



CHALMERS
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Permitting as a Bottleneck in Swedish Housing Projects

A Study of Delay Drivers and Mitigation Measures

Master's thesis in Design and Construction Project Management

KAIHAN AZAR, BURIM KRASNIQI

MASTER'S THESIS ACEX30

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Göteborg, Sweden 2026

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ABSTRACT

Housing delivery remains a major challenge in Swedish cities and growth regions, where demand for new housing is high. One reason is that many housing projects face long lead times before construction can begin. These delays are often connected to planning and permitting, where projects must pass through formal stages and balance legal, technical, political, and public interests.

The aim of this study was to examine major permitting related issues in Swedish housing projects and to understand how these issues are addressed in practice. The study also examined whether these issues are similar across housing projects or vary depending on project type. The research was based on a qualitative approach, combining a literature review with eight semi-structured interviews with actors involved in housing development, municipal planning, research, and housing policy.

The findings show that permitting-related delays are not caused by one actor or one step. Instead, they are created through the combined effect of legal requirements, municipal responsibilities, actor coordination, technical investigations, political decisions, public participation, appeals, limited resources, and project-specific conditions. Detailed development planning appears as a central bottleneck, especially when risks are identified late or when requirements and responsibilities are unclear.

The study shows that permitting issues are mainly addressed through earlier preparation, risk identification, stronger coordination, parallel work, public dialogue, digital support, clearer prioritization, and dedicated capacity. These measures do not remove the need for legal review, public participation, or formal approval. Rather, they help actors work earlier and more systematically within the existing system.

The findings also show that permitting issues vary between project types. Infill projects are often exposed to local objections and political sensitivity, while large urban projects often face coordination challenges. Projects requiring a new or amended detailed development plan are generally more uncertain than projects that fit within existing planning conditions. The main conclusion is that permitting delays should be understood as a system issue rather than a single-actor problem. Reducing unnecessary delays therefore requires better coordination and earlier risk handling, while still protecting legal certainty, democracy, and public interests.

Keywords: Swedish housing projects, permitting, planning process, lead times, detailed development plan, coordination and project delays.

Tillståndsprövning som en flaskhals i svenskt bostadsprojekt
En studie av orsaker till förseningar och åtgärder för att minska dem
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Sammanfattning

Bostadsförsörjningen är fortsatt en stor utmaning i svenska städer och tillväxtregioner, där efterfrågan på nya bostäder är hög. En bidragande orsak är att många bostadsprojekt har långa ledtider innan byggandet kan påbörjas. Dessa ledtider är ofta kopplade till planering och tillståndsprövning, där projekt måste passera flera formella steg och hantera juridiska, tekniska, politiska och allmänna intressen.

Syftet med denna studie var att undersöka centrala tillståndsrelaterade problem i svenska bostadsprojekt och hur dessa problem hanteras i praktiken. Studien undersökte även om problemen är likartade mellan olika bostadsprojekt eller om de varierar beroende på projekttyp. Arbetet bygger på en kvalitativ ansats där en litteraturstudie kombinerades med åtta semistrukturerade intervjuer med aktörer inom bostadsutvecklingen, kommunal planering, forskning och bostadspolitik.

Resultaten visar att tillståndsrelaterade förseningar inte kan förklaras av en enskild aktör eller ett enskilt steg. De uppstår genom samspel mellan lagkrav, kommunalt ansvar, aktörssamordning, tekniska utredningar, politiska beslut, medborgardeltagande, överklaganden, resurser och projektspecifika förutsättningar. Detaljplaneringen framstår som en särskilt viktig flaskhals, framför allt när risker identifieras sent eller när krav och ansvar är otydliga.

Studien visar att tillståndsproblemen främst hanteras genom tidigare förberedelser, tidig riskidentifiering, starkare samordning, parallellt arbete, dialog med berörda aktörer, digitalt stöd, tydligare prioriteringar och särskild kapacitet. Dessa åtgärder tar inte bort behovet av rättslig prövning, medborgardeltagande eller formella godkännanden. De bidrar snarare till att aktörer kan arbeta tidigare och mer systematiskt inom det befintliga systemet.

Resultaten visar också att problem varierar mellan projekttyper. Förtätningsprojekt är ofta mer utsatta för lokala invändningar och politisk känslighet, medan större stadsutvecklingsprojekt möter omfattande samordningsutmaningar. Projekt som kräver en ny eller ändrad detaljplan är vanligtvis mer osäker än projekt inom befintliga planförutsättningar. Huvudslutsatsen är att tillståndsförseningar bör förstås som en systemfråga. Att minska onödiga förseningar kräver därför bättre samordning och tidigare riskhantering, samtidigt som rättssäkerhet, demokratiskt inflytande och allmänna intressen skyddas.

Nyckelord: Svenskt bostadsprojekt, tillståndsprövning, planeringsprocess, ledtider, detaljplan, samordning och projektförseningar.

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Preface

This master's thesis was written during the spring of 2026 as the final part of our master's program at Chalmers University of Technology. The thesis has been both a challenging and rewarding process, and it has given us a deeper understanding of the complexity of housing development, planning, and permitting processes in Sweden.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this thesis. First, we would like to thank our supervisor, Dimosthenis Kifokeris, for his constant support, guidance, and valuable feedback throughout the entire process. His advice has helped us develop the direction, structure, and quality of the study.

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Furthermore, we would like to thank all interview respondents for taking the time to participate in this study and for sharing their experiences, reflections, and honest answers. Their contributions have been essential for understanding how permitting-related delays are experienced and addressed in practice. We hope that we have represented their perspectives in a fair and respectful way.

We would also like to thank the faculty at Chalmers, our classmates, and everyone who has provided feedback, support, and encouragement during the process.

A special thank you also goes to our families for their patience, encouragement, and support throughout our studies and during the writing of this thesis. Their support has meant a great deal to us and has helped us stay motivated during this process.

Finally, this thesis has helped us understand that delays in housing projects are more complex than they may first appear. They are not only caused by formal rules or by one slow actor. Instead, they are shaped by how many actors, responsibilities, decisions, and institutional conditions interact over time.

Kaihan Azar and Burim Krasniqi
Gothenburg, 2026

1 Introduction

Housing provision remains a major societal issue in Sweden. Although the national housing situation is uneven, housing shortages continue to be particularly visible in metropolitan and growth regions, where demand is strongest and where housing market pressures are closely connected to population growth and labor market concentration (Boverket, 2025a). In these areas, the housing question is not only about access to dwellings, but also about whether housing delivery is able to respond to demand within a reasonable time frame.

Despite continued housing need, residential construction has not reached the levels required to meet long-term demand. Boverket (2025b) estimates that more than 523,000 new dwellings are needed in Sweden during the period 2024–2033, corresponding to approximately 52,300 dwellings per year. At the same time, Statistics Sweden (2026) reports that 30,250 dwellings were started in 2025. This gap suggests that the challenge is not only to increase construction output, but also to understand why housing production responds slowly to persistent demand. Figure 1 shows municipalities' assessment of the housing situation in year 2025. As shown, housing shortages are particularly concentrated in metropolitan regions and growth areas, while only a limited number of municipalities report a surplus.

