

# MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

Development Services Department



Building Safety

**Date:** October 1, 2025

**To:** Anchorage Assembly Members

**From:** Greg Soule (Director/Building Official, Development Services Department)  
Daniel King (Engineering Services Manager, Development Services Department)

**Re:** Third Party Plan Review 2025 Annual Update

Members of the Anchorage Assembly,

Optional Single Family and Two-Family Residential Plan Review was adopted into the Anchorage Municipal Code in 2012 under Assembly Ordinance (AO) 2012-62(S-1). At that time, it was limited to residential plan review only which had historically been handled by municipal plan reviewers and allowed any licensed structural or civil engineer to complete the structural review and any licensed architect or certified building plans examiner to complete the fire-life safety review. This change also allowed for audit of any third-party reviews by municipal staff. During that time, audits typically did not happen unless problems arose in field. In February of 2024, AO 2023-136(S)\* expanded third party plan review to include all commercial and residential permits and all engineering disciplines (e.g. electrical, mechanical, plumbing). The requirements to be qualified were modified, requiring a registry to be maintained of third-party reviewers approved by the Development Services Department (DSD). This also applied a mandatory audit of 10% of all projects with third party plan review and a required annual report due October 1 on the previous year of permitting.

The AO was passed and approved by the Anchorage Assembly on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The DSD updated the policy on third party reviews and created a procedure for tracking the expected third-party reviews and the requested data on audits. This updated policy was effective April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. With October of 2024 not creating a full year, October of 2025 will be the first official audit.

## **Approved Third-Party Reviewers**

As of September this year, there are 16 approved reviewers, with one each for mechanical/plumbing and electrical, two for architectural, eight for structural, and five for residential (fire-life safety) reviews.

## **Audit Results**

The selected audit period is from June 1, 2024 to June 1, 2025.



There were almost 700 commercial permits (See Figure A) for new buildings, alterations, and additions during the audit period. Of those, 1% utilized third party plan review. All the third-party reviews during the audit period were for structural designs. Due to staffing shortages, we have not completed the 10% audit (1 permit audit) required by code.

Permit Type	Commercial		
	Total Permits	Third Party	% Third Party
New Building	32	3	9%
Alteration	636	3	0.5%
Addition	13	2	15%
Total	681	8	1%

Figure A: Commercial Third-Party Plan Reviews

There were almost 900 residential permits (See Figure B) for new buildings, alterations, and additions during the audit period. Residential would include single family, duplex, and triplex construction. Of those, 19% utilized third party plan review.

Permit Type	Residential		
	Total Permits	Third Party	% Third Party
New Building	205	128	62%
Alteration	527	35	7%
Addition	154	8	5%
Total	886	171	19%

Figure B: Residential Third-Party Plan Reviews.

Residential permits only require structural and fire-life safety reviews. Structural third-party review was utilized on 94% of these permits, while fire-life safety was utilized on 89%. Due to staffing shortages, we have not completed the 10% audit (24 permit audits) required by code. We have only logged three audits officially (one-eighth of the target), each with a structural and fire-life safety third party review for a total of 6 audit items. There are two more permits currently flagged in field due to issues, but these have not been entered since we're still waiting for responses from the designer and third-party reviewers.

Results for audits are categorized as Pass, Corrections, or Fail:

- Pass – No corrections are required.
- Corrections – Corrections by designer are required and both designer and third-party reviewer are notified of issues to be addressed.
- Fail – Corrections by designer are required that are considered substantial or life-safety risks. The designer and third-party reviewer are notified of issues to be addressed.

Of the six items audited, two were pass, two were corrections, and two were fails.

## Commentary

We are currently behind on third party audits due to short staffing. For the last year and a half, we have had only two structural/residential plan reviewers, when we are organized to have four. DSD is expected to complete a 10% audit of all permits with third party review, but limited staffing has required us to prioritize the regular reviewing duties over the auditing process. Further, it is difficult to time the audits since waiting for responses to substantive review comments can stop a permit from being issued; we do not want to issue a permit as approved when safety items have been identified or corrections to construction documents need to be made. Auditing after permits have been issued is not feasible and is only done when issues are identified in field.

The third-party plan review process is unique in Anchorage. Other jurisdictions will have third-party



review contracts with engineering firms to complete reviews when they don't have the capacity or knowledge to complete them. This is not to speed up the review process necessarily but to provide adequate reviews on an adequate timeline. Anchorage is unique that this policy is expected to address delays in reviews but not necessarily due to a lack of qualified review staff. This is supposed to decrease the amount of time it takes to get from permit application to permit issuance, but we've heard there are delays in getting the third-party reviewers to complete the work in a timely manner themselves.

This also creates a conflict of interest for the third-party reviewers. Those reviewers are expected to be hired by the owner of the project, per the AO; however, they are typically recommended or selected outright by either project managers or contractors on behalf of the owner. They typically select them based on how quickly they can complete the review and if they agree with the comments being provided. It behooves the third-party reviewer to limit the number of comments to maintain relationships with their clients and not necessarily to meet the letter of the code. We've had engineers before stating they knew they'd done things wrong on drawings they've submitted for municipal plan review and were waiting for us to call them out so they could not be the one to have to say no to the client.

### **Next Report**

It is expected the department will be fully staffed as of December this year. It is the goal to provide the required 10% audit during the next audit period. The reporting requirement is expected to terminate with the 2026 report per the AO.