STATE OF HAWAI'I • DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

Trends in Honolulu Building Permits 2005 - 2024

RESEARCH & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS DIVISION
DBEDT • STATE OF HAWAI'I

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Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism
State of Hawai'i

This study was produced by the Research and Economic Analysis Division (READ) of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT). It was prepared by Paul Migliorato, Economist, and Rene Kamita, Ph.D., Economist, under the direction of Eugene Tian, Ph.D., Economic Research Administrator (retired).

Contents

1. Introduction

Securing a building permit in Honolulu can be a complicated and time-consuming process. DBEDT (2025) found that the average permit processing time in 2023, as measured by the length of time between permit application filing and issuance, was 632 days for State government projects, 374 days for City and County of Honolulu projects, and 104 days for private sector permits.[1] The backlog which faces both those awaiting and those anticipating applying for permits, has become a source of increasing attention.

This study examines Honolulu building permits created and completed over the last twenty years to better understand how permit issuance times, project completions, and project values have changed over time. As shown in Table 1, completed permits include those which have been closed, cancelled, revoked, or denied. Most of the focus is on closed permits, as those projects have passed all required permit inspections with values subject to City and County of Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) review.[2]

The total universe of permit applications completed during this period numbered 388,063. Of these, 85.3 percent (331,143) saw permit applications closed. Closed permits averaged 16,557 per year. An additional 11.6 percent (45,177) were listed as "job cancelled," with 2.3 percent (8,939) listed as "permit revoked."

Table 1. Number of Permits Issued and Completed by Permit Status, 2005-2024

Status of Completed Permits	Number of permits	Share of Completed Permits
Cancelled - no plans uploaded	1,957	0.5%
Denied	587	0.2%
Full refund issued	68	0.0%
Job cancelled	45,177	11.6%
Model review only - no BP issued	20	0.0%
Partial refund issued	172	0.0%
Permit application closed	331,143	85.3%
Permit revoked	8,939	2.3%
Total	**388,063**	**100.0%**

Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu, READ estimates.

Table 2 indicates the disposition of permits issued and completed between 2005 and 2024 by estimated value (as provided by the applicant) and accepted value following DPP's review. The accepted value for completed permits over the twenty-year study period is approximately 80

[1] DBEDT (2025). Assessing the Cost of Building Permit Delays in Honolulu: 2022 – 2023. https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/reports/building_permit_delays.pdf

[2] The data in this study reflects permit applications made through December 31, 2024 that were completed as of January 1, 2005 or later. The data was downloaded on March 7, 2025 from the City and County of Honolulu DPP website.

percent of estimated value, largely due to differences in permit values for jobs cancelled and permits cancelled with no plans uploaded. When based on accepted value, permits closed represent 92.0 percent of completed permit value.

Table 2. Estimated and Accepted Permit Valuations for Completed Permits, 2005-2024

Status of Completed Permits	Estimated value of permits	Accepted value of permits	Share of accepted value
Cancelled - no plans uploaded	$469,852,432	$8,201,853	0.0%
Denied	$63,207,974	$12,877,677	0.0%
Full refund issued	$1,334,953	$1,249,353	0.0%
Job cancelled	$11,373,034,249	$2,706,365,330	6.4%
Model review only - no BP issued	$2,900,934	$2,242,330	0.0%
Partial refund issued	$35,339,653	$46,298,169	0.1%
Permit application closed	$40,770,910,493	$39,123,662,113	92.0%
Permit revoked	$573,024,118	$622,968,260	1.5%
Total accepted value	**$53,289,604,805**	**$42,523,865,085**	**100.0%**

Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu, READ estimates.

Figure 1 depicts the annual volume of permit applications DPP received based on permits completed and permits closed during the 2005 to 2024 time period. The distributions for completed and closed permits are similar over time, with applications peaking in 2012, corresponding to a surge in solar permits, and declining since then.

Figure 1. Honolulu building permits completed and permits closed, by year of application
Permits completed between 2005 and 2024

Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Because the times between application, issue, and completion can be long, data on permit activity is less complete for more recent applications (e.g., those filed in 2024), as many may remain under review and are not captured in this data set. As shown, approximately 8.2 percent of permits completed during the study period were created in the years prior, some going back to 1999.

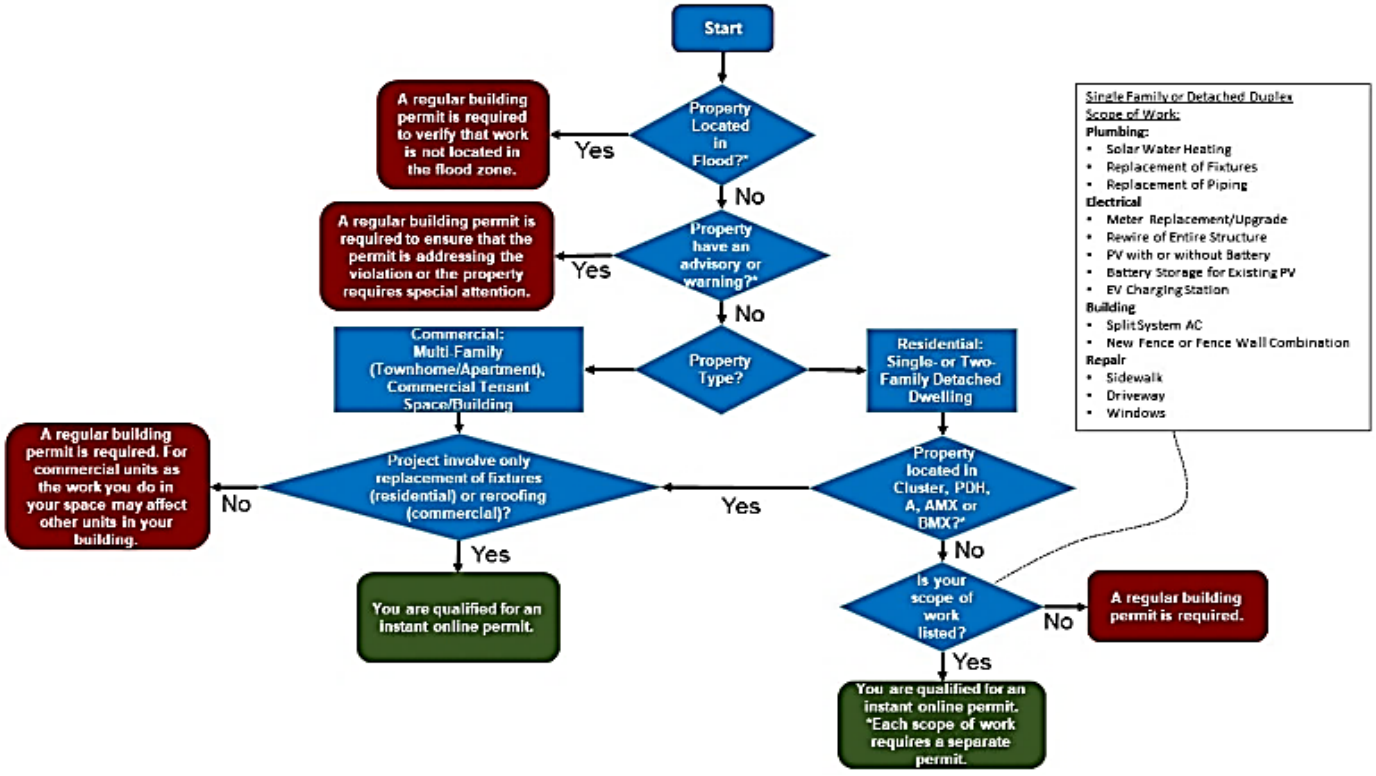
Section 2 describes the permitting process, followed in Section 3 by a discussion of the types of projects included in the permit data set. Sections 4 and 5 examine trends over time in permits for new structures and for new single-family houses (SFH). Section 6 concludes the study, summarizing some of the findings.