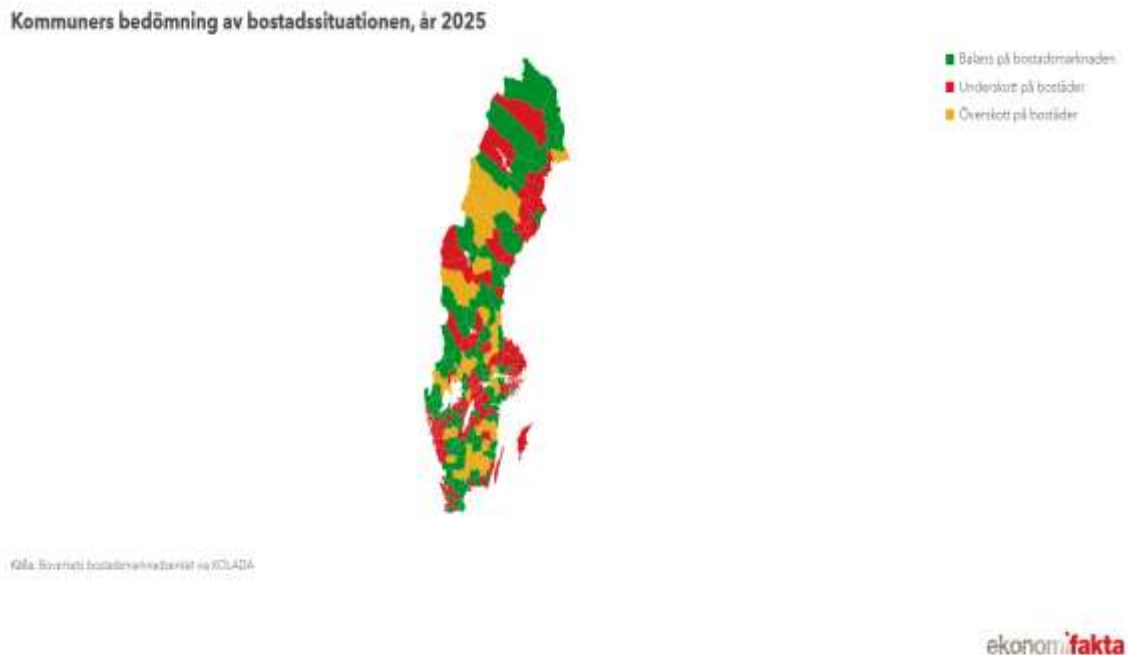


Figure 1 Municipalities' assessment of the housing situation in the year 2025

One important explanation is that the issue is not only how many housing projects are initiated, but also how long it takes for them to move from planning to construction. According to Nationellt Ledtidsindex 2025, the weighted average lead time for detailed planning and building permit processes for multi-family housing was 4.8 years during the period 2017–2024. The same report states that lead times in an efficient process

rarely need to exceed 2.5 years (Initiativet Bygg i Tid et al., 2025). Long planning and permitting lead times may therefore constitute a major bottleneck in Swedish housing delivery, particularly in the urban regions where shortages are most severe.

This is especially important because the early stages of project development influence more than project timing alone. When planning and permitting processes are prolonged, housing delivery is delayed, uncertainty increases, and the ability of the housing sector to respond to demand is weakened. In this sense, the Swedish housing challenge cannot be understood solely in terms of the number of dwellings built. It must also be understood in relation to how efficiently projects are able to move through the planning and permitting system.

Previous research has shown that housing development is shaped not only by market conditions and internal project management, but also by legal requirements, public procedures, actor coordination, and institutional structures. Permitting-related issues may therefore be rooted in both project-specific and system-level conditions. At the same time, such issues do not necessarily appear in the same way across all housing projects. Different project types may face different permitting conditions depending on factors such as urban context, complexity, scale, and approval pathway.

Against this background, this study examines permitting-related issues in Swedish housing projects, with particular focus on how these issues are addressed and whether they vary depending on project type. By focusing on the early stages of project development, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of why housing delivery remains slow despite continued demand and why permitting-related delays continue to be a challenge in Swedish housing production.

The next section provides a more detailed background to the Swedish housing context, after which the purpose, research questions, and limitations of the study are presented.

1.1 Background

This section provides the background needed to understand the context of the study. It first presents the Swedish housing situation and explains why housing provision remains an important societal issue, particularly in metropolitan and growth regions. The section then describes how housing projects move through the Swedish development process before construction can begin. Particular attention is given to the planning and permitting system, the role of key actors, and the affect of appeals and legal review on project progression. Finally, the section explains the sustainability relevance of the topic and why reducing unnecessary lead times must be balanced against legal certainty, public participation, and long-term urban quality.

1.1.1 The Swedish Housing Context

The housing situation in Sweden is marked by a long-term imbalance between supply, demand, affordability, and location. Sweden has a large housing stock in absolute terms, but this does not mean that housing is equally accessible across the country. At the end of 2024, Sweden had 5,260,876 dwellings. Of these, 41 percent were located in one- and two-dwelling buildings, 52 percent in multi-dwelling buildings, 5 percent in

special housing, and 2 percent in other types of buildings. In multi-dwelling buildings, rental housing was the most common tenure form. This shows that the Swedish housing issue is not only about the number of dwellings. It is also about where housing is located and whether it matches the needs of different household groups (SCB, 2025a).

Housing provision remains a current societal issue because access to housing affects everyday life, labor market participation, household formation, and regional development. Boverket's 2025 Housing Market Survey shows that 127 of Sweden's 290 municipalities reported a housing shortage in the municipality as a whole. The same material shows that the number of municipalities reporting shortages has decreased since 2017, but this does not mean that the housing problem has disappeared. It means that the national picture has become more uneven, with stronger pressure remaining in the areas where demand is highest (Boverket, 2025c).

The pressure is strongest in metropolitan and growth regions. In the 2025 survey, 24 of 26 municipalities in Greater Stockholm reported a housing shortage in the municipality as a whole. In Greater Gothenburg, all 13 municipalities reported a shortage. In Greater Malmö, 9 of 12 municipalities reported a shortage. These figures show that housing shortages remain most visible in the parts of Sweden where jobs, education, infrastructure, and population growth are concentrated. This is important because housing shortages in these regions affect not only local residents, but also recruitment, commuting, labor mobility, and the ability of growing regions to function well over time (Boverket, 2025d).

Housing costs make this situation more difficult. Statistics Sweden reports that the average monthly rent for a three-room apartment in 2025 was SEK 9,118 nationwide. In the same year, the average monthly rent was SEK 10,139 in Greater Stockholm, SEK 8,907 in Greater Gothenburg, and SEK 10,432 in Greater Malmö. SCB also reports that average rents increased by 5.0 percent in 2024 and by 4.6 percent in 2025. These were the strongest rent increases in decades. This means that the Swedish housing issue is not only about shortage, but also about affordability and access, especially for young adults, students, and households with weaker financial resources (SCB, 2025b).

The housing issue also has a clear social dimension. Socialstyrelsen's national mapping of homelessness, published in 2024 and based on conditions in 2023, found that more than 27,000 people were in some form of homelessness. More than 4,400 people were in acute homelessness during the measurement week, and more than 1,800 children were living with their parents in acute or temporary accommodation. Socialstyrelsen also states that these figures should be understood as an absolute minimum. This shows that housing provision in Sweden is not only a market issue, but also a question of welfare, social inclusion, and unequal living conditions. When secure housing is difficult to access, the effects are strongest for households that already have a weak position in the housing market (Socialstyrelsen, 2024).

The financial situation of households makes housing provision even more important. SCB reported that the household debt ratio stood at 154 percent in the second quarter of 2025. This means that household debt corresponded to 1.54 times annual disposable income. A housing market in which many households are highly exposed to debt becomes more sensitive to changes in interest rates and living costs. This increases the

importance of a housing system that is more stable and easier to access over time (SCB, 2025c).

