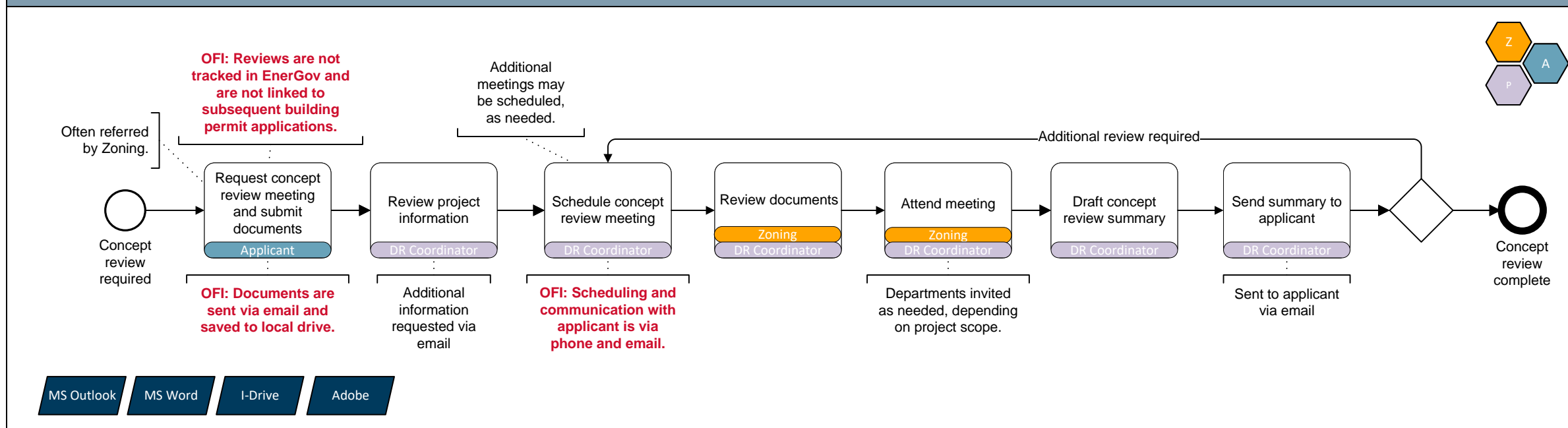




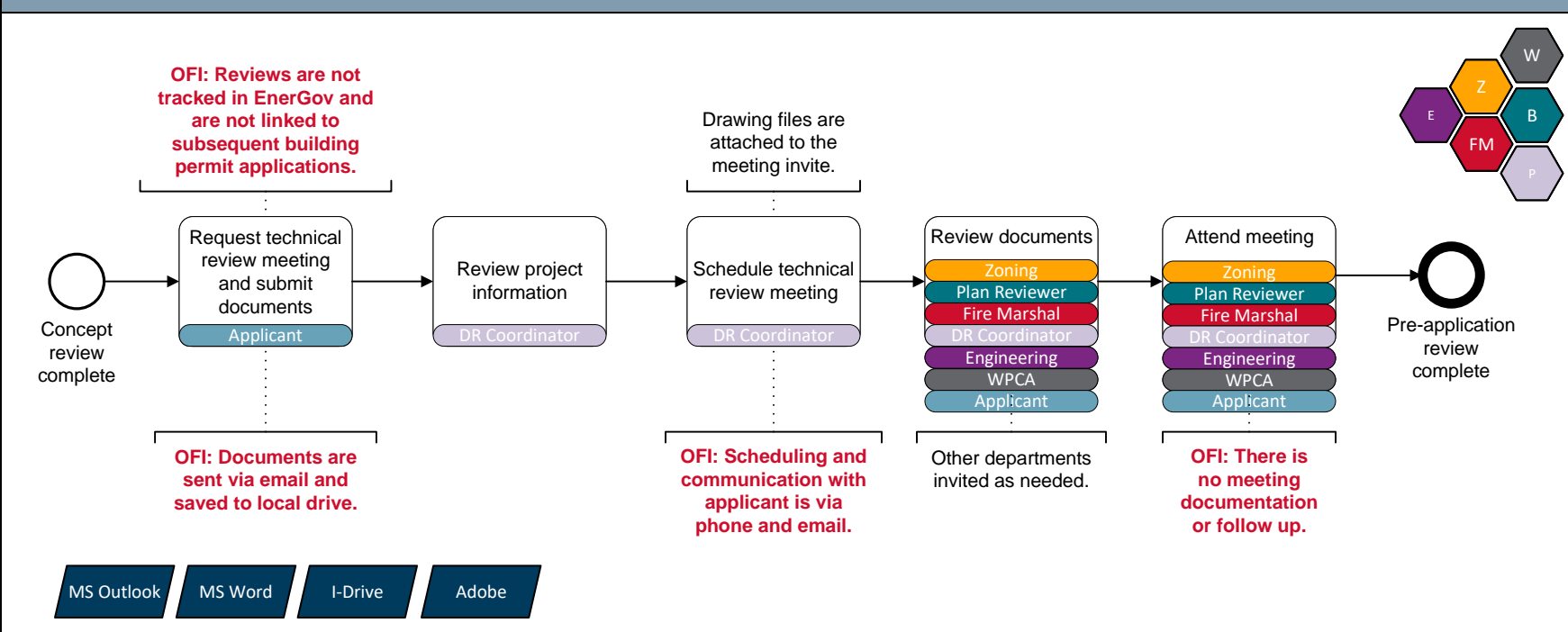




Sub-Process: Concept Review



Sub-Process: Technical Review



Appendix B: System Recommendations

This appendix includes a list of recommended EnerGov (EPL) configuration changes or considerations to improve the use of technology for the permitting review process.

The EnerGov system allows the development of workflows which the City has configured specifically for each permit type and work class. In addition to the workflow functionality, intelligent objects (IOs) can be configured to automate tasks and notifications/emails to internal and external users and are designed to run anytime the data is changed to trigger the action. Intelligent Object Automation Agents (IOAAs) run nightly, so as not to interfere with the system backup. GeoRules are automations that run from the GIS server and are linked to data in the layers within the City’s GIS system.

While the City has automated some processes in EnerGov using these tools, there are some areas where additional automation or use of new technology could improve efficiency in the development review process. Table B.1 identifies several opportunities for system improvement.

Table B.1: Opportunities for System Improvement

Opportunities for System Improvement		
No.	Challenges	Opportunities
1	Board and commission applications are submitted via paper. Staff enter general project information in EnerGov, but projects are not tracked in the system.	Applications could be configured in the system to allow applicants to apply through the portal for staff to review before requiring applicants to print and submit hard copies. This would save staff time required for manual data entry and could reduce applicant costs. Tracking application progress and status in EnerGov could be used to share information with other City staff and applicants and could be helpful for long-term reporting.
2	Board and commission plans are not uploaded to EnerGov.	Board and commission plans could be uploaded to EnerGov to be made publicly available and available for reference by other departments.
3	Staff do not receive a notification when a payment is made on an invoice.	An IO system notification (or email) could be set up to notify the staff person assigned to the project record when a payment is made or when an invoice has been paid in full. If the payment is the final step in the review process, such as for trade permits, the payment of the invoice could initiate permit issuance via an IO, without requiring any action by staff.
4	Applicants may apply with no address or an incorrect address, which requires staff to review and identify the correct address.	More detailed instructions could be added to the portal application page to direct applicants to search for the project address before attempting to enter the address manually, with instructions on how to identify the correct address using the City’s mapping tool.