2. The Permitting Process

The permitting process is multi-faceted and seldom as simple as applicants might hope. The range of projects overseen by DPP is broad. Permits are required "to erect, construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, improve, remove, convert or demolish any building or structure."[3]

Figure 2, created by DPP to clarify which projects are eligible to qualify for instant online permits, hints at what applicants seeking permits face. Only those projects which make their way to the green boxes at the base of the path qualify for instant permit consideration. All others are subject to the standard, frequently lengthy permit application process.

Figure 2. Honolulu DPP instant online building permit qualification map

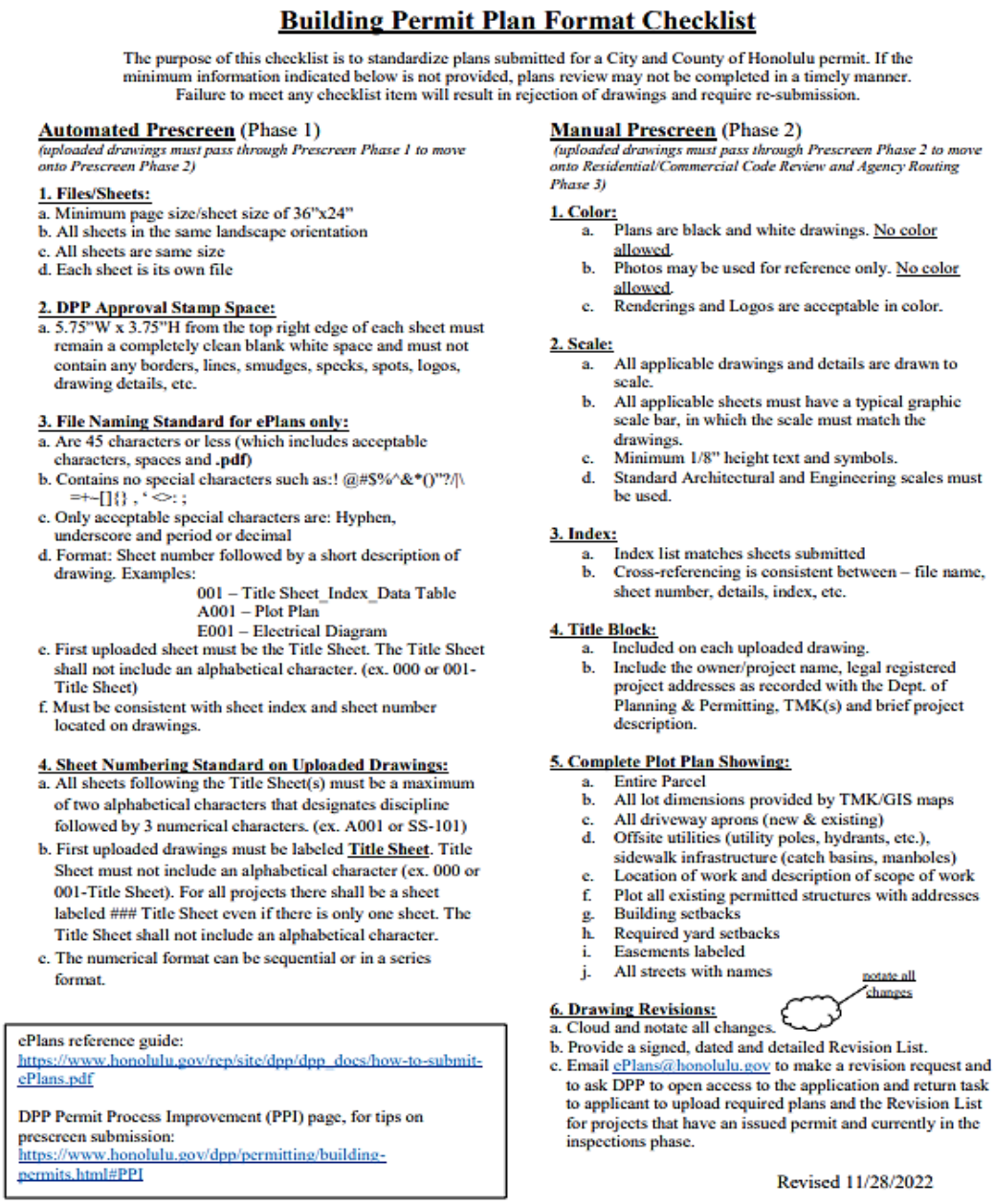


Source: https://www.honolulu.gov/dpp/permitting/building-permits-home/instant-online-building-permits/

[3] https://www.honolulu.gov/dpp/permitting/building-permits-home/building-permit-requriements/

Plans are required for all new residential and commercial projects. Applicants are tasked with including details in up to 77 permits categories, including the estimated value of the work to be undertaken and characteristics of the project. Figure 3 outlines some of what is required of applicants seeking to submit project plans. It includes a warning that plan reviews "may not be completed in a timely manner" if the checklist is not adhered to carefully.

Figure 3. Building Permit Plan Format Checklist



Building Permit Plan Format Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to standardize plans submitted for a City and County of Honolulu permit. If the minimum information indicated below is not provided, plans review may not be completed in a timely manner. Failure to meet any checklist item will result in rejection of drawings and require re-submission.

Automated Prescreen (Phase 1)
(uploaded drawings must pass through Prescreen Phase 1 to move onto Prescreen Phase 2)

1. Files/Sheets:
a. Minimum page size/sheet size of 36"x24"
b. All sheets in the same landscape orientation
c. All sheets are same size
d. Each sheet is its own file

2. DPP Approval Stamp Space:
a. 5.75"W x 3.75"H from the top right edge of each sheet must remain a completely clean blank white space and must not contain any borders, lines, smudges, specks, spots, logos, drawing details, etc.