Efficient housing delivery is important because slow and uncertain housing production can strengthen both economic and social problems. When housing is not delivered in the right places and within a reasonable time, shortages remain in the parts of the country where demand is highest. This affects labor market matching, regional development, and households' ability to move to places where jobs and education are available. According to SCB, 30,250 dwellings were started in 2025, which was 11 percent more than in 2024. This suggests some improvement, but it also shows that recovery is gradual rather than immediate (SCB, 2026).

Boverket's March 2026 building forecast estimated that total housing starts may rise to 35,500 in 2026 and 37,700 in 2027. This points to continued recovery, but it also shows that Sweden is still dealing with a housing supply system that responds slowly to demand. In practice, this means that shortages can remain in place for several years even when construction starts begin to increase again (Boverket, 2026).

The planning system also affects how quickly housing can be delivered. Boverket explains that municipal decisions to adopt, amend, or repeal a detailed development plan may be appealed to the Land and Environment Court. The Swedish planning system is designed to protect legal certainty and public participation, but it can also contribute to longer lead times and greater uncertainty in housing projects. In areas where demand is already high, this can make it harder to respond quickly to housing needs (Boverket, 2025h).

The Swedish housing context is marked by a large housing stock, continued shortages in many municipalities, especially strong pressure in metropolitan regions, rising housing costs, household financial vulnerability, and clear social consequences when stable housing is difficult to access. Housing provision remains a major societal issue in Sweden because it affects not only where people live, but also how labor markets function, how regions grow, and how social inequality develops over time (Boverket, 2025c).

1.1.2 Overview of the Swedish Housing Development Process

A housing project in Sweden usually moves through a sequence of stages from an initial idea to the point where construction may begin. Figure 2 shows this particular sequence of stages. Figure 2 describes this route as a process that starts in an idea phase, continues through planning and implementation, and ends in a completed and later managed building. The development path does not begin with construction or with a permit application. It begins earlier, with idea formation, land-related questions, and preliminary assessment of whether development is possible and worth pursuing (Byggföretagen, 2024).



Figure 2 The Project Process for Housing Project

In the earliest phase, the project is still open and exploratory. Byggföretagen includes steps such as idea, land acquisition, and pre-study before the formal planning work begins. A project may therefore already have spent considerable time in preparation before it enters the formal planning system. Questions concerning ownership, site suitability, market conditions, financing, and overall project viability may all need to be addressed before the project is mature enough to move forward (Byggföretagen, 2024).

One important early step is the plan notice, or *planbesked*. Boverket explains that a plan notice gives the applicant an early answer on whether the municipality intends to begin detailed planning work. The municipality must normally decide on a complete request within months unless another time has been agreed. A plan notice is therefore an early formal point in the development path, though it is not the same as approval of the project itself (Boverket, 2025c).

If the intended development is not already supported by existing planning conditions, the project may need a new or amended detailed development plan before it can

continue. Boverket states that detailed planning is used to determine how land and water areas should be used and that the municipality carries out this work through a legally regulated process. That process is intended to secure insight for affected parties, produce a sound basis for decision-making, and anchor the proposal. Housing development in Sweden is therefore closely tied to formal planning when the land-use conditions are not already settled (Boverket, 2025c).

The planning phase contains several formal steps. Boverket presents consultation, review, political adoption, and legal force as central parts of the detailed planning process. These steps are connected and largely sequential. A proposal may therefore need to be revised after consultation, reconsidered after review, or delayed while waiting for adoption or legal finality. The planning phase becomes one of the central pre-construction phases not only because it regulates land use, but also because several later steps depend on its outcome (Boverket, 2025c).

Byggföretagen's process overview also shows that detailed planning is only one part of a longer development route. In its model, the project moves from idea and pre-study into planning, then further into implementation-related steps such as property formation, project design, procurement, permit handling, construction, and later management. The route to construction start is therefore not limited to one administrative decision. It is built through a chain of connected stages (Byggföretagen, 2024).

Once the planning conditions have been clarified, the project moves into permit and technical preparation. Boverket explains that, within a detailed development plan, the building committee examines whether the proposed measure complies with the plan and with the legal requirements that must be tested at the building permit stage. Building permit review therefore concerns the specific proposed project rather than the broader question of whether the site may be used for housing in principle (Boverket, 2026c).

A granted building permit does not in itself mean that construction may begin. Boverket states that a measure requiring permit or notification may not begin until the building committee has issued a start notice. Boverket also states that the committee shall issue a start notice if the measure can be assumed to meet the requirements of the Planning and Building Act and associated regulations. The Swedish process therefore separates land-use clarification, permit approval, and actual construction start into different stages (Boverket, 2025d).

The relation between building permit and start notice is important because project progress remains conditional even after planning has been completed and a permit decision has been made. Boverket's guidance on enforceability states that a start notice applies immediately. The same guidance states that a decision to grant building permit also applies immediately, even if it has not gained legal force. This means that the legal and procedural structure surrounding construction start is more complex than a simple sequence in which one approval automatically leads to the next (Boverket, 2025d).

Lead times may therefore arise in several places before building starts. Time may build up while the project is being prepared, assessed, and positioned in relation to land and municipal priorities. Time may also build up in the planning phase, where consultation,

review, revisions, political handling, and legal force may all extend the process. Further time may be added in permit review and in the technical preparation needed before a start notice can be issued. The route from project idea to construction start is made up of many linked steps rather than one short administrative path.

1.1.3 The Planning and Permitting System in Sweden

The Swedish planning and permitting system is structured as a sequence of formal approval stages that must be passed before construction may begin. A housing project must first be assessed in relation to land use and planning conditions. It must then be examined in relation to the rules that apply to the specific building proposal. After that, the project must meet the technical conditions required before works may start. Development is therefore not based on one single approval, but on a chain of linked decisions that together determine whether housing may proceed from idea to construction (Plan- och bygglag, 2010:900).

A central feature of the system is the role of municipalities under the Planning and Building Act. Swedish planning rests on the municipal planning monopoly, which means that the municipality decides whether detailed planning should begin and determines how land and water are to be used through its planning instruments (Plan- och bygglag, 2010:900).

The municipality's role continues in the later stages as well. Through the detailed development plan, the municipality regulates land use and the broader conditions for future development in a specific area. Through the building committee, the municipality later examines building permit matters and issues start notices before construction may begin. The municipality therefore shapes both the legal framework for development and the later decisions that allow the specific proposal to move toward implementation (Boverket, 2025c).

The distinction between *detaljplan*, *bygglov*, and *startbesked* is central to how the system works. A detailed development plan regulates the legal and spatial framework for development in a specific area. It determines how land and water may be used and sets the main conditions for what kind of development can be accepted there. In many housing projects, a new or amended detailed development plan is required before the project can continue, especially when the intended development is not already supported by existing planning conditions (Boverket, 2025c).

The detailed development plan does not approve one exact building in the same way as a building permit does. Its role is broader. It establishes whether housing development is acceptable on the site, what general building rights apply, and what legal and spatial framework later project design must stay within. The planning stage therefore concerns land use and broader development conditions rather than the final approval of one specific building proposal (Boverket, 2025c).