Opportunities for System Improvement		
No.	Challenges	Opportunities
5	Some staff are using paper forms to assign admin staff to create an invoice for a permit application.	Review and inspections staff could be given permission to create invoices. Since these users are adding or confirming fees, this could eliminate a step in the process. Alternatively, review and inspections staff could generate a task in the workflow to assign another staff member a task to create the invoice.
6	Subpermits and inspections are not consistently linked to the related building permit or plan approval record, making it difficult for internal coordination on projects.	Permit workflows should be configured to allow all subpermit and inspection records to be linked to a building permit and for building permits to be linked to a board or commission approval, as appropriate.
7	Applicants are not always aware that their property is within a historic district or other special district or zone.	GeoRules could be implemented to create internal system alerts to staff and pop-up notifications in the portal when an applicant enters a project address that is within a historic district, flood zone, special assessment district, etc.
8	The correct reviewers or reviews are not consistently assigned or added to the permit workflow.	The EnerGov work group, in reviewing permit types and workflows, should also evaluate automation of workflows (IOs and IOAAs). Where appropriate, when requirements are associated with a specific permit type (e.g., Fire review is required for all commercial applications), workflow automation should be created to reduce errors in assigning reviews. In addition, departments should work with ITS on reviewing how assignments are directed, either to one person to reassign, based on project scope, or by load balancing for a review team.
9	Some staff do not have permission to generate invoices or edit workflows.	The EnerGov work group should evaluate staff roles across departments and review permissions in EnerGov to help ensure that staff are able to complete their work efficiently while still maintaining overall accountability for the permitting process.
10	Contacts cannot view project information if they do not sign into the system with an account.	This is a limitation of the system and could be addressed by providing email communication to all contacts when an application is submitted to direct all contacts to register in the portal to access important project information and documents.

Opportunities for System Improvement		
No.	Challenges	Opportunities
11	Permit expiration dates and due dates are not related to existing processes or requirements.	Department representatives (through the EnerGov work group) should coordinate with ITS to review and update as needed the permit expiration dates and review due dates to align with requirements and relevant timelines for the permitting process (e.g., L&P permit expiration dates are based on the application date when instead they should be determined based on the permit issuance date).
12	Recurring inspections are not configured in EnerGov to support staff in necessary follow-up after construction completion.	Engineering staff should coordinate with ITS to add bond inspections to the workflow after CO issuance. ITS could consider setting up automated inspection dates or notifications for post-construction inspections or other follow-up activities.
13	Staff are not consistently notified when a review is assigned or due.	The EnerGov work group should review automations and notifications to help ensure that staff receive appropriate communication about workflow tasks and assignments.
14	Staff manually email permits, COs, and other documents and information to applicants.	For system-generated documents and other notifications of information tracked in the system, IOs in the form of automated emails should be created (consistent in language and format as other City communication) to provide information to the applicant and include appropriate instructions (e.g., an automated email for invoicing fees should include instructions on how to pay the invoice).