3. File Naming Standard for ePlans only:
a. Are 45 characters or less (which includes acceptable characters, spaces and **.pdf)**
b. Contains no special characters such as:! @#$%^&*()"?/|\ =+~[]{} , ' <>: ;
c. Only acceptable special characters are: Hyphen, underscore and period or decimal
d. Format: Sheet number followed by a short description of drawing. Examples:
001 – Title Sheet_Index_Data Table
A001 – Plot Plan
E001 – Electrical Diagram
e. First uploaded sheet must be the Title Sheet. The Title Sheet shall not include an alphabetical character. (ex. 000 or 001-Title Sheet)
f. Must be consistent with sheet index and sheet number located on drawings.

4. Sheet Numbering Standard on Uploaded Drawings:
a. All sheets following the Title Sheet(s) must be a maximum of two alphabetical characters that designates discipline followed by 3 numerical characters. (ex. A001 or SS-101)
b. First uploaded drawings must be labeled **Title Sheet**. Title Sheet must not include an alphabetical character (ex. 000 or 001-Title Sheet). For all projects there shall be a sheet labeled ### Title Sheet even if there is only one sheet. The Title Sheet shall not include an alphabetical character.
c. The numerical format can be sequential or in a series format.

ePlans reference guide:
https://www.honolulu.gov/rep/site/dpp/dpp_docs/how-to-submit-ePlans.pdf

DPP Permit Process Improvement (PPI) page, for tips on prescreen submission:
https://www.honolulu.gov/dpp/permitting/building-permits.html#PPI

Manual Prescreen (Phase 2)
(uploaded drawings must pass through Prescreen Phase 2 to move onto Residential/Commercial Code Review and Agency Routing Phase 3)

1. Color:
a. Plans are black and white drawings. No color allowed.
b. Photos may be used for reference only. No color allowed.
c. Renderings and Logos are acceptable in color.

2. Scale:
a. All applicable drawings and details are drawn to scale.
b. All applicable sheets must have a typical graphic scale bar, in which the scale must match the drawings.
c. Minimum 1/8" height text and symbols.
d. Standard Architectural and Engineering scales must be used.

3. Index:
a. Index list matches sheets submitted
b. Cross-referencing is consistent between – file name, sheet number, details, index, etc.

4. Title Block:
a. Included on each uploaded drawing.
b. Include the owner/project name, legal registered project addresses as recorded with the Dept. of Planning & Permitting, TMK(s) and brief project description.

5. Complete Plot Plan Showing:
a. Entire Parcel
b. All lot dimensions provided by TMK/GIS maps
c. All driveway aprons (new & existing)
d. Offsite utilities (utility poles, hydrants, etc.), sidewalk infrastructure (catch basins, manholes)
e. Location of work and description of scope of work
f. Plot all existing permitted structures with addresses
g. Building setbacks
h. Required yard setbacks
i. Easements labeled
j. All streets with names

notate all changes

6. Drawing Revisions:
a. Cloud and notate all changes.
b. Provide a signed, dated and detailed Revision List.
c. Email ePlans@honolulu.gov to make a revision request and to ask DPP to open access to the application and return task to applicant to upload required plans and the Revision List for projects that have an issued permit and currently in the inspections phase.

Revised 11/28/2022

Source: https://www4.honolulu.gov/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-347535/building-permit-checklist.pdf

Once the permit has been approved by all appropriate agencies, and the required documents and payment have been submitted, DPP issues the permit. The applicant may then start work and call for the required inspections. Once all inspections are complete, the permit is closed.

3. Honolulu Building Permits Issued and Closed, 2005 through 2024

DPP tracks and makes available a multitude of metrics regarding permit applications.[4] For the purposes of this study, we focus on closed permits as these projects would have passed all inspections with accepted values subject to DPP review. Moreover, in terms of adding to and supporting Honolulu's residential infrastructure, it is closed projects matter most. People live in homes, not in the approved architectural plans which are necessary for the issue of permits.

Based on the DPP data, of the $39.1 billion worth of permits issued and closed between 2005 and 2024, 7.4 percent were designated as state projects and 4.8 percent were designated as city projects. The remaining 87.8 percent were private sector permits. Well over half of all closed permit value was for work on existing projects.

Projects categorized as additions (to existing structures) accounted for 10.7 percent of issued and closed permit volume and 9.7 percent of total permit value. Projects categorized as alterations accounted for an additional 20.4 percent of permit volume and 31.3 percent of total permit value.

Permits involving solar projects, particularly from 2010, account for a significant share of permits issued and annual permit value. Permits designated as "solar" include the installation of solar water heaters as well as the installation of solar photovoltaic systems. Solar permits may include other types of building work or construction as well. Solar permits totaled about 130,800 or almost 40 percent of all permits closed. Because most solar permits are small, their share of total accepted permit value for closed permits was 21.5 percent.

Figures 4 and 5 show that the number and value of solar permits issued by DPP peaked in 2012. Though both follow similar patterns over time, the annual values of solar permits may fluctuate based on the nature of the project (e.g., whether residential or commercial) and whether the permit includes other types of work in addition to the solar project. For detail on permits specific to solar photovoltaic and/or battery installations, DBEDT produces annual reports on Solar PV Battery Installations in Honolulu.[5]

In 2012, permits involving solar projects represented over half of the total permit value issued that year. The share of solar project permit value has declined since then, however, permits involving solar projects continue to represent a significant share of permits issued and closed. To the extent that solar permits are issued and closed more quickly than other types of building permits, they will represent a higher percentage of issued and closed permits in recent years (e.g., 2024).

