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City Adds Online Permits for Small Projects

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It is getting easier for a licensed professional to get a permit to do building work on homes and business spaces in New York City—a development that could ultimately reduce costs for property owners.

The city's Department of Buildings said Monday that architects and engineers licensed by the state can now apply online for permits for small renovations—tasks such as redesigning kitchens and bathrooms or repairing facades. In the past, the process has required going to the department's office in person to submit paperwork and pay fees. Owners can't apply for a permit themselves but rather must hire a professional to use the system.

Until now, it has taken anywhere from several days to a few weeks to acquire necessary permits from the day that the application is submitted, said Tony Sclafani, a department spokesman.

Under the new system, licensed professionals can get a permit within one business day by filling out an application and submitting construction plans digitally. The process could also reduce costs for homeowners by reducing the time it takes to complete a project, building industry experts said. Cities such as Washington, D.C., and Chicago already have online systems for submitting construction permits in place.

The expanded system is part of a broader effort by the city to speed up the construction project approval process. A year ago, the city began accepting construction plans for new buildings and major renovation projects online.

The program was begun "to combine new technology with great customer service to expedite safe construction—and it has surpassed our expectations," Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in a news release Monday. Indeed, 339 large construction projects have been approved under the program.

The expansion of the online procedure to include small projects is "digitizing more of the construction process," Mr. Sclafani said.

About 50,000 applications for small projects are submitted a year, according to the department. The online approach is expected to save the building industry up to \$50 million per year in labor costs by eliminating the need to make physical trips to the office.

The online option could also help with transparency. "We would be able to see when the permit was asked for and when it was issued," said **Adam Leitman Bailey**, a real-estate lawyer in New York. "It will allow for accountability and more discipline."