



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

September 29, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services

Subject: Restaurant Inspection Audit Status Report

INTRODUCTION

On July 10, 2024, the City Auditor submitted [an audit report](#)¹ on the status of Restaurant Inspections to the City Council, including recommendations to improve the overall delivery of services for the food safety inspection program. This is the fourth status report updating the City Council on the implementation of those recommendations.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The audit included nine recommendations. Since our last update on February 24, 2026, the implementation progress is as follows:

- **Fully Implemented:** Three recommendations are complete.
- **Partly Implemented:** Four recommendations are underway.
- **Started:** Two recommendations have commenced.

The full implementation of the four “partly implemented” recommendations depends on new technological solutions and adequate staffing. Progress has been significantly impacted by delays in the upgrade and conversion to the Accela database; the anticipated go-live date for the new database is January 2027. This database conversion has grown increasingly complex as the technical integration has progressed. There was also a month delay in our fee proposal which has delayed the integration of these fees into the new database.

Once active, the new database will allow operators to make direct payments. Although this feature is a convenient option for the public, configuring the system to align with existing City financial processes and current transactional workflows has proven challenging. Nonetheless, staff are working in close collaboration with the City’s Finance and IT Departments and are making progress with the database vendor.

Additionally, food facility inspection reports will become accessible to the public via the new Accela database. EHD has been unable to publish these inspection reports online

¹ https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Berkeley_Restaurant_Inspections_-_Chronically_Understaffed_Program_Did_Not_Meet_Targets.pdf

due to 1) City's shift away from attaching PDFs to web pages due to accessibility requirements, and 2) several reports are outdated or incomplete.

One of the recommendations is to establish a restaurant placarding system. Because a low placard score can directly and severely impact a business's revenue and reputation, the Environmental Health Division (EHD) is committed to ensuring absolute fairness, consistency, and accuracy before launching the system. To get this right, all food inspectors have completed formal "classroom" standardization training earlier in the year, which will be followed by field shadowing alongside a state-certified inspector. Additionally, EHD is establishing clear checks and balances, documented administrative appeal procedures, and an automated inspection scoring system within the new database to ensure objective and reliable evaluations. The new placarding program will not begin until the new database is on-line stably and staff are confident it is functioning properly. The anticipated launch date for the placarding program is early Spring 2027.

Please see Attachment 1 for a detailed table outlining the audit recommendations, corrective action plans, and implementation progress. The next status report to Council is scheduled for presentation in the Fall of 2027.

BACKGROUND

This report represents the fourth status update provided to the City Council since the City Auditor released the [Berkeley Restaurant Inspections audit](#) report on July 10, 2024. The audit highlighted how historical staffing shortages, pandemic emergency reassignments, and statewide hiring challenges created a backlog in routine food safety inspections. This update highlights key operational milestones achieved through the audit's recommendation framework:

- **High-Risk Backlog Cleared:** Addressing core audit findings regarding inspection delays, the EHD implemented revised policies to adapt to periods of understaffing while maintaining a baseline of at least one inspection per year. EHD has now successfully inspected all high- and very-high-risk food facilities that were overdue from 2023.
- **Enhanced Complaint Response:** EHD updated its internal intake workflows to ensure all public and customer complaints regarding alleged foodborne illnesses are formally cataloged within 24 hours or one business day for rapid inspector prioritization.
- **Technology Modernization & Public Transparency:** While full execution of remaining audit items depends on the rollout of the new inspections database, now scheduled for launch in January 2027, the upgraded system is being built with a public-facing portal. While inspection data is not currently available through the City's former Open Data portal, the Accela database implementation is intended to restore online public access to full inspection histories for all permitted food facilities in Berkeley through a new public facing portal.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects associated with the subject of this report.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Council could approve funding for two additional FTE Environmental Health inspector staff. Adequate program staffing is necessary to ensure the full implementation of the Auditor's recommendation.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Implementation of the remaining audit recommendations may have fiscal impacts associated with staffing, database implementation, and a future placarding program. Council previously directed staff to return during the FY 2027 Annual Appropriations Ordinance #1 process regarding the request for two additional Environmental Health FTEs. Any additional appropriation or staffing authorization will be presented to Council as part of that process.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1: Food Inspections Recommendations Status Update Table – August 2026

Audit Title: Berkeley Restaurant Inspections: Chronically Understaffed Program Did Not Meet Targets

Issue Date: July 10, 2024

Table: Audit Recommendation Statuses

Finding	Recommendation	Department	Previous Status Update	Current Status Update
The Division was significantly behind on inspections in 2023, increasing health risk.	1.1 Develop a plan to improve coverage of routine inspections throughout the City, which may require the Division to prioritize health and safety duties over other responsibilities. As part of this process: (a) Evaluate inspection targets to determine if current inspection frequencies are achievable, or establish different temporary targets to adapt to periods of understaffing. (b) Establish a baseline of inspection coverage for all permitted food facilities in the City and prioritize inspection of facilities with high risk and very high-risk designations that were not inspected in 2023.	HHCS	Implemented	Implemented. The Division developed new policies that include revised inspection targets for periods of short staffing and a baseline of at least one inspection per year. According to the Division, all high and very high-risk facilities that were not inspected in 2023 have now been inspected.
The Division was significantly behind on inspections in 2023, increasing health risk.	1.2 Develop a plan to ensure timely response to complaints involving alleged foodborne illness, which may require the Division to prioritize health and safety duties over other responsibilities.	HHCS	Implemented	Implemented. The Division has strengthened its internal policy for addressing complaints in a timely fashion. Policy improvements include documented responsibilities for staff to ensure complaints are received by admin staff and/or other designated staff and prioritized by inspectors within 24 hours or one business day.