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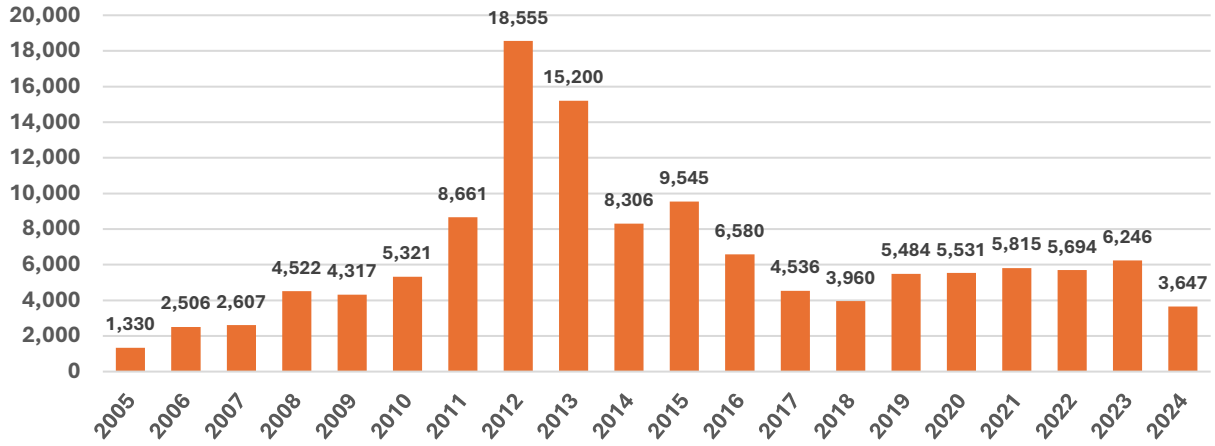
[4] DPP also provides information on permit processing. For each building permit issued there are timeline metrics available online; they compare how long various parts of the process (e.g., days in pre-submission queue, days in plan review queue, days in plan review, total days to issue) for individual permits to "application of similar types and values of work issued within the last 12 months." Another of the metrics is "days waiting for pickup," which is defined as "the number of days after the plan review completed until the applicant pays for and picks up their permit."

[5] See, for example, Solar PV Battery Installations in Honolulu: 2024 Update on the DBEDT Reports page at https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/economic/reports_studies/

Figure 4. Solar permits issued by year of issue

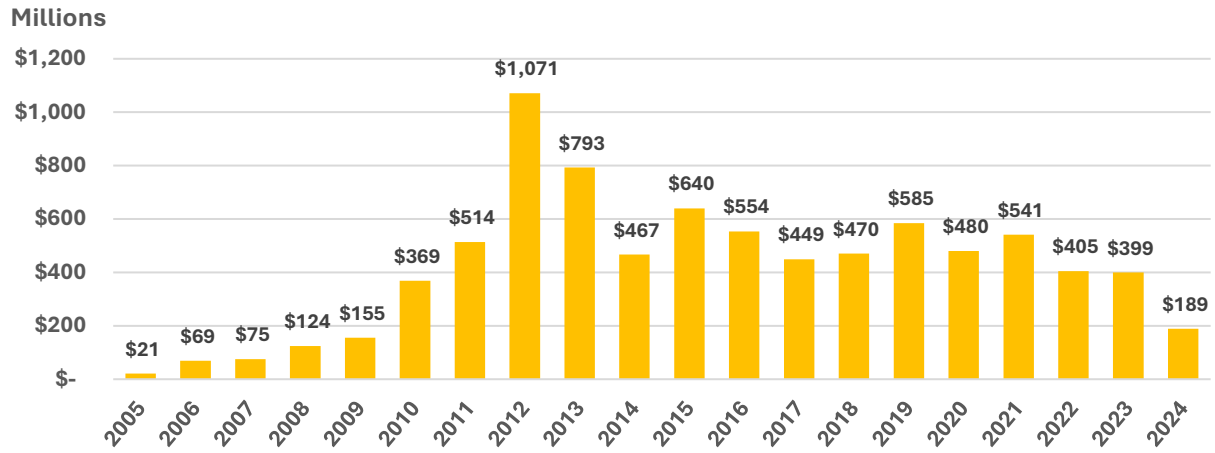
Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ. Solar permits include the installation of solar water heaters and solar photovoltaic systems.

Figure 5. Annual solar permit value by year of issue

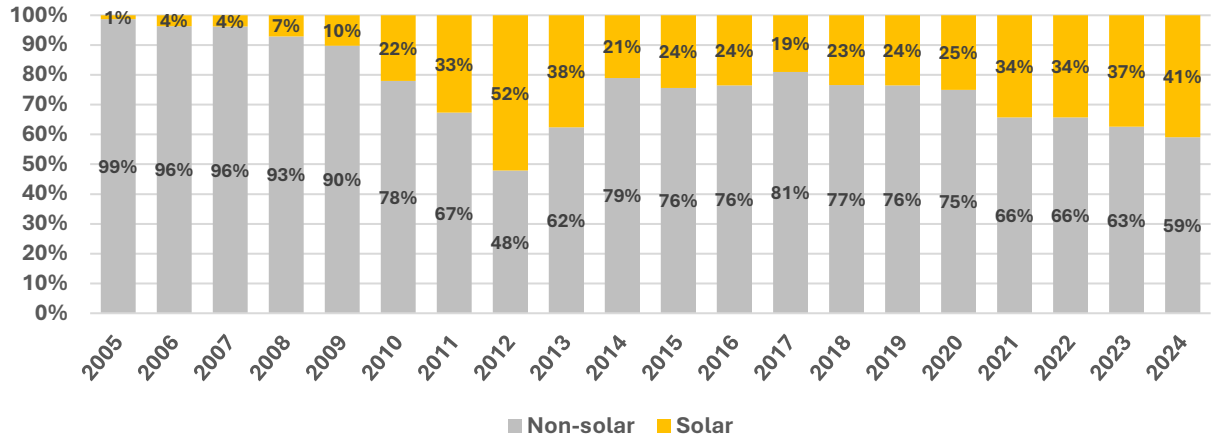
Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ. Solar permits include the installation of solar water heaters and solar photovoltaic systems. Permit value may also include other building work.

Figure 6. Shares of solar and non-solar permit value by year of issue

Permits issued and closed 2005-2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ. Solar permits include the installation of solar water heaters and solar photovoltaic systems. Solar permit value may also include other building work.

Viewed by project occupancy group designation, which indicates how permitted structures are used, the dominance of residential use is clear: single-family, two-family, and apartment permits accounted for 263,807 of closed permits, 79.7 percent of the total number permits issued and closed. Their combined share of accepted permit value was $18.3 billion or 46.7 percent of total accepted permit value.

Tables 3 and 4 break down the largest areas of permitting activity in terms of occupancy groups, separating work on new structures from work on existing structures. Of the $18.3 billion in residential housing permits (single-family, two-family, and apartment), $10.5 billion were for new structures. Of the total value for new residential structures, $6.1 billion or 58.3 percent was for single-family homes, with $3.9 billion or 37.0 percent for apartments. Permits for work done to existing single-family homes totaled approximately $5.7 billion, close in value to amount for new structures.

