



CITY OF ATLANTA
City Auditor's Office
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January 2022

Performance Audit:

Building and Zoning Enforcement

What We Found

The Department of City Planning's Inspections and Enforcement Division uses a decentralized complaint intake method without a mechanism in place to ensure all complaints are captured. After reviewing complaints submitted to the CodeBusters email account, we found that the division failed to enter five of 38 total emails in Accela, while only 18 were entered within the Division's 24-hour performance goal. The inability to ensure all complaints are captured can cause complaints to be unaddressed or missed.

The Inspections and Enforcement Division has not maintained accurate and reliable data in Accela. We reviewed complaint data in Accela and found that staff entered incorrect information, that some fields were left blank, and some cases were left unassigned to an inspector. Of 4,733 complaints logged between 2017-2020, 8% lacked an initial inspection date and 50% had blank closed dates. Additionally, 58% of complaints were left unassigned in Accela, a task delegated by the division supervisor. Increasing the number of supervisory staff could improve data quality in Accela and reduce fraud risk while managing an increasing workload, including a backlog of cases yet to be properly addressed in Accela.

Zoning enforcement responsibilities have shifted since 2011 and have not been properly updated or communicated in city code and Planning's website, which has contributed to confusion. Both the Code Enforcement Section and the Inspections and Enforcement Division can enforce portions of the zoning code and have responded to the same complaints; therefore, the delineation between responsibilities for these agencies is unclear. Moving the zoning enforcement function from the Inspections and Enforcement Division to Police's Code Enforcement Section could reduce confusion, improve effectiveness, and align with peer cities. Additionally, the division's continued participation in the Code Enforcement Academy can ensure that citizens remain informed and updated on enforcement responsibilities.

Why We Did This Audit

We undertook this audit because City Council members expressed interest in a performance audit of the Office of Buildings' Inspections and Enforcement Division. We reviewed the Division's internal procedures, observed the enforcement process, and analyzed data in Accela to assess whether the Inspections and Enforcement Division met industry and peer city standards, met its performance goals, and complied with internal procedures.

What We Recommended

To improve building and zoning code enforcement, if the function remains in Planning, the Commissioner should:

- require staff to enter and update complaint information in Accela, including the backlog, update and follow internal procedures, develop and track performance goals, and participate in the Code Enforcement Academy
- work with the ATL311 commissioner to transfer the complaint intake process

To centralize building and zoning code enforcement, the Commissioner of City Planning should:

- work with the Police Chief to transition zoning enforcement to the Police's Code Enforcement Section, including moving complaint intake to ATL311

For more information regarding this report, please use the "contact" link on our website at www.atlaudit.org

Management Responses to Audit Recommendations

Summary of Management Responses		
Recommendation #1:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning work with the Police Chief to transfer zoning enforcement responsibilities to Police's Code Enforcement Section.	
Response & Proposed Action:	See attachment	Disagree
Timeframe:		
Recommendation #2:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning route all zoning complaints to ATL311 and provide ATL311 staff with training on entering complaints in Accela.	
Response & Proposed Action:	See attachment	Agree
Timeframe:	Jan. 2022/Feb. 2022	
Recommendation #3:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning continue encouraging staff to participate in the city's Code Enforcement Academy to educate citizens on all the division enforcement responsibilities.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Currently participating in all invited community meetings and Code Enforcement Academy training sessions.	Agree
Timeframe:	Ongoing	
Recommendation #4:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning update complaint information in Accela to ensure that all cases are entered and update the status of cases.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Complaint information is currently being updated in Accela. A backlog report was generated and is currently being updated.	Agree
Timeframe:	Immediately	
Recommendation #5:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning create additional supervisor positions to ensure that complaints are properly assigned and reviewed prior to closure.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Four (4) lead positions were created in the personnel budget for FY22. These positions will serve as the supervisors of each quadrant.	Agree
Timeframe:	Immediately	
Recommendation #6:	We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning ensure that supervisors enter all information related to complaints into Accela according to established procedures.	

Response & Proposed Action:	Supervisor positions have been approved and being recruited. Once hired, they will presume the duties to ensure that all information related to complaints are entered into Accela according to established procedures.	Agree
Timeframe:	Nov./Dec. 2021 – Upon the hire of supervisors.	
Recommendation #7: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning direct staff to enter the backlog of complaints into Accela and work with Police to obtain the status of each complaint referred to the department and update the status in Accela.		
Response & Proposed Action:	Complaint information is currently being updated in Accela. A backlog report was generated and is currently being updated. Additionally, four (4) lead positions were created in the personnel budget for FY22. These positions will serve as the supervisors of each quadrant.	Agree
Timeframe:	Immediately	
Recommendation #8: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning ensure that procedures for handling stop-work complaints are documented and consistently followed.		
Response & Proposed Action:	Revise current SOPs, distribute & train all inspectors.	Agree
Timeframe:	November 2021	
Recommendation #9: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning ensure that all complaints received through the CodeBusters email are entered into Accela within 24 hours, consistent with the division's procedures.		
Response & Proposed Action:	Currently developing monitoring process for implementation. Will reiterate established SLA and its importance.	Agree
Timeframe:	Immediately	
Recommendation #10: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning develop a performance target for resolving customer complaints and track metrics for each step of the process (from the time the complaint is received until the issue is resolved) and monitor compliance with the performance targets.		
Response & Proposed Action:	New performance metrics are being established for SWO's. All other complaint categories already have established performance metric. Will work with AIM, Accela System Administrator to revise the complaint workflow to better serve Office of Buildings' needs & provide accurate reporting and monitoring.	Agree
Timeframe:	Jan. 2022/Feb. 2022	
Recommendation #11: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning ensure that supervisors promptly assign cases to inspectors in Accela in order to meet the performance target of conducting inspections within 72 hours after the complaint is entered into the system.		

<p>Response & Proposed Action:</p> <p>Timeframe:</p>	<p>Supervisor positions have been approved and being recruited. Once hired, they will presume the duties to ensure that all information related to complaints are entered into Accela according to established procedures. Currently developing monitoring process for implementation. Will reiterate established SLA and its importance.</p> <p>Immediately</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>Recommendation #12: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning ensure that complaint inspection and closure dates are consistently entered into Accela.</p>		
<p>Response & Proposed Action:</p> <p>Timeframe:</p>	<p>Supervisor positions have been approved and being recruited. Once hired, they will presume the duties to ensure that all information related to complaints are entered into Accela according to established procedures. Currently developing monitoring process for implementation. Will reiterate established SLA and its importance.</p> <p>Immediately</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>Recommendation #13: We recommend that the Commissioner of City Planning update procedures to require supervisors to review cases, at least on a spot-check bases, before they are closed in the system and ensure that the procedure is followed.</p>		
<p>Response & Proposed Action:</p> <p>Timeframe:</p>	<p>Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QA/QC) program is being established for all inspection types, including zoning enforcement.</p> <p>Jan. 2022/Feb. 2022</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>Recommendation #14: We recommend the Commissioner of City Planning work with the Accela System Administrator to reduce the inspectors' access in Accela to only those permissions needed to perform their specific functions.</p>		
<p>Response & Proposed Action:</p> <p>Timeframe:</p>	<p>Will work with Accela Systems Admin. To revise the complaint workflow to better serve Office of Buildings enforcement needs, provide accurate data reporting and automated reminders for efficiency.</p> <p>Jan. 2022</p>	<p>Agree</p>