Building permit review serves another purpose. While the detailed development plan sets the broader framework, the building permit concerns the specific proposed measure. Boverket explains that, within a detailed development plan, the building committee examines whether the proposal complies with the plan and with the legal requirements that must be tested at the permit stage. Boverket also states that no new

localization assessment is carried out at this stage because that question was handled when the detailed development plan was prepared (Boverket, 2026c).

The start notice is a further and separate stage. A measure requiring permit or notification may not begin until the building committee has issued a start notice. The start notice is linked to whether the project can be assumed to meet the applicable technical and regulatory requirements before works start. A granted building permit therefore does not in itself authorize construction to begin (Boverket, 2025d).

The structure of the system is therefore sequential in a very concrete way. A housing project may first need to pass through the detailed development plan process. It may then move to building permit review. After that, it must pass technical preparation before the building committee can issue a start notice and works may begin. Each stage has a different legal function, and each later stage depends on the outcome of earlier ones.

This sequential structure is one reason the process may become time-consuming. A project may need to pass through consultation, review, revisions, political adoption, and legal force before planning is complete. After that, the proposal may still need building permit review. Even a granted permit must be followed by a start notice before works may begin.

1.1.4 Key Actors in the Permitting Process

Several actors are involved in the permitting process for Swedish housing projects, and progress depends on how these actors work in relation to one another. The process includes municipalities, developers, consultants, control managers, and public authorities such as the County Administrative Board. Different actors enter at different stages, and one actor may also have more than one role depending on the part of the process that is being handled (Boverket, 2025e).

The municipality holds a particularly strong position because it influences both the route and the pace of the project. Through the planning system, the municipality decides whether detailed planning should begin and determines the legal and spatial conditions for development. Through the building committee, it also reviews permit matters and issues start notices before construction may begin. Municipal priorities and municipal capacity may therefore affect how quickly a project moves from one stage to another (Boverket, 2025c).

This is important already in the early stages. A project that is not prioritized may struggle to enter the planning process, while a project that is considered suitable and timely may move forward more quickly. Legal rules may be the same across municipalities, but differences in organization, workload, and internal coordination may still affect how the process works. Boverket's guidance on plan notice and detailed planning makes clear that the municipality is the actor that decides whether the formal planning route will begin (Boverket, 2025c).

The developer, or *byggherre*, is the main project driving actor. Boverket states that the developer is responsible for ensuring that applicable laws, regulations, and decisions

are followed in connection with building, demolition, and land works. This responsibility applies even where the measure does not require permit or notification. The developer's role therefore extends beyond submitting an application (Boverket, 2025e).

The quality of project preparation matters for how smoothly the process works. If important issues are addressed too late, if technical material is incomplete, or if submitted documentation needs repeated revision, the process may become longer because more clarification and more handling are required. Boverket's guidance on the control plan also shows that the developer is responsible for ensuring that planning for control exists for most permit and notification requiring measures (Boverket, 2025e).

Consultants are important because much of the material required in planning and permitting is specialized. Architects, engineers, planners, environmental specialists, geotechnical consultants, and legal advisers may all contribute to the basis on which authorities make decisions. Their role is usually not to make the formal approvals themselves, but to produce the drawings, reports, calculations, and investigations needed for the project to move forward. The timing and quality of that material may strongly affect whether the process moves smoothly or whether more revisions become necessary later (Boverket, 2025e).

The control manager, or *kontrollansvarig*, is another specialized role in the process. Boverket explains where a control manager is required, it is the developer who proposes who that person will be. They also states that different control managers may be appointed for different parts of a project and that one may have coordinating responsibility. This role becomes especially important in the stages connected to technical preparation before construction start (Boverket, 2025g).

Public authorities also influence the permitting process. The County Administrative Board has advisory, coordinating, and supervisory roles in the planning and building system (Boverket, 2025f). Länsstyrelsen Stockholm also states that municipalities can book meetings concerning complex detailed plans and larger projects (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2026).

Coordination between these actors is important already before construction begins. Early dialogue between municipalities and the County Administrative Board is used around complex plans and larger projects. The municipality depends on the developer and consultants to provide relevant and sufficiently complete material. The developer depends on municipal guidance, prioritization, and decisions. Public authorities may raise concerns or require clarifications that lead to revisions or further documentation. Delays may therefore arise not only from legal stages themselves, but also from the way material, comments, requirements, and decisions move between actors during the early project phases.

1.1.5 Appeals and Legal Review

Appeals and legal review form an important part of the Swedish planning and permitting system. A municipal decision may have been made, while the project still cannot move forward securely because that decision may be challenged and reviewed in another instance. The route from municipal decision to legally final outcome is

therefore not always immediate. This matters because the project may remain uncertain even after a formal decision has been issued (Sveriges Domstolar, 2026).

Both detailed development plans and building permits can be appealed, though their legal routes differ. A decision to adopt, amend, or repeal a detailed development plan may be appealed to the Land and Environment Court (Boverket, 2025h). Decisions on building permits and preliminary decisions are first appealed to the County Administrative Board. The legal route therefore depends on the type of decision that is being challenged (Boverket, 2026b).

The institutions involved in legal review are also different depending on the matter. In permit related matters, the County Administrative Board functions as the first appeal instance. A detailed development plan follows another route and is appealed to the Land and Environment Court. Sveriges Domstolar also explains that appeals are first sent to the authority that made the original decision, which then checks whether the appeal was submitted in time before forwarding it. Legal review is therefore also a formal continuation of the decision process (Sveriges Domstolar, 2026).

The right to appeal a detailed development plan is also connected to participation during the planning process. In order to appeal a decision on a detailed development plan, a person must normally have submitted written comments before the review period ended and must not have had those comments satisfied by the municipality. The appeal right is therefore linked to earlier participation in the process rather than arising independently afterward (Boverket, 2026c).

Legal review affects when a decision becomes usable in practice. For permits and preliminary decisions, the appeal period is either three weeks from the day the complainant received the decision or four weeks from public notice for those who are not individually served. A building permit may therefore have been granted while the project still remains within the period in which the decision may be challenged (Boverket, 2026b).

A similar issue applies to detailed development plans. Municipal adoption does not automatically mean that the plan has become a secure basis for the next stage. The decision may still be reviewed or appealed before it gains legal force. A project may therefore appear to have moved forward formally, while the legal basis for the next stage is still not final (Boverket, 2025h).

Later steps in the development process depend on earlier decisions becoming sufficiently settled. If a detailed development plan is appealed, later permit-related work may be delayed because the legal basis for the project remains uncertain. If a building permit is appealed, technical preparation and construction start may also be delayed because the project cannot move forward on the same terms while the decision is under challenge (Sveriges Domstolar, 2026).

Appeals may therefore extend project lead times in a direct way. The time added does not come only from the legal assessment itself. It also comes from the waiting period created while the project remains open, uncertain, and unable to proceed on the same terms as before. A decision that has not become final cannot always function as a stable basis for the next stage of development (Boverket, 2026b).

The significance of appeals becomes even greater in a system that is already sequential. The Swedish planning and permitting process moves through several linked stages before construction may begin. Legal review adds another layer to that structure because it may prolong one stage and thereby delay the stages that follow. Appeals form part of the institutional framework through which projects must pass.

1.1.6 Sustainability Relevance

Based on the housing shortage, the structure of the planning and permitting process, and the role of lead times in housing delivery, the topic of this study also has a clear sustainability relevance. Long lead time and permitting-related delays may affect how efficiently housing projects are developed and delivered. When projects are delayed or require repeated revisions, additional time, resources, and coordination efforts are often needed before construction can begin. Reducing unnecessary delays and rework in the planning and permitting process may therefore contribute to more resource-efficient project development and support a more sustainable use of time, administrative capacity, and project resources.