Table 3. New structure accepted permit value for top ten occupancy groups

Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024

Occupancy group – New structure permits	Accepted permit value	Share of total
01 - Single Family	$6,123,144,192	38.7%
03 - Apartment	$3,887,093,504	24.6%
15 - School	$1,218,468,736	7.7%
04 - Hotel	$617,947,200	3.9%
18 - Store	$553,291,456	3.5%
07 - Industrial	$527,114,496	3.3%
02 - Two Family	$487,609,952	3.1%
19 - Other non residential	$440,317,312	2.8%
11 - Institution	$427,018,336	2.7%
08 - Garage (public)	$352,627,648	2.2%
Total permit value - 20 occupancy groups	**$15,811,191,226**	**100.0%**

Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Table 4. Existing structure accepted permit value for top ten occupancy groups

Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024

Occupancy group – Existing structure permits	Accepted permit value	Share of total
01 - Single Family	$5,668,469,248	24.3%
20 - Structure other than building & unclassified	$4,552,975,360	19.5%
18 - Store	$1,947,382,912	8.4%
15 - School	$1,797,806,848	7.7%
03 - Apartment	$1,751,229,696	7.5%
19 - Other non-residential	$1,488,169,856	6.4%
04 - Hotel	$1,469,213,312	6.3%
12 - Office Building	$1,350,193,536	5.8%
11 - Institution	$712,359,872	3.1%
07 - Industrial	$604,314,240	2.6%
Total permit value - 22 occupancy groups	**$23,312,470,949**	**100.0%**

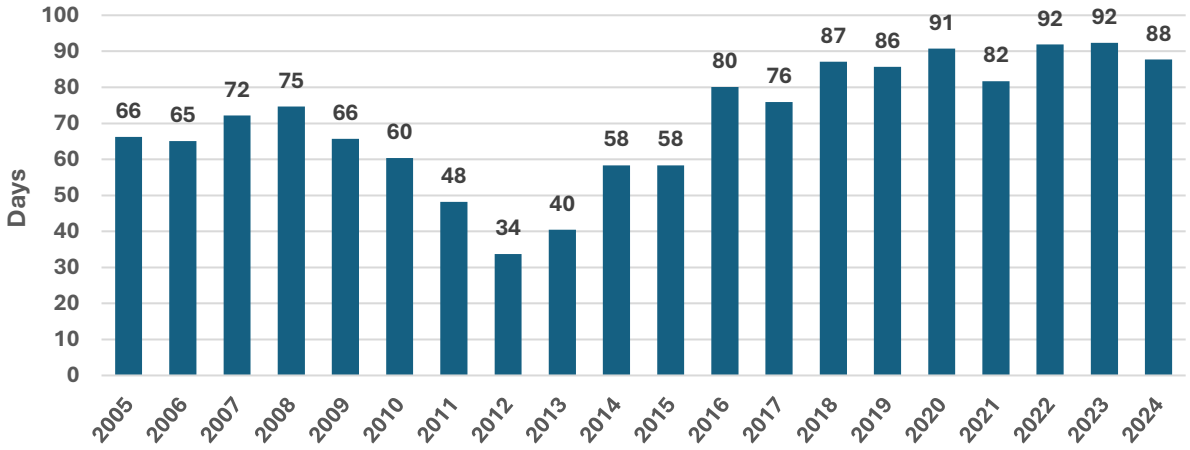
Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Figure 7 shows the average number of days to issue permits for permits closed between 2005 and 2024. The average number of days grew from 66 days in 2005 to 88 days in 2024, or by 33 percent. The average number of days to issue permits was the lowest in 2012, at 34 days, which is consistent with the relatively high percentage of solar permits processed that year. Solar permits are generally issued more quickly than non-solar permits, with most solar permits issued within one day of application.[6]

[6] Of the solar permits issued and closed between 2005 and 2024, 70 percent were issued within one day.

Figure 7. Average days to issue permits by year of issue

Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024

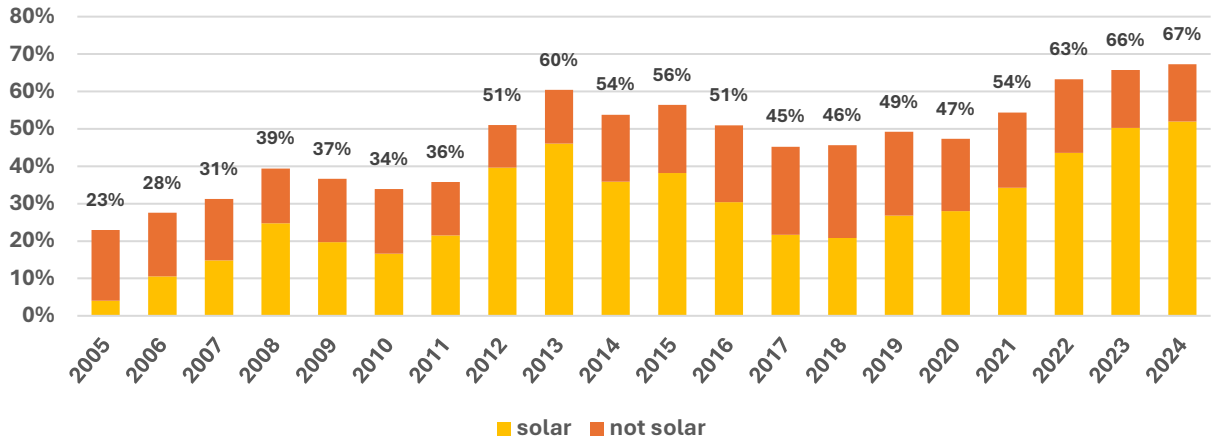


Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Figure 8 shows that the share of closed permits issued within one day of application has grown over time, from 23 percent in 2005 to 67 percent in 2024. A significant share of the permits issued within one day are solar (including solar water heaters and/or solar photovoltaic systems). It should be noted that the total number of closed permits is smaller, especially in 2024, making the share of closed permits issued within one day higher. Permits issued that remain open (e.g., that are still under construction and subject to inspections) are not captured in this data set.

Figure 8. Percentage of permits issued within one day, by year of issue

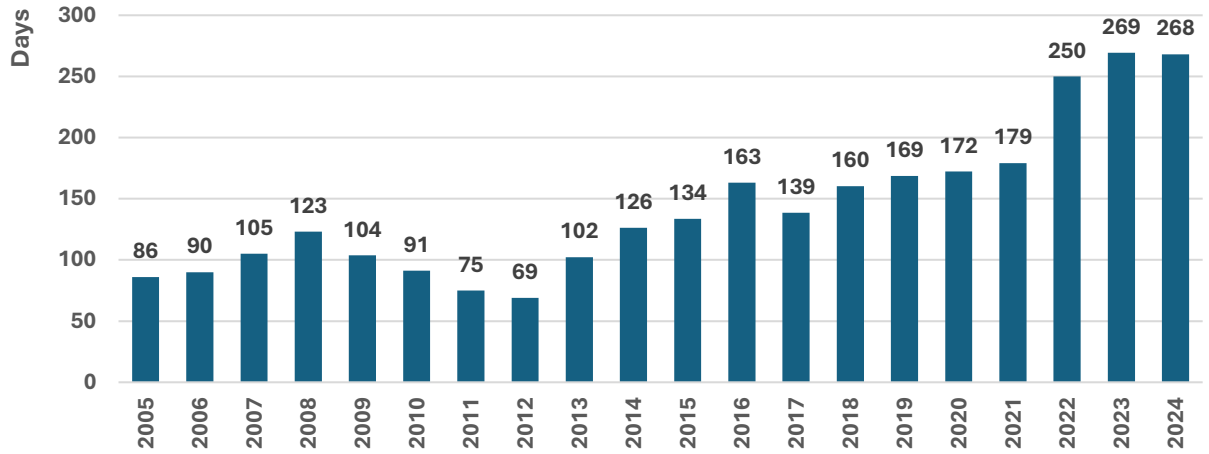
Permits issued and closed, 2005-2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Despite the increase in the number of permits issued within one day of application, permits which took longer to be issued (two or more days) saw a much sharper expansion in time between application and issue. Figure 9 shows that, between 2005 and 2024, the average days to issue grew by 217 percent for these permits.

