

05/22/2026

To: The Civil Service Commission,

I am writing anonymously as a City employee who has been following the ongoing discussion surrounding the implementation of the OpenGov/PermitSF system and the broader conversation about permitting reform in San Francisco.

The current public debate has understandably focused on the shortcomings, frustrations, and implementation challenges associated with the system rollout. Criticism and oversight are important, particularly for a project of this scale and public importance. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the problem that City staff have been attempting to address for many years.

San Francisco's permitting infrastructure has long been criticized as outdated, fragmented, and reliant on aging legacy systems and workarounds, including processes dependent on unsupported or archival technologies. Permit timelines and backlogs had already become a significant concern well before the current transition. If a truly bespoke system tailored specifically for San Francisco was the preferred solution, that investment should have been made years ago, not only when the failures and limitations of the existing systems became impossible to ignore. Governments rarely build enterprise software quickly or cheaply, and waiting for a perfect system can become an excuse to preserve dysfunctional legacy processes.

While the current system may not be a perfect or fully customized product, modernization efforts of this scale are inherently iterative. Giving a new system a fair opportunity to improve is not blind loyalty to a vendor; it is an acknowledgment that progress requires adaptation, testing, and refinement. Rejecting every imperfect attempt at modernization risks locking the City into systems that many employees and members of the public have long agreed are unsustainable.

One concern with the current discourse is that the broader merit of modernization itself is becoming lost within an increasingly polarized argument. The discussion would be more productive if it focused on identifying design flaws, workflow conflicts, implementation gaps, training needs, and operational improvements, all of which are normal and expected challenges in large municipal technology transitions. These are fundamentally process and systems design issues that should be reviewed thoughtfully and improved collaboratively.

RECEIVED  
26 MAY 27 14:09:53  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION  
SAN FRANCISCO

It is also important to acknowledge that there are public servants who support aspects of this transition, *even* while recognizing its flaws. Public discourse should leave room for differing perspectives without assuming bad faith on either side. Our colleagues are navigating operational, staffing, and coordination challenges while still attempting to move work forward, and those efforts should not be dismissed simply because the process has been imperfect.

It should be possible to question procurement decisions, implementation strategy, timelines, or vendor performance while still recognizing that many City employees involved in this effort were acting in good faith to modernize a permitting system that had long been acknowledged as unsustainable. Those positions are not mutually exclusive.

At the work place, the tone of the conversation is beginning to create an increasingly divisive and unhealthy work environment at a time when employees across departments should be focused on a shared objective: improving outcomes for San Francisco residents. However, the environment becomes counterproductive when disagreement is framed in ways that discourage collaboration or make employees feel they must choose sides rather than contribute solutions.

I am submitting this letter anonymously because, just as some individuals opposing the project have expressed concerns about retaliation or marginalization, those with more nuanced or differing perspectives may also feel hesitant to speak openly. Healthy workplaces and strong labor communities should allow room for disagreement, constructive criticism, and differing professional opinions without alienation or hostility.

San Francisco's permitting challenges were not created overnight, and they will not be solved overnight. The people working through these changes deserve accountability, certainly, but they also deserve fairness, perspective, and the opportunity to continue improving a system that many have long agreed needed reform.

Sincerely,

A Concerned City Employee