Finding	Recommendation	Department	Previous Status Update	Current Status Update
The Division did not track spending and left critical positions vacant.	2.1 Work with the Budget Office to track how the food inspection program revenues are used.	HHCS	Partly Implemented	Implemented. The Division is able to track and produce reports comparing revenues and expenditures related to food facility inspections for several fiscal years.
The Division did not track spending and left critical positions vacant.	2.2 Take the following steps to fill positions and assess program staffing: (a) Open recruitment for the supervisor position. (b) If the recruitments for the supervisor and food inspector positions do not yield qualified candidates, work with the Human Resources Department (HR) to develop targeted recruitments for the inspector and supervisor roles. This may include conducting an analysis of compensation or other factors that affect recruitment. (c) Develop a trainee program to build a pipeline into the Division's inspector positions. (d) Work with HR as needed to identify staffing resources needed to meet inspection targets.	HHCS	Partly Implemented	Partly Implemented. In June 2026, City Council approved a new fee schedule for food facility permits that is expected to increase revenue. According to the Division, Council agreed to revisit their request for 2 additional FTEs to help meet inspection targets during the FY 2027 Annual Appropriations Ordinance #1 process. In a future update, the Division will need to show that it pursued Council approval for these 2 additional FTEs. We will also follow up on the Division's plans to develop a training program once staffing stabilizes.

Finding	Recommendation	Department	Previous Status Update	Current Status Update
The Division did not track spending and left critical positions vacant.	2.3 Make the following updates to the inspection data: (a) Add a risk designation to all food facilities in the Envision database. (b) Correct the date of last inspection in the Envision software that inspectors use during inspections, or develop a workaround to ensure inspectors have an accurate list of facilities prioritized by last inspection date. (c) Develop a process to regularly verify that the Envision database includes all food facilities that should be permitted and inspected.	HHCS	Partly Implemented	Partly implemented. The Division postponed the release date of the new inspections database from summer 2026 to fall 2026 to complete the preparation needed for it to go live. To mark this recommendation as implemented, the Division would need to confirm the new database can produce an accurate list of facilities prioritized by the last inspection date.
The Division did not track spending and left critical positions vacant.	2.4 Work with the Department of Information Technology (IT) to develop list of database functionalities and/or data points needed to help meet the Division's targets and produce reports. If the current database cannot provide this functionality, document the limitations of the current database and include these requirements in the future request for proposals for a new database.	HHCS	Partly Implemented	Partly implemented. The Division postponed the release date of the new inspections database from summer 2026 to fall 2026 to complete the preparation needed for it to go live. We will reassess the status of this recommendation once the new database is in place.

Finding	Recommendation	Department	Previous Status Update	Current Status Update
The Division did not track spending and left critical positions vacant.	2.5 Identify performance metrics and report them to the public at least annually.	HHCS	Partly Implemented	Partly implemented. The Division has finalized the performance metrics for the Food Safety and Inspection program. However, the Division will wait until the new database goes live to track and report these measures. We will reassess the status of this recommendation once the new database is in place.
Public information about food safety was limited.	3.1 Work with Department of Information Technology (IT) to update the online system for sharing information on food inspections. As part of this process: (a) Develop internal guidance informed by state code that details what information the Division will share with the public online and defines responsibility for managing the data. (b) Make inspection history available online for all permitted food facilities in Berkeley. This could include sharing a copy of the most recent inspection report.	HHCS	Not Started	Started. Since our last follow up, the Division has not returned to publishing food inspections information online after it removed this information from the City's Open Data Portal. According to the Division, they have started to work with IT and Finance to prepare to launch the new inspections database with a public facing portal. The estimated launch date for the new inspections database has been delayed from summer 2026 to fall 2026.

Finding	Recommendation	Department	Previous Status Update	Current Status Update
Public information about food safety was limited.	3.2 Develop a plan to implement placarding in Berkeley once staffing levels are stable. As part of this process: (a) Assess resources needed to implement placarding. (b) Consider adding elements such as community engagement for designing and implementing evidence-based, equitable placarding.	HHCS	Started	Started. Since our last follow up, all of the Division's food inspectors completed a training on food inspection standardization, which is the first step in the inspection standardization process. The next training step will be shadowing with certified inspectors. Additionally, according to the Division, the new database will be set up to work with a placarding program and will include a scoring system for inspections. To mark this recommendation as implemented, the Division would need to develop a documented plan or procedures for a future placarding process.