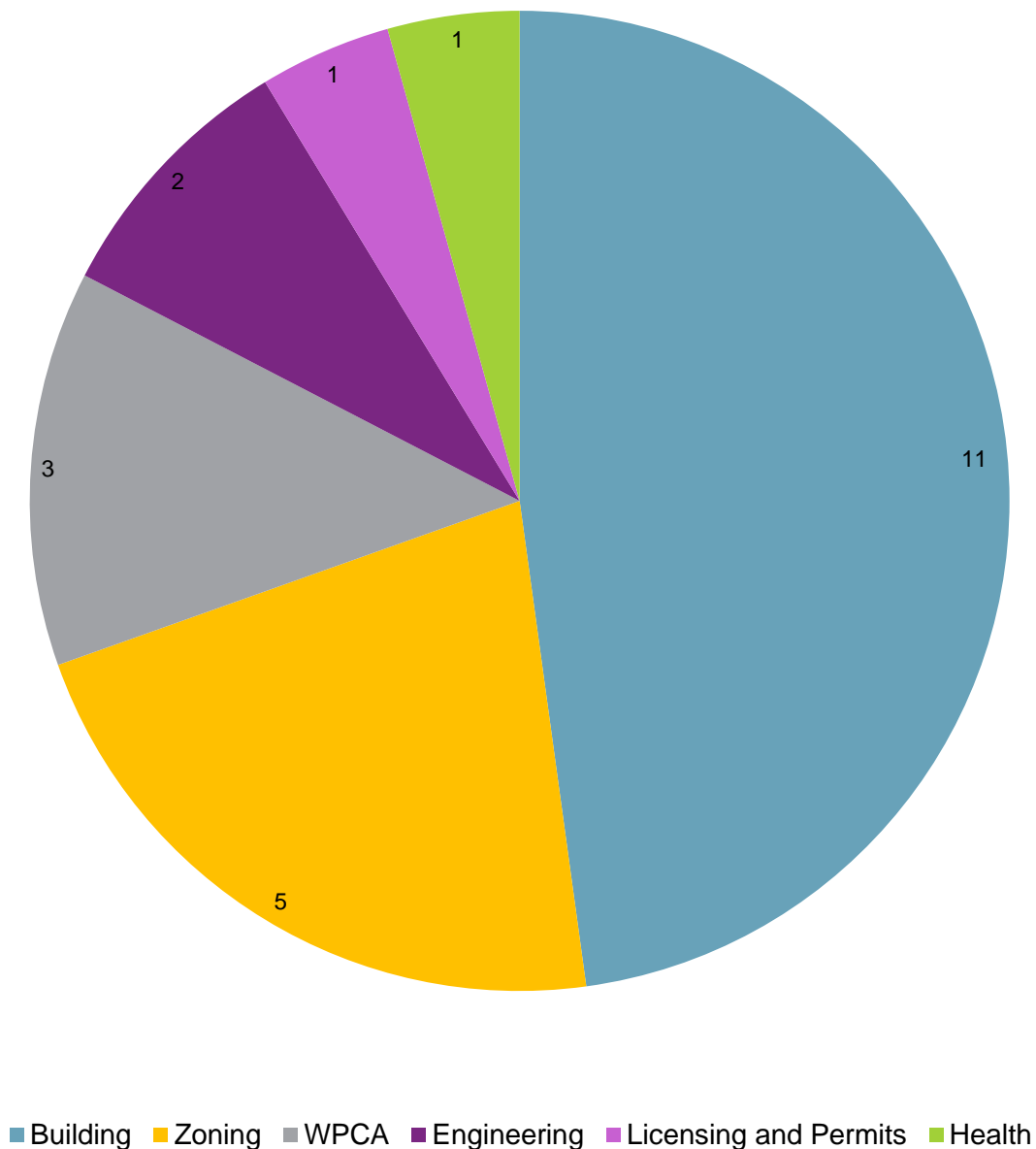


Appendix C: Internal Stakeholder Survey Analysis

This appendix contains a summary of results from the survey BerryDunn distributed to internal stakeholders.

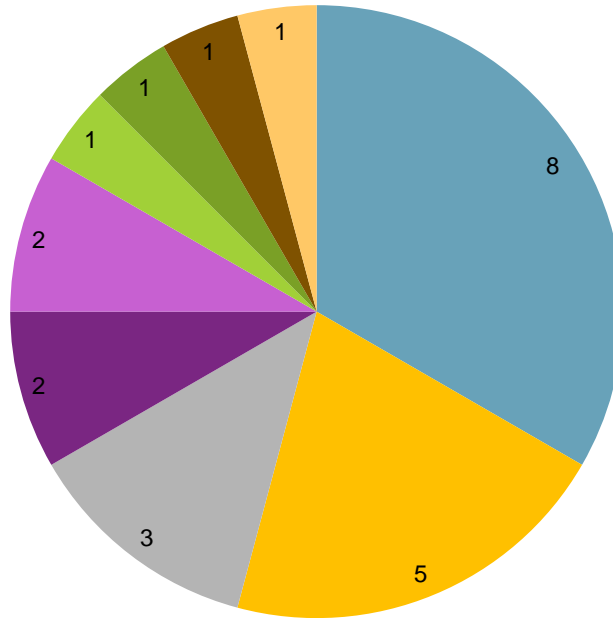
Survey Respondents

Internal Web Survey Responses by Department





Internal Web Survey Responses by Role



- Staff member primarily working in the office
- Staff member primarily working in the field
- Department director
- Administrative support staff member
- Supervisor
- Equal time in the office for administrative tasks and Field for physical inspection, meetings and reviews
- Staff member working equally in the field and office.
- I work in the office and also in the field
- office and field worker

