

Email to AIA Seattle from Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, on issues related to Accela

Sept. 4, 2018

My apologies for the delay in responding to you. I know you have also reached out to Councilmembers, specifically Councilmember Herbold, and also to the Mayor's Office. Here are our responses to the concerns raised by AIA members in emails to the City in August. Thank you for providing specific issues.

We are currently gathering customer feedback about usability issues. We developed the previous portal's interface over the course of more than 8 years. That portal was comprised of a complex suite of custom-built tools that interfaced with a static permitting database. It was difficult to maintain and update. The new system is an off-the-shelf product that automates many of the previous portal's functions. We are now conducting a post-launch upgrade of the new portal, in which we'll prioritize critical usability issues and enhancements to improve system. We are releasing improvements to the system twice a month for the next several months. However, because the Seattle Services Portal will be a city-wide permitting system, it is not likely that we will customize it to the previous extent.

Your feedback is important and will help us determine where best to focus our efforts.

Below are responses to your specific concerns.

- **Initial portal project interface**
 - Preliminary application
 - Paying fees: We released a solution to the fee payment issue on 8/21/18 that allows fees to be paid by anyone with or without a Seattle Services Portal account.
 - Project Number Creation/Processing
 - We recently hired additional staff in the workgroups that process preliminary applications to focus on the unexpected backlog created when we converted to the new system and to keep up with continued high demand. The new staff will allow us to create project numbers more quickly and will eliminate the need to use the pre-application number in other processes. We are also planning to automate the process to create new numbers as soon as the PA is completed. The system will then notify applicants that the new number(s) have been created.
 - Intake appointment scheduling
 - We released an interim solution to the difficult scheduling calendar display on 8/21/18. The calendar now displays the next four available intake appointments above the dates. We continue to work on a solution that will display only available dates.
 - Managing appointments
 - We will release new functionality to allow applicants to filter projects that have been scheduled for intake into a single view as early as 9/11/18. You will still need to open the application to find the scheduled date. We are exploring a custom solution to create a dashboard view of scheduled appointments. However, we don't yet have a timeline for that.
 - Pre-submittal Conference Application

- We have heard that some customers are not able to use the “save and continue” function when submitting permit documents. Seattle IT is not able to recreate this error. We’ll continue to investigate the problem.
 - The check status map app had to be discontinued because it didn’t “talk” to Accela. We put in a temporary check status box that works with RECORD NUMBERS only. To check a status, type in the record number and it will take you to the record details. We are developing a project to recreate the map app so that customers can do a broad search from our home page. We don’t yet have a timeline for when that will be released.
 - Dates and times of specific application steps can be found by searching for the record in the Seattle Service Portal, selecting “status” under record info and opening the task in question.
 - The system requests confirmation of the applicant name when making any changes to an application to ensure that correct information is collected on permit amendments. Our customers have told us that they do sometimes need to change applicants at various points in the process.
 - The recent upgrade to the date scheduler was our first attempt at addressing the usability problems with the intake appointment calendar. We believe this will help our customers narrow down the time line for when they will be able to successfully find an available appointment time. If you want a time later, we recommend that you start looking for dates after the last earliest date (which is often a few months out). We continue to work on this issue so that it will show actual available dates. This issue has been a huge technical challenge, and we don’t have a timeline for a complete fix.
 - Anything marked “TBD” means that the system has automatically advanced your permit to the next phase. Your project will then show up in our staff dashboards to be assigned to a reviewer. This is an indication that the system has accepted your project and is advancing it through the expected steps.
 - We continue to work with staff and Seattle IT to identify all actions that are missing a required email notification, and to add those notifications as necessary
 - We have logged a request to allow customers to delete documents during the upload process before final submission.
 - You can sort attachments from oldest to newest or newest to oldest. When you first click the date column header, the system sorts the items oldest to newest. Click the date column header again and the system sorts the items newest to oldest.
- **Technical Training/Customer Service**
 - We are aware of issues with incorrect fees on projects. This is a high priority for us to resolve as quickly as possible. Fee issues are often complex and require research and coordination with accounting staff. If you have specific fee problems our new customer service group, described below, should be able to help you.
 - We are developing a new customer service group that will be able to help you with questions about these issues. That group should be in place within a couple of weeks. To get help, contact 206-684-8850, and they will forward you to the correct customer service representative to help you with your issue. We have reminded our managers to ask their staff to clear out their voicemails. You can also try contacting the managers via email. Here’s a list of [managers, phone numbers, and emails](#).

I hope this information is helpful to you and the AIA members. We appreciate your participation in helping us make the system better, and we appreciate your patience.

Sincerely,

Nathan Torgelson



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Director

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