Figure 9. Average days to issue permits for permits requiring 2 or more days to issue
Permits issued and closed, 2005- 2024



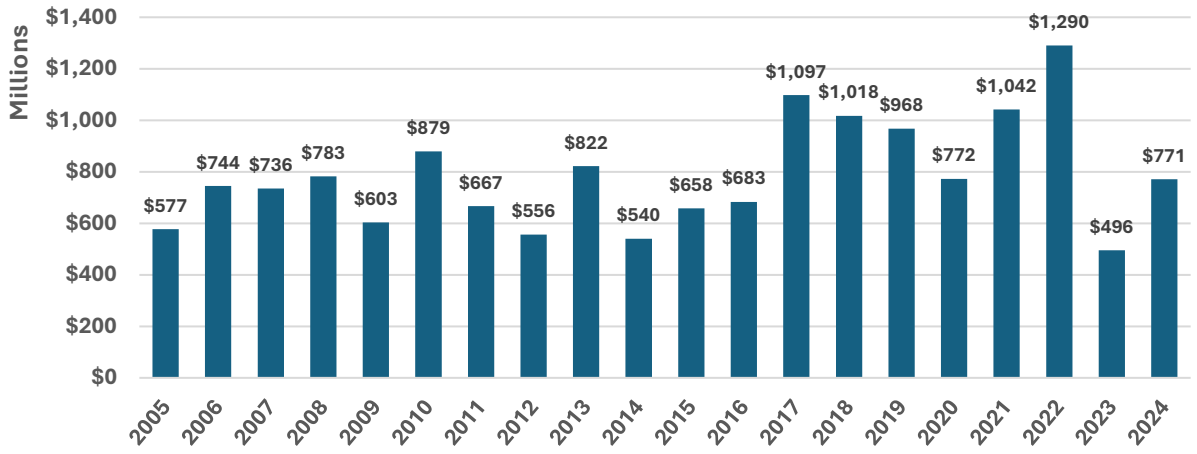
Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

4. New Structure Permits

To understand how permit values for new construction have evolved over time, we next examined permits issued and closed between 2005 and 2024 for new structures with an accepted permit value of at least $100,000. Of the 50,102 permits with a value of $100,000 or more, 23,117 (46.1%) were for new structures.

The impact of residential permits is again clear: 85.1 percent of these applications were for single-family projects, with an additional 7.6 percent for two-family units or apartments. In value terms, the three residential categories together accounted for 66.4 percent of total permit value for new structures with accepted values of $100,000 or more. Apartment buildings alone accounted for nearly a quarter of total permit value. The average permit value for an apartment permit was over twelve times the value for a single-family project during the period. As Figure 10 details, annual completion value varied sharply during the period, largely due to the timing of project completions.

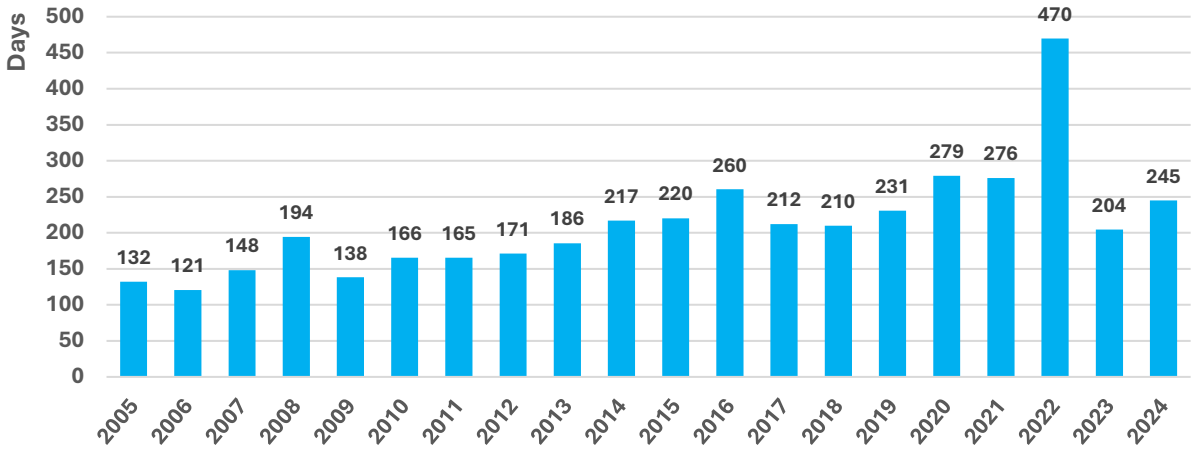
Figure 10. Total value of permits valued at $100,000 or more, by year of completion
New structure permits issued and closed, 2005- 2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Figure 11 shows that the average time to issue new structure permits valued at $100,000 or more has generally increased over the last two decades. Average days to issue spiked to 470 in 2022, however, this appears to be driven by the issuance of 95 permits for residential units submitted for the Mauna ʻOlu project in 2017. If these permits are removed from the sample, the average days to issue for 2022 falls to 252.