Summary of Strengths of the Permitting Process

- Use of EnerGov for plan review routing between departments
- Ability to track completion dates by task
- Easy access to permit data in EnerGov
- Knowledgeable staff and thorough plan reviews
- Easy access to application status in EnerGov
- Robust querying functionality in EnerGov

Summary of Challenges of the Permitting Process

- Lack of notifications when plan review routes between departments
- Lack of training on EnerGov
- Lack of dashboards to track reviews past-due
- Complex invoicing process
- Lack of communication to applicants on project status
- High volume of applications for incorrect permit types

Summary of Desired System and Process Changes

- Automated notifications when plan review routes between departments
- Ability to bulk update records or bulk invoice fees
- Consistent tracking of communication with applicants
- Formal process and associated permissions for workflow changes
- Commitment to a consistent use of EnerGov by all departments

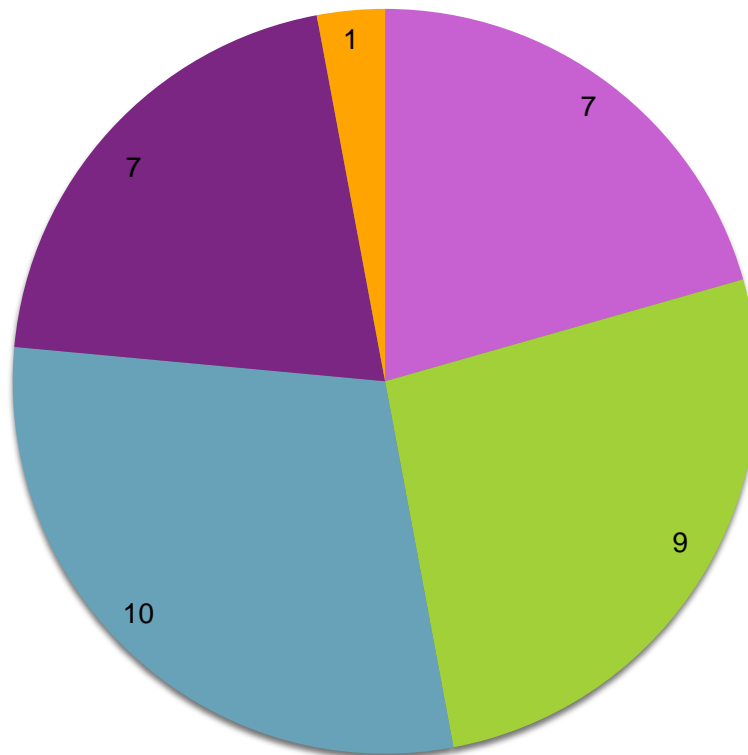


Appendix D: External Stakeholder Feedback Analysis

This appendix contains a summary of results from the survey BerryDunn distributed to external department stakeholders and summary of feedback from the external stakeholder focus group session.