The study is also connected to social sustainability, since housing delivery affects access to housing in Swedish cities and growth regions. More efficient planning and permitting processes can support the timely delivery of housing, -which is important in a context where housing shortages may affect affordability, inclusion, and social well-being. In this sense, the topic is linked to broader sustainability goals, particularly sustainable cities and communities, as well as responsible use of resources in the built environment.

However, faster processes should not automatically be understood as more sustainable. Planning and permitting also serve important public purposes, including transparency, legal certainty, environmental review, and public participation. The sustainability relevance of this study therefore lies in understanding how lead times can be reduced without weakening these functions. By examining how permitting issues are addressed in practice, the study may contribute to discussions on how Swedish housing development can become both more efficient and more sustainable.

1.2 Purpose and aim

The purpose of this study is to examine permitting-related issues in Swedish housing projects, with particular attention to how such issues contribute to long lead times in the early stages of project development. The study focuses on the permitting phase because previous work and industry experience indicate that substantial delays often arise before the design and construction stages begin, and that these delays may significantly affect the overall delivery of housing projects. The study is centered on Swedish cities, where housing shortages and slow project progression have made the efficiency of housing development an important issue for both public authorities and industry actors.

The aim of the study is to analyze the major permitting issues that affect Swedish housing projects and to develop a better understanding of how these issues are addressed in practice. More specifically, the study seeks to identify the causes of

permitting-related delays, examine whether such issues are handled differently depending on project conditions, and assess whether the nature of these issues varies between different types of housing projects. In this way, the study aims to contribute knowledge about how permitting processes influence project development and why long lead times continue to be a challenge in Swedish housing production.

To achieve this aim, the study applies a qualitative research approach based on a literature review and interview material from actors involved in housing development and municipal planning. By combining previous research with empirical insights from practitioners and public-sector representatives, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of permitting-related delays and the institutional, organizational, and project-specific conditions that shape them. The broader ambition is not only to identify the main problems, but also to create a basis for discussing how such delays may be prevented or mitigated in future housing projects.

1.2.1 Research questions

Based on the purpose and aim of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. How are the major permitting issues in Swedish housing projects being addressed?
2. Are the issues the same for all housing projects, or do they vary depending on the type of project?

1.3 Limitations

This study is limited to permitting-related delays in housing projects and does not examine later project phases such as detailed design, procurement, or construction. The main focus is therefore on the early stages of project development, where planning and permitting issues may influence whether and when housing projects are able to move forward. By narrowing the scope in this way, the study aims to provide a more focused understanding of the specific challenges connected to permitting and lead times.

The study is further limited to housing projects in Swedish urban contexts. This means that the analysis is primarily concerned with projects developed within Swedish cities, where planning and permitting are shaped by the institutional and regulatory conditions of the Swedish system. Although selected international literature is included in order to provide a broader perspective and support comparison, the empirical focus remains on Sweden.

Another limitation is that the study does not attempt to examine all possible causes of delay in housing development. Economic conditions, financing, market cycles, and construction-phase challenges may also affect project duration, but these aspects are not the main concern here unless they are directly linked to the permitting process. The study instead concentrates on legal, organizational, procedural, and actor-related factors that influence lead times before construction begins.

Finally, the study is based on a qualitative research design using literature review and interviews. This means that the findings will provide an in-depth understanding of how permitting issues are experienced, interpreted, and addressed, rather than a statistically

generalizable explanation of all housing projects in Sweden. The intention is therefore to contribute analytical insight into the character of permitting-related delays and how they may vary between different project types, rather than to measure their frequency across the entire housing sector.

2 Theory

This chapter presents the theoretical framework used to analyze long lead times and permitting-related delays in Swedish housing projects. It introduces Institutional Theory as the main theoretical perspective, outlines key concepts, and explains how the theory can be related to project development and the Swedish housing context. The chapter concludes by clarifying the analytical relevance of Institutional Theory for examining how rules, responsibilities, institutional structures, and external expectations shape project development processes.

2.1 What Is Institutional Theory?

Institutional Theory is a perspective used to understand how organizations and actors are shaped by the wider environment in which they operate. Rather than viewing organizations as fully autonomous and purely rational entities, the theory argues that they are embedded in broader systems of rules, expectations, and socially accepted ways of working. In this sense, organizational behavior cannot be understood only by looking at internal goals, resources, or technical problem-solving. It must also be understood in relation to the external structures and conditions that define what is considered appropriate, legitimate, and rational in a given setting. Woodhouse (2024) reinforces this view by showing that institutional theory is not a single homogeneous perspective, but a broad field that contains several approaches to understanding institutions and their effects on behavior. This makes institutional theory particularly useful for examining how organizations are influenced by their surrounding context rather than acting independently of it.

A central idea in Institutional Theory is therefore that organizations are influenced by more than market competition or technical efficiency. The institutional environment includes formal and informal elements that shape behavior over time. These include laws, regulations, formal procedures, organizational routines, professional norms, and shared expectations about what an organization should look like and how it should act. Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) emphasize that institutional theory is particularly useful when it is used to examine how organizations are constrained both internally, through established routines and practices, and externally, through their surrounding institutional environment. Woodhouse (2024) similarly points out that the meaning of institutions is broad and often varies depending on the disciplinary perspective adopted. Even so, a common thread across these perspectives is that institutions both enable and constrain action by creating incentives, expectations, and forms of order within a given environment.

This perspective challenges the assumption that decisions are always made because they are the most technically efficient or economically optimal. Instead, decisions are also shaped by the need to appear legitimate and appropriate in relation to external audiences and institutional expectations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) make this point very clearly when they argue that organizations often become more similar without necessarily becoming more efficient. According to them, organizational change is frequently driven by pressures coming from the state, the professions, and other actors in the organizational field, rather than by competition alone. In mature organizational fields, the search for legitimacy becomes highly important, and organizations may

adopt structures, routines, or practices because these are seen as rational and acceptable, even if their actual impact on performance is uncertain. This means that what appears to be a rational decision may in fact be strongly shaped by institutional expectations rather than by purely technical reasoning.

One of the most influential contributions made by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) is the concept of institutional isomorphism, which refers to the tendency of organizations in the same field to become increasingly similar over time. They identify three main mechanisms behind this process, namely coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. Coercive pressures come from laws, regulations, state authorities, and other forms of formal control. Mimetic pressures emerge when organizations face uncertainty and respond by imitating other organizations that are seen as successful or legitimate. Normative pressures come from professionalization, education, and shared standards within occupational groups. Together, these mechanisms help explain why organizations often adopt similar practices, structures, and decision-making patterns. In this way, institutional theory highlights that organizational behavior is not simply the result of independent choice, but of adaptation to a structured environment in which some forms of action are more socially acceptable than others. Woodhouse (2024) supports this broader understanding by showing that organizational institutionalism is one important strand within a larger institutional tradition, and that institutions can be understood through different analytical lenses depending on whether the focus is on organizational practice, economic rules, or governance structures.

Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) build on this tradition but place particular emphasis on the role of institutional theory in public administration and organizational change. They argue that the theory is most useful when it is understood as a way of recognizing and analyzing institutional pressures, constraints, and inertia that shape organizational reforms and change processes. Their contribution is especially relevant because it shifts the focus away from highly voluntaristic interpretations in which actors are assumed to freely create, change, or disrupt institutions. Instead, they argue that institutional theory is better suited to understanding what organizations are constrained from doing, how institutional conditions shape their options, and why change efforts often fail, become distorted, or produce unintended outcomes. This understanding is highly valuable in public settings, where organizations are embedded in legal, administrative, and professional frameworks that place clear limits on action. Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) therefore reinforce the idea that organizations should not primarily be seen as actors acting freely on their environment, but as actors whose behavior is deeply shaped by institutional contexts.

This perspective is particularly useful for understanding planning and permitting processes in housing development. These processes do not take place in a neutral or purely technical space. They are embedded in institutional systems shaped by legislation, formal approval procedures, administrative responsibilities, professional norms, and expectations of transparency, accountability, and legal certainty. In such settings, decisions are not made only on the basis of what would be fastest or most efficient from a project management perspective. They are also shaped by what is lawful, procedurally correct, professionally acceptable, and publicly legitimate. This means that long lead times in housing development cannot be understood only as technical or managerial inefficiencies. They may also reflect institutional pressures that influence how actors behave, how decisions are made, and how different parts of the

process are organized. The relevance of Institutional Theory in this context lies in its ability to show that delays may arise not only from poor coordination or lack of resources, but also from the institutional environment itself.

In the context of housing development, this is important because planning and permitting involve several organizations and authorities that must interact within a common institutional field. Municipal departments, developers, consultants, regulatory bodies, and legal review institutions are all affected by formal rules and shared expectations. Their actions are therefore shaped not only by project goals, but also by institutional demands related to responsibility, compliance, due process, and legitimacy. From an institutional perspective, bottlenecks may emerge when actors respond to different rules and expectations at the same time, or when legal and organizational structures limit flexibility and speed. Institutional Theory therefore provides a useful starting point for understanding why planning and permitting processes can become slow, complex, and difficult to manage in practice. Rather than treating these problems only as project-level issues, the theory makes it possible to see them as outcomes of a wider institutional setting.

2.2 Key Concepts in Institutional Theory

A central concept in Institutional Theory is the idea of institutions. Institutions can be understood as the rules and constraints that shape human interaction and make behavior more predictable. North (1990) describes institutions as the “rules of the game,” meaning that they provide structure to social and organizational life. This definition is useful because it shows that institutions are not limited to organizations themselves, but refer to the wider systems that guide how actors behave and make decisions. Pirrolas and Correia (2025) similarly describe institutions as systems of rules, norms, beliefs, and organizations that generate regular patterns of behavior in public administration. Hodgson (2025) reinforces this understanding by arguing that there is a near-consensus in the literature that institutions can be understood as systems of rules, even if scholars continue to debate how the concept should be applied and classified. This makes the concept broad, but still analytically valuable for understanding order and coordination in social and organizational life.

An important distinction in Institutional Theory is the difference between formal institutions and informal institutions. North (1990) explains that institutions can consist of both formal constraints and informal constraints. This distinction is important because it shows that behavior is shaped not only by written rules, but also by unwritten expectations and established ways of working. Formal institutions provide the official framework for action, while informal institutions influence how that framework operates in practice. Hodgson (2025) adds that this distinction remains analytically important, but also argues that it must be used carefully because formal and informal institutions are often discussed too loosely in the literature. He suggests that formal rules are best understood as rules that are actually or potentially enforced by legal systems. This clarification is especially useful in institutional analysis, since it links the idea of formal institutions directly to law, enforcement, and public authority rather than only to whether a rule happens to be written down.

Formal institutions include laws, regulations, approval procedures, and organizational structures. North (1990) notes that formal rules may take the form of constitutions,

laws, contracts, and other codified arrangements that define rights, responsibilities, and procedures. In organizational and public-sector settings, formal institutions therefore determine who can make decisions, what procedures must be followed, and how actions are monitored or enforced. Pirrolas and Correia (2025) describe institutions in a similar way, emphasizing that they include operational rules that define who is eligible to act, what actions are permitted, and what consequences may follow from different decisions. Hodgson (2025) supports this perspective by showing that legal systems involve organized legislative, judicial, and enforcement institutions, and that formal rules are sustained through this wider legal structure. This makes formal institutions especially relevant in structured administrative processes, where actions are expected to follow approved rules and procedures.

At the same time, informal institutions are also essential. These include norms, routines, habits, professional expectations, and unwritten ways of working. North (1990) argues that institutions are not only written rules but also unwritten codes of conduct that develop over time. Informal institutions often emerge through repeated interaction and become taken for granted within organizations and professional settings. Pirrolas and Correia (2025) also point out that institutions include routines, conventions, and shared meanings that influence behavior. This means that even when two actors operate under the same formal rules, they may still act differently because their behavior is shaped by different routines, expectations, or professional cultures. Hodgson (2025) further emphasizes that no institution lacks informal elements and that legal systems themselves depend on informal rules and norms in order to function in practice. Informal institutions are therefore important for understanding how processes work beyond what is stated in formal documents.

Another key concept in Institutional Theory is legitimacy. Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as a generalized perception that the actions of an organization are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. This definition is important because it shows that organizational behavior is shaped not only by efficiency or technical performance, but also by the need to be accepted and recognized as appropriate by others. In other words, organizations must not only function effectively, but also act in ways that fit the expectations of their environment. Meyer and Tse (2025) support the continued importance of this concept by describing organizational legitimacy as a central idea in institutional and organizational theory. They also note that legitimacy is widely understood as multidimensional and tied to the approval of relevant stakeholders, which reinforces the view that legitimacy is not only about legal compliance, but also about broader social acceptance.

Legitimacy is especially relevant in public-sector decision making. Public organizations are expected to follow rules, act transparently, and make decisions that can be justified to citizens, stakeholders, and other authorities. Legitimacy affects both how organizations are understood and how people act toward them. Organizations that are perceived as legitimate are more likely to be trusted and accepted. This is particularly important in administrative and regulatory settings, where procedures, fairness, and accountability may matter just as much as outcomes (Suchman, 1995). Meyer and Tse (2025) add that legitimacy is often shaped by the perceptions of different stakeholder groups and that organizations may face several legitimacy pressures at the same time. Although their discussion is situated in another empirical context, it still

supports the broader point that legitimacy is a relational and context-dependent concept, shaped by how actors are evaluated by their surrounding environment.

These concepts help explain how rules and expectations shape the behavior of different actors in a process. Institutional Theory suggests that actors do not make decisions in isolation. Instead, they respond to the formal and informal institutions around them. North (1990) shows that both formal and informal constraints limit and structure the range of choices available to individuals and organizations. Formal rules define what is legally and procedurally possible, while informal norms influence what is seen as appropriate or reasonable in practice. Suchman (1995) adds that actors are also influenced by the need to maintain legitimacy, meaning that they often act in ways that are publicly acceptable and consistent with social expectations. Pirrolas and Correia (2025) further argue that institutions include systems of meaning and expectations that guide organizational responses. Together, these ideas show that behavior in a process is shaped not only by technical tasks or internal goals, but by the institutional environment in which actors operate.

The key concepts in Institutional Theory provide a useful way of understanding how organizations and actors behave within structured environments. Institutions can be seen as the wider systems of rules and expectations that guide action. The distinction between formal and informal institutions makes it possible to understand both the official and the practical sides of organizational behavior. The concept of legitimacy adds another important dimension by showing that decisions are shaped not only by efficiency, but also by social acceptance, appropriateness, and trust. Together, these concepts help explain why behavior in complex organizational and public-sector processes is often shaped by more than formal authority or rational planning alone.