Figure 11. Average days to issue new structure permits valued at $100,000 or more
New structure permits issued and closed, 2005-2024

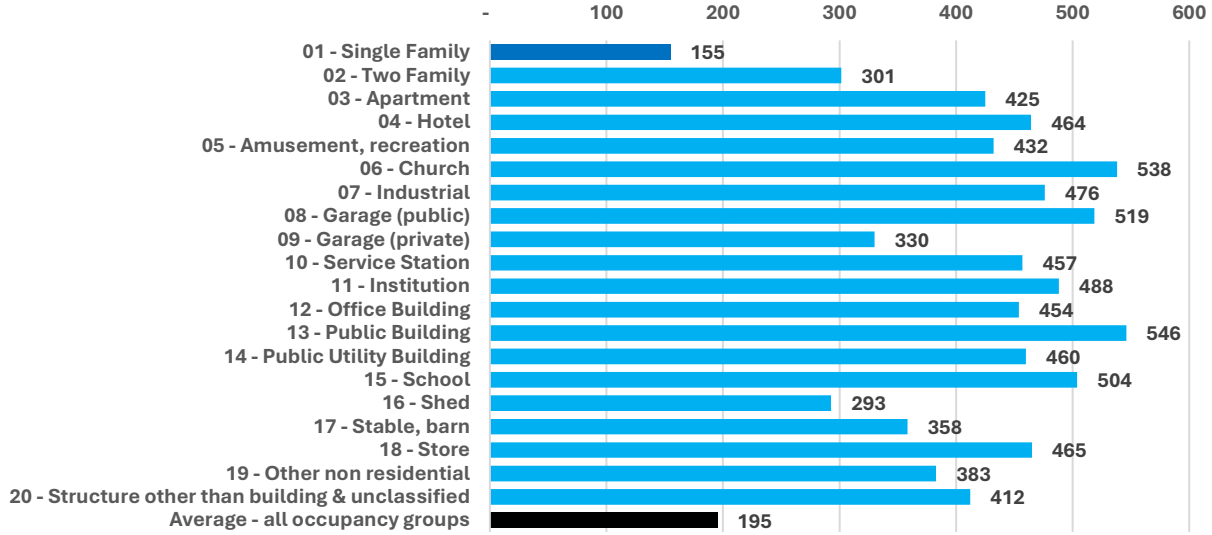


Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ. The average days to issue for 2022 reflects the issuance of 95 permits for a residential community that had been submitted in 2017.

Figure 12 illustrates the average number of days to issue permits of $100,000 or more for new structures by occupancy group. The average number of days for permit issuance across all occupancy groups was 195, with single family homes having the lowest average at 155 days.

Housing-related permits accounted for 92.5 percent of the total number of new structure permits valued at $100,000 or more, with the single-family category alone accounting for 84.3 percent of the total. Most other occupancy categories saw far smaller numbers of permit issuances.[7]

Figure 12. Average days to issue permits valued at $100,000 or more, by occupancy type
New structure permits issued and closed, 2005 - 2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

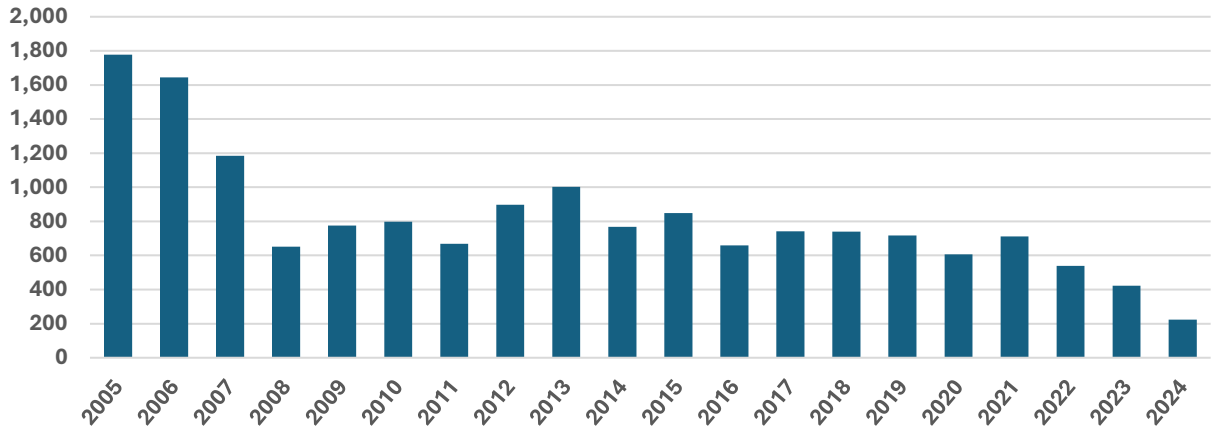
5. Single-Family Homes

While single-family home permits constitute the vast majority of new structure permits valued at $100,000 or more, Figure 13 shows that single-family home permit issuances declined in 2007 and 2008, during the time of the Great Recession. The number of permits issued for new single-family home structures increased slightly between 2009 and 2013 but has remained relatively low. While this analysis is primarily concerned with permitting trends, it is worth noting that the median price of a single-family home in Honolulu increased significantly over the study period from $590,800 in 2005 to $1.1 million in 2024.[8] The low number of single-family home permits issued in recent years also reflect that the data set is restricted to closed permits. Single-family home permits often take several months or more from the time of issue to permit closure.

[7] Occupancy groups with fewer than 200 new structure permits valued at $100,000 or more and issued and completed during this 20 year period include Hotel; Amusement, recreation; Church; Garage (public); Garage (private); Service Station; Institution; Office Building; Public Building; Public Utility Building; Shed; Stable, barn; Store; Other non residential; and Structure other than building & unclassified.
[8] Honolulu Board of Realtors data.

Figure 13. Honolulu single family home permits, by year of issue

New structure single family home permits valued at $100,000 or more, issued and closed 2005 - 2024

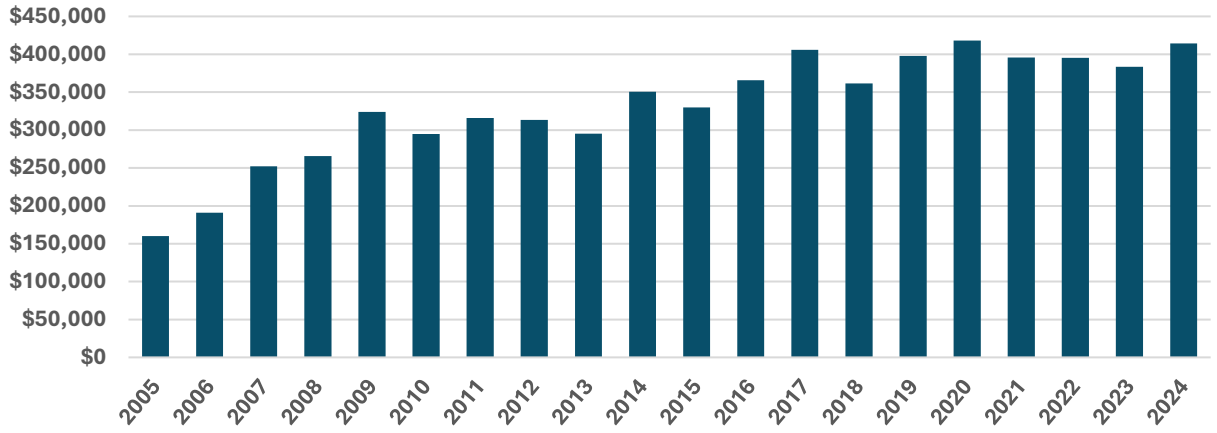


Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

New single-family homes generally require only a single permit. Because of this, using permit data to analyze trends in this market is relatively straightforward. Two simple calculations are illustrative. The first involves the average per unit value of permits by year, which can be calculated by dividing total accepted permit value by the number of units permitted. Figure 14 indicates that the average permit value per new single family home has increased over time. Note that the value does not include the cost of land.