Survey Respondents

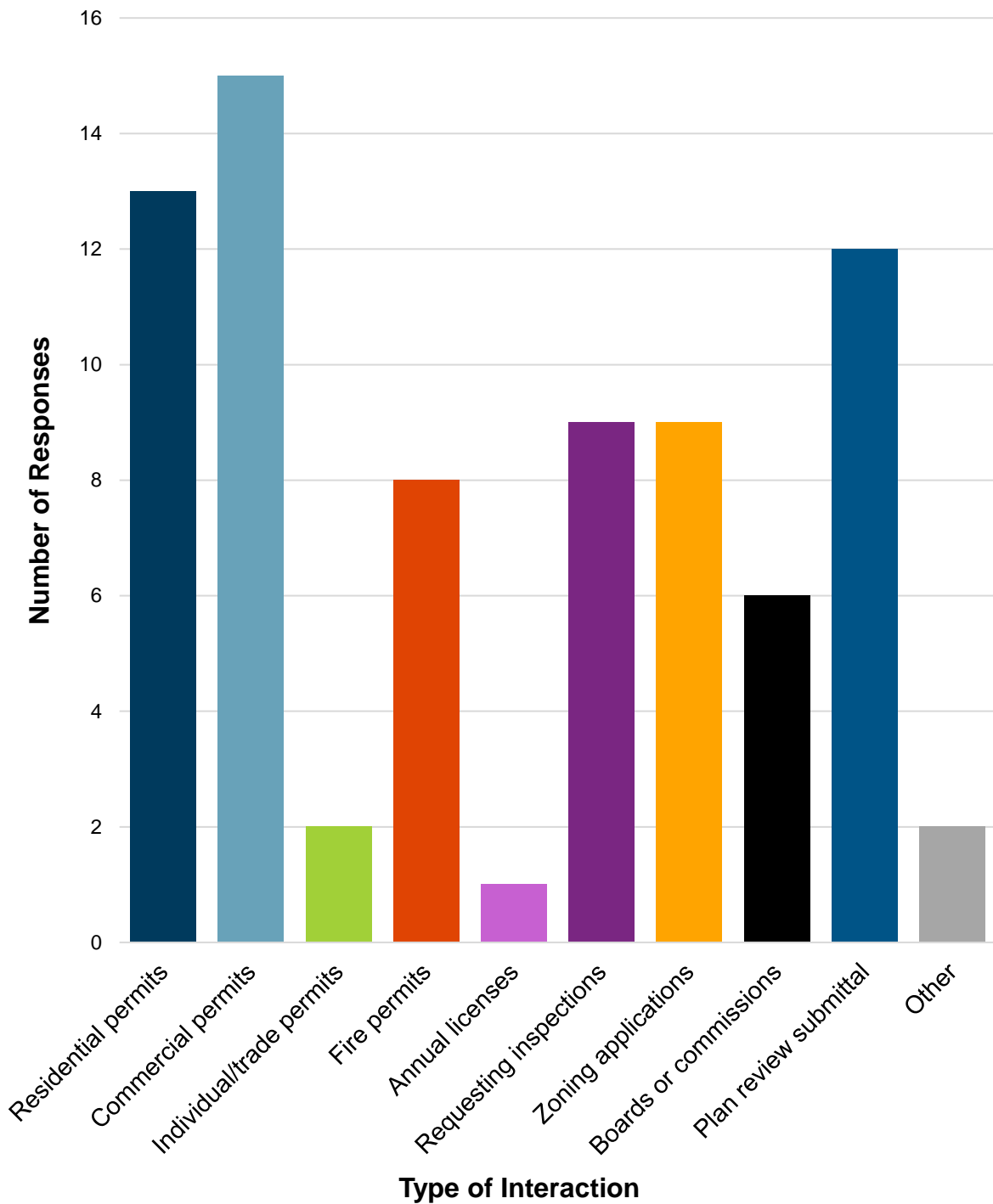
External Web Survey Responses by Role



- Architect
- Contractor
- Engineer
- Property owner or manager
- Developer



External Web Survey Responses by Purpose of Interaction



Rating of City Services

Respondents were asked to rate different aspects of the development process on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). The following results are averages of all responses.

- Residential Building Permit Process: 3.11
- Commercial Building Permit Process: 3.05
- Individual or Trade Permit Process: 3.69
- Inspection Process: 6.50
- Fire Permit Process: 3.78
- Zoning Application and Review Process: 6.11
- Board and Commission Review Process: 5.73
- Availability of Information on Permit Review: 3.74
- Availability of Information Related to Project Status: 2.77

Summary of Strengths of the Permitting Process

- Knowledgeable Building, Zoning, and Engineering staff
- Knowledge, courtesy, and professionalism of inspectors
- Turnaround time on scheduling and completing inspections

Summary of Challenges of the Permitting Process

- Length of review time
- Lack of communication and plan version control between departments
- Inconsistency in communications from different departments
- Inconsistency in verbal comments and written comments
- Lack of communication on project status

Summary of Desired System and Process Changes

- Unified plan review process among all departments
- Automated inspection comments
- Tracking of plan review times by department