2.3 Institutional Theory in Relation to Project Development

Project development does not take place in isolation. Rather, it unfolds within a broader institutional setting that shapes how projects are initiated, coordinated, reviewed, and approved. From an institutional perspective, projects are embedded in systems of rules, procedures, organizational roles, and expectations that influence what actors can do and how they are expected to act. This means that project development cannot be understood only as an internal managerial process driven by technical planning, scheduling, and resource allocation. It must also be understood in relation to the institutional environment in which it takes place (Aksom & Vakulenko, 2024).

Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) argue that Institutional Theory is particularly useful for understanding how organizations are shaped by institutional pressures, constraints, and inertia. This is highly relevant in project development especially in sectors where formal procedures and public authority are central. In such settings, progress is not determined solely by project teams and internal planning practices. Instead, it is also influenced by legal frameworks, established administrative routines, and expectations connected to accountability and procedural correctness. From this perspective, project

development is not simply a linear progression from planning to implementation, but a process shaped by the institutional context surrounding it.

This institutional embeddedness becomes especially important in planning and housing development. Sorensen (2017) explains that planning processes are deeply shaped by institutions and that cities themselves are highly institutionalized environments. Planning does not occur in a vacuum. It takes place through systems of governance, legal structures, property arrangements, public procedures, and historically developed rules that shape how decisions are made. In this sense, planning systems do not merely provide a neutral background for development rather they actively structure the conditions under which development can occur. As a result, housing projects are affected by much more than internal project objectives. They are also shaped by the wider planning systems, its rules, and its institutional logic (Sorensen, 2017).

This is particularly relevant when considering housing projects, which are commonly subject to formal requirements, public procedures, coordination demands, and sequential decision-making processes. Legal requirements may determine whether a project needs a detailed development plan, a building permit, additional technical review, or compliance with specific environmental and safety standards. Public procedures often require consultation, review, documentation, and coordination between different authorities and stakeholders. These elements create an institutional framework that influences how projects move forward. As Fauth et al. (2025) show, building permit processes across Europe vary significantly depending on legal, institutional, and organizational conditions. Their study demonstrates that the structure of approval systems matters for how development processes unfold and how long they take.

One important implication of this is that project progress may be influenced by institutional constraints rather than only by internal project planning. A project may be well prepared from a managerial perspective and still experience delays because it must adapt to formal procedures, respond to public authorities, or wait for decisions that lie outside the project team's direct control. In other words, the pace of project development is not determined only by how efficiently the project is managed internally. It is also shaped by how the surrounding institutional system is organized and by how actors must operate within that system. Institutional Theory helps explain this by showing that organizations and actors are constrained by rules, norms, and external expectations that structure their behavior (Aksom & Vakulenko, 2024).

Sorensen (2017) also highlights that institutions both constrain and enable action. This is an important point in relation to project development. Formal systems can create predictability, legal certainty, and procedural fairness, but they can also introduce rigidity, sequentially, and path dependence. In planning contexts, this means that the structure of the system itself may influence whether projects move smoothly or become slowed down by formal requirements and coordination challenges. Project development is therefore shaped not only by project characteristics, but also by institutional arrangements that govern land use, planning, permitting, and decision-making. This helps explain why similar housing projects may progress at different speeds depending on the institutional conditions in which they are rooted.

This institutional perspective is also useful when discussing lead times. Lead times are often treated as a matter of project efficiency, but they can also be understood as outcomes of system design. Fauth et al. (2025) describe building permit processes as complex organizational processes involving multiple stakeholders. This suggests that the time required for a project to progress is influenced by how responsibilities are distributed, how decision-making is sequenced, and how many actors and review steps are involved. From this perspective, long lead times are not necessarily signs of poor planning alone. They may also reflect the way the wider institutional environment is structured. If the process requires several formal decisions, multiple reviews, and adaptation to different authorities, lead times are likely to be shaped by those external conditions.

Delays may therefore occur when projects must adapt to formal requirements and multiple external actors. In housing development, actors such as developers, planners, permit officers, consultants, technical reviewers, and public authorities often interact within the same process, but from different institutional positions. Each actor operates under specific rules, responsibilities, and expectations. As Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) note, institutional environments impose constraints that can shape organizational action in powerful ways. Fauth et al. (2025) likewise show that permit processes involve multiple stakeholders and that institutional and organizational arrangements affect how those processes function. When actors must coordinate across organizational boundaries while also complying with formal procedures, delays can arise even when there is no single major obstacle. The need to align internal project ambitions with external requirements can therefore become a source of slow progress.

Institutional Theory provides a useful way of understanding project development as a process that is shaped by its surrounding environment. Housing projects are not only technical or managerial undertakings. They are also institutional processes, influenced by laws, public procedures, governance structures, coordination demands, and formal decision-making systems. Project progress may therefore be shaped as much by institutional constraints as by internal planning efforts. This perspective is especially helpful for understanding why lead times can become long and why delays may emerge when projects must adapt to formal requirements and multiple external actors (Fauth et al., 2025).

2.4 Institutional Theory and Swedish Housing Projects

Having outlined Institutional Theory and its relevance to project development more generally, the next step is to apply this perspective to the Swedish housing context. In Sweden, housing development is not simply a market-driven or internally managed project process. It is embedded in a public and institutional setting where legal requirements, planning procedures, political decision-making, and administrative routines shape how projects move forward. From an institutional perspective, this means that Swedish housing projects are influenced not only by the intentions of developers or project managers, but also by the wider systems of rules, roles, and expectations in which they are carried out. Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) argue that institutional theory is especially valuable when used to understand how organizational change and action are shaped by institutional pressures, constraints, and inertia. That perspective is highly relevant in the Swedish housing sector, where project

development takes place inside a rule-bound planning and permitting system rather than in isolation.

One of the most important institutional features of Swedish housing development is the central role of Planning and Building Act (PBL) and the municipal planning monopoly. Persson (2020) explains that spatial planning in Sweden is mainly undertaken at the municipal level and that municipalities both initiate and adopt their own plan. He further notes that municipalities exercise a “planning monopoly”, although they must still follow national legislation and take national and regional policies into account. This makes Swedish housing development strongly dependent on local government decisions and on how municipalities interpret and apply the legal framework. In institutional terms, this means that project development is filtered through a system in which public authority, legal, competence, and local priorities are deeply embedded in the process (Persson, 2020).

Koglin (2017) reinforces this point by showing that the Swedish planning system formally gives substantial power over land-use planning to municipalities. Referring directly to the Planning and Building Act, he notes that planning the use of land and water is formally a municipal responsibility. At the same time, Koglin shows that this planning monopoly is not absolute in practice, since municipal planning decisions are shaped through interactions with many different stakeholders and must also be tested against legal requirements and state interests. This is important from an institutional perspective because it shows that the planning monopoly is both a source of local authority and a site of institutional coordination. In other words, municipalities are powerful actors, but they operate inside a system where other institutional forces continue to matter (Koglin, 2017).

The structure of the Swedish planning and permitting process further illustrates how institutions create the framework for housing development. Granath Hansson (2015) explains that Swedish town planning is regulated by the Planning and Building Act and that two main statutory plans structure the process: the comprehensive plan and the detailed development plan. The comprehensive plan covers the whole municipality and is not legally binding, while the detailed development plan is binding and regulates development in a specific area. Building permits are generally based on the detailed development plan, and Granath Hansson notes that there are very limited opportunities to grant a building permit unless it is based on such a plan. This gives the detailed development plan a particularly important institutional role, since it becomes the core legal instrument through which development rights are shaped and controlled (Granath Hansson, 2015).