Figure 14. Average permit value per single-family home, by year of completion

New structure single-family home permits valued at $100,000 or more, issued and closed 2005 - 2024

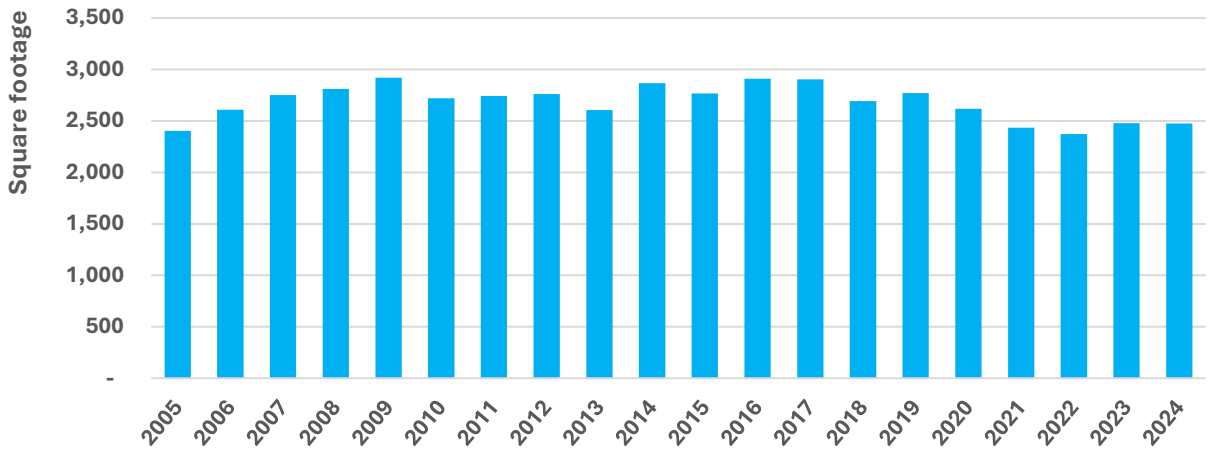


Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

The second uses permit value and reported new floor area to estimate project cost on a per square foot (sf) basis. Permits include data on new floor area created per project, which may not be restricted to living space and may include square footage for driveways, garages, etc. As shown in

Figure 15, the average square footage for new structure single-family homes has varied over time between 2,400 and 3,000 sf, reaching a peak in 2009 at 2,919 sf. Average square footage has generally declined since 2016.

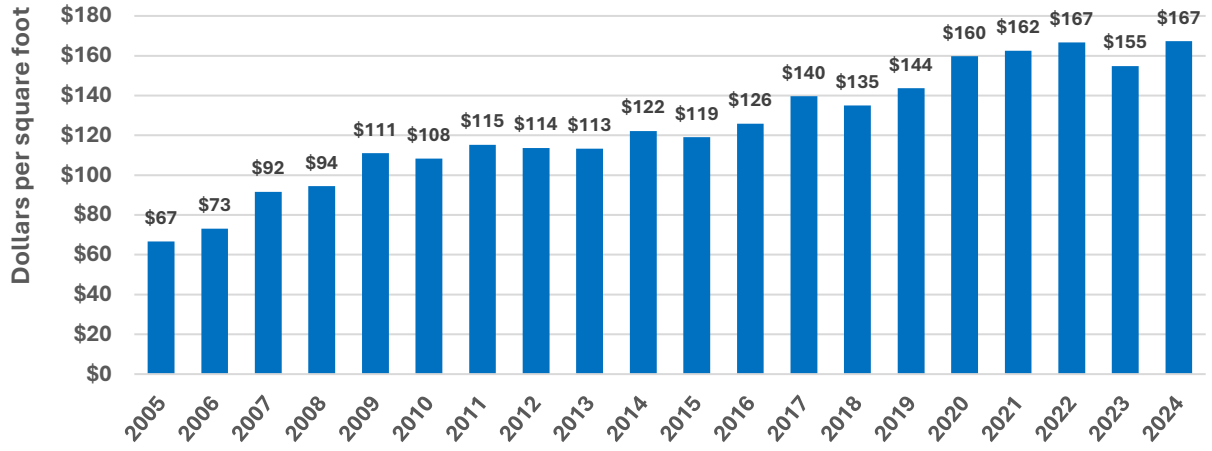
Figure 15. Average new floor area for single-family homes, by year of completion
New structure SFH permits valued at $100,000 or more, issued and closed 2005 - 2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

Figure 16 reflects the permit value per square foot for new single-family homes for permits issued and closed between 2005 and 2024. The resulting numbers suggest costs per square foot have risen over time. It should be noted, however, that this data reflects all new structure single-family homes, including homes with and without solar water heaters and/or solar photovoltaic systems as well as homes that may have features such as pools, carports, or garages.

Figure 16. Permit value per square foot of new floor area, by year of completion
New structure SFH permits valued at $100,000 or more, issued and closed 2005 - 2024



Source: Department of Planning and Permitting, City and County of Honolulu. Calculations by READ.

6. Conclusion

Historical permit records offer a vital view of construction activity, and more specifically what is and isn't being built in Honolulu. While the share of permits approved within a day of application has grown significantly, other projects face a more complicated and less predictable path toward permitting.

Residential permits account for the largest share of permitting activity. Their share of new project work is particularly notable. Of the $39.1 billion in total permits issued and closed during the 2005 - 2024 period, 47 percent were for residential (single-family, double-family, and apartment) units. Among all permits issued and closed, 40 percent of permit value was for new projects. For the $18.2 billion of residential permits, 58 percent of the value was for new projects.

Permit processing times have increased during the two decades this study covers, including the average days to issue for new structures with permits valued at $100,000 or more, and new single-family homes. Delays serve to drive up both costs and uncertainty.

Based on the DPP data, the cost per square foot for new structure single-family homes, as represented by the permit value per square foot of new floor area, has moved higher over time. The value increased from $67 in 2005 to $167 in 2024. The average square footage per unit during the same period has fluctuated over time between 2,400 and 3,000 sf, generally declining since 2016. It is important to note that square footage estimates may not be restricted to living area square footage as a single-family home project may include items such as driveways or garages.