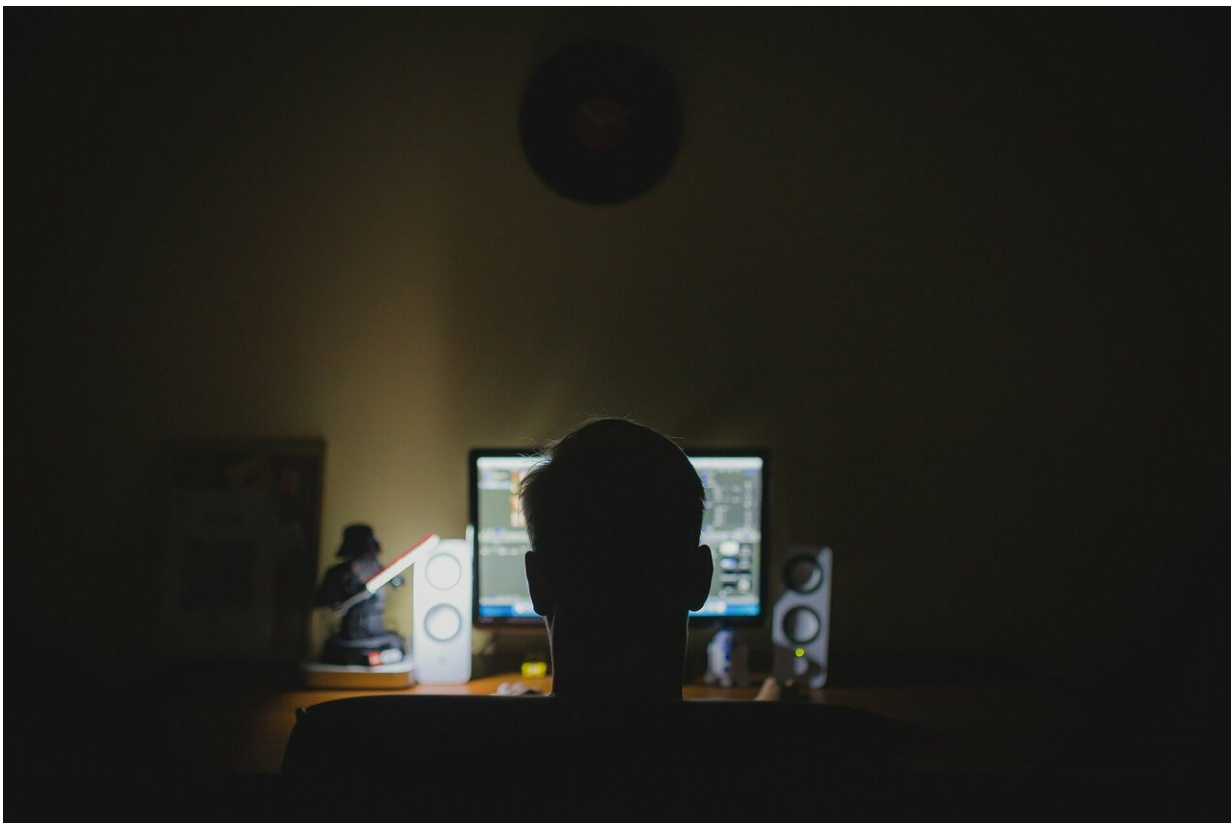


Ransomware delays Dallas permits: 'I've never had to wait weeks for a fence...'

July 10 2023, by Everton Bailey Jr.



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Blake Smith was confused when his contractor told him at the end of June that the city of Dallas still hadn't approved his application for a new fence.

It had been three weeks since Smith's contractor submitted an application with the city to replace a chain-link fence surrounding his South Oak Cliff home with a taller wooden one.

So Smith said he called Dallas' development services office, which issues the permits, to get answers. It could be another two to six weeks before the application is reviewed, Smith recalled being told.

"They blamed the whole thing on ransomware," said Smith, 33, who bought his home in October. He's getting the new fence in part to keep his German shepherd in the backyard. "I didn't know it was an issue until I called about the delay. It's been frustrating."

Two months after Dallas' May 3 ransomware attack, lingering impacts remain. City officials told The Dallas Morning News this week that 97% of its network has been restored two months after the cyberattack, up from 90% last month. But the city still won't publicly disclose all the services still impacted, leaving residents like Smith blindsided with problems when seeking city aid.

Smith said when he called the city on Wednesday he was told that it could be another week before his permit is reviewed. His application is one of approximately 300 city permits requests for fences, roof replacements, foundation repairs and demolitions whose reviews have been delayed because of impacts related to the ransomware attack, according to the city. The delays were caused by problems with the city's mapping software and staff being unable to access internal shared drives.

The tally was 870 as of June 30, according to a memo sent to the mayor and City Council members. development services staff have been working overtime and over the weekend to clear the backlog, [city officials](#) said.

"The May 2023 ransomware attack impacted and limited staff's ability to access internal shared drives and GIS Zoning maps which are fundamental tools in the plan review process," the memo said. "These limitations caused major delays in the issuance of permits."

The latest round of delays in the Dallas' development services department come amid recent city efforts to cut down on years of it taking several months to issue residential and commercial building permits. Department officials reported that it took staff a median of five days to review residential permits in May, compared with 58 days in May 2022 and 72 days in May 2021.

Catherine Cuellar, the city's communications, outreach and marketing director, said new applications for permits like new fences are now being processed in one to three business days, while staff are also working to clear the backlog of other applications that have been waiting for much longer. She said the backlog is estimated to be cleared by July 17.

"Restoration from May 3 is 97% complete prioritizing [public safety](#) and public-facing services, and the remaining restoration of service is internal," Cuellar said.

Cuellar responded to questions posed to City Manager T.C. Broadnax, Development Services Director Andrew Espinoza and other supervisors linked to the permitting office. Espinoza is out of the office until Monday.

Ismael Soriano of Hi-Def Exteriors, who is Smith's contractor, said it typically takes one to three days to get a permit for a fence in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He said he submitted the application for Smith's property to Dallas on June 7 and said he wasn't told at the time that there would be any issues in being able to timely get the fence permit.

As days turned into weeks, Soriano said he assumed the delay was because the city has struggled to timely issue residential and commercial building permits.

"I've never had to wait weeks for a fence permit before," said Soriano, who lives in Dallas and has some clients in the city but said he does most of his work in Frisco, Fort Worth, Plano and other parts of Collin County. "We've already got the materials, and we're just waiting on the city at this point."

Dallas officials have mainly cited an ongoing criminal investigation into the attack as reason to still not give specific details related to the cyber incident. Details on the scope of the attack, how it happened and the amount of recovery work the city has done still haven't been released by city officials.

The city said IT workers early on May 3 were alerted to the [ransomware attack](#), that several servers were compromised, and that other servers had to intentionally be taken offline to prevent the bad software from spreading. It led to several departments being hampered and some city services, such as residents being unable to pay their water bills online or not being able to report nonemergency complaints via the [city's](#) 311 app, being unavailable.

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