

See page two for Queens Civic Congress' quote in this article about our [victory](#) in this effort to prevent rules that limit our ability to make valid building complaints.



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DOB Delays Civilian Complaint Plan

By Joseph Orovic

The Department of Buildings will alter its development process, applying a 30-day challenge period for citizens to raise concerns about any new construction.

The new plan has caused an outcry among opponents of overdevelopment and out-of-character buildings, who say it favors developers and not residents.

The proposal was originally slated to take effect on Monday after a public hearing last Friday. Significant objections over the virtually non-existent gap between the hearing and implementation caused the agency to push the plan's start-date back to mid-April.

Sources at the DOB assert the new process allows for greater community oversight, accountability and efficiency. It will result in "lowering duplicate complaints and decreasing pauses in construction."

"The reforms [...] will inject a much-needed dose of transparency and accountability into a critical area of construction and development – zoning compliance," said Mayor Mike Bloomberg at the plan's announcement on Feb. 2. "The reforms center on the public's right to challenge any approved development if they think it violates local zoning regulations."

Development plans would be posted on the DOB's Web site, with a black and white diagram of the building and its dimensions. While the pseudo-rendering does not place the building within the context of its surroundings, DOB sources asserted the Web site will provide ample information for citizens.

The current system also allows for delays in construction, brought on by residents' concerns as buildings are going up.

The system as it stands today "puts the public at a disadvantage and creates uncertainty for developers, who could be subject to a challenge long after a building is out of the ground," DOB Commissioner Robert LiMandri said.

Should the new 30-day window pass without any hiccups, the developer may move forward with the project. New Yorkers still retain their right to challenge any project with the DOB Borough Commissioner and can still pursue complaints up to the Board of Standards and Appeals.

Councilman Tony Avella (D-Bayside) was joined by Councilwoman Rosie Mendez (D-Manhattan) and Assemblyman James Brennan on the steps of City Hall last Friday to denounce the deal, which he said essentially puts a deadline on public review.

“Despite being touted by Mayor Mike Bloomberg and DOB Commissioner LiMandri as empowering the public with greater oversight over new developments, these rule changes will actually diminish the ability of residents to contest new construction by creating a de facto statute of limitations,” Avella said.

The Queens Civic Congress also lashed out against the change.

“Restricting our challenge to 30 days without at least the confidence that a neutral examiner has reviewed the plans is arbitrary and dangerous,” the group said in a statement.

Both QCC and Avella said there may even be a First Amendment violation taking place.

“Theoretically, how do you restrict the public’s right to complain? I think it’s unconstitutional. If it wasn’t sad, it would be laughable,” Avella said. “If they go through with this, we’ll sue.”