Persson (2020) describes the detailed development plan in similar terms, noting that it is the proper legal instrument regulating development rights and that all building permits within its jurisdiction must conform to what it specifies. This relationship between plan permit means that Swedish housing projects are structured by a layered sequence of formal decisions. Together with later implementation approvals, including start notices before construction can begin, these legal stages create an institutional framework around project development. The framework is not only technical, it is also political and administrative. Persson (2020) points out that municipal planning is not merely a technical exercise but also a political steering instrument. This means that

project progress is shaped by law, local discretion, and formal decision-making procedures rather than by project planning alone (Persson, 2020).

Appeals further strengthen the institutional character of Swedish housing development. Granath Hansson (2015) notes that after a detailed plan or a building permit has taken effect, affected parties may appeal. She explains that the first appeal instance is the County Administrative Board, followed by the Land and Environment Court and the Land and Environment Supreme Court. This appeal structure is significant because it shows that project development is subject to judicial review and that formal rights can affect the timing and predictability of housing delivery. From an institutional perspective, appeals are not external interruptions to an otherwise straightforward process. They are part of the institutional system itself, reflecting norms of legal certainty, public participation, and due process (Granath Hansson, 2015).

Several actors are therefore involved in Swedish housing development, each operating within specific institutional roles. Municipalities play the leading role through their planning monopoly and their power to adopt plans. Politicians make the final planning decisions, while planners perform preparatory work and draft plans (Persson, 2020). County Administrative Boards can review plans on legal grounds and act as the first appeal instance in many cases (Granath Hansson, 2015). Koglin (2017) also shows that consultation with authorities, including County Administrative Boards, as well as with other stakeholders and citizens, may be required by law. In addition, private developers, consultants, and other sectoral actors increasingly shape planning processes through collaboration, negotiation, and implementation. This means that project development takes place through interaction among multiple public and private actors rather than within a single organizational hierarchy.

This multi-actor setting is one reason why long lead times can be understood institutionally. Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) emphasize that organizations cannot escape institutional forces and that change attempts are shaped by constraints, pressures, and inertia. Applied to Swedish housing projects, this suggests that long lead times may emerge when projects must adapt to legal requirements, administrative routines, formal consultations, and multiple stages of review. Granath Hansson (2015) points to several problems that prolong Swedish housing development, including complicated planning processes, overly detailed plans, far-reaching appeal rights, extensive regulation, and a lack of predictability and transparency in certain municipal processes. Koglin (2017) similarly argues that Swedish spatial planning has become more complex, with more actors involved and planners increasingly acting as coordinators rather than autonomous planners. These observations support the idea that long lead times are connected not only to project-specific challenges, but also to the institutional structure of the Swedish system itself.

Transparency and legal certainty are particularly important in this context. Granath Hansson (2015) notes that reforms have often been discussed in terms of increasing predictability and transparency in the planning process, while also pointing to the way appeal rights and detailed regulation can produce lengthy and costly procedures. From an institutional perspective, these features should not be viewed only as inefficiencies. They also reflect the public values embedded in the Swedish planning system. Housing development must not only be efficient enough to deliver projects; it must also be procedurally correct, open to review, and capable of balancing public and private

interests. This helps explain why long lead times cannot be understood simply as project management failures. They may also be outcomes of a system organized around legal certainty, democratic accountability, and formalized coordination (Granath Hansson, 2015).

This provides a useful way of understanding Swedish housing projects as embedded in a legally structured, municipality-led, and multi-actor system. The Planning and Building Act, the municipal planning monopoly, the detailed development plan, building permits, subsequent formal approvals, and appeals together create an institutional framework that shapes project development. Within that framework, several actors interact under legal, administrative, and political constraints. Long lead times may therefore be connected to the organization of the system itself, including formal requirements, organizational routines, coordination demands, and expectations of transparency and legal certainty. In this sense, Swedish housing development is not only a matter of building homes. It is also a matter of navigating an institutional environment that fundamentally shape how, when, and under what conditions development can take place (Aksom & Vakulenko, 2024).

2.5 Analytical Relevance for This Study

Institutional Theory provides a useful analytical lens for understanding long lead times and permitting-related delays in Swedish housing projects because it shifts attention away from purely technical or managerial explanations and towards the institutional setting in which project development takes place. As Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) argue, institutional analysis is especially valuable when it focuses on how organizations are shaped by pressures, constraints, and inertia rather than assuming that actors are free to optimize processes as they wish. In this context, delays are not understood only as project-level inefficiencies. They can also be seen as outcomes of the rules, routines, responsibilities, and expectations that structure decision-making in public-sector environments.

This perspective is particularly relevant for examining how different actors involved in Swedish housing development are influenced by formal and informal institutional conditions. Institutional Theory makes it possible to analyze how municipalities, planners, developers, consultants, and other actors operate within a framework defined by legal responsibilities, organizational roles, and external expectations. Sorensen (2017) emphasizes that institutions mediate between structure and agency by both constraining and enabling action. This is important because it suggests that actors in the planning and permitting process do not simply act according to internal project goals. Their choices are shaped by the wider institutional context, including accepted procedures, legitimate decision paths, and the distribution of authority within the planning system (Sorensen, 2017).

Using Institutional Theory also makes it possible to connect the study to key themes such as laws, stakeholders, bottlenecks, coordination, and accountability. Rather than treating these as isolated project problems, the theory allows them to be understood as institutionally embedded. For example, bottlenecks may arise when multiple actors must coordinate across organizational boundaries while also complying with legal rules and administrative procedures. Similarly, accountability and legitimacy requirements may shape how quickly decisions can be made and how much flexibility actors have in

practice. Aksom and Vakulenko (2024) stress that organizations are constrained both by their surrounding institutional environment and by internally established institutional routines. This is especially relevant for permitting-related delays, where formal procedures and established administrative practices may affect not only what can be done, but also how quickly it can be done.

The theory is also useful for understanding variation. It helps explain not only why delays occur, but also why they may be handled differently and why the permitting process may vary between different types of housing projects. Sorensen (2017) notes that institutions shape the conditions under which actions take place and that institutional settings influence how social and political processes develop. Applied to this study, this means that different project types may face different institutional demands depending on location, planning conditions, stakeholder involvement, and the extent of formal review required. Institutional Theory therefore supports an analysis that focuses not only on the existence of delays, but also on the institutional mechanisms behind them.

Overall, Institutional Theory provides a suitable framework for analyzing the relationship between project development and the institutional setting in Swedish housing projects. It makes it possible to interpret long lead times and permitting-related delays as products of a broader rule-based and multi-actor environment. In that sense, the theory supports an analysis of why delays occur, how they are managed in practice, and why project development may vary depending on how actors interact with the institutional conditions surrounding them (Aksom & Vakulenko, 2024).

3 Method

This chapter describes the methodological approach used in the study. It explains how the research was designed, how the literature review was conducted, how the empirical material was collected through interviews, and how the literature and interview findings were analyzed together. The chapter also discusses quality, ethical considerations, validity, and reliability.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach was considered suitable because the aim of the study is not to measure the frequency of permitting issues, but to develop a deeper understanding of how such issues are experienced, interpreted, and addressed by different actors involved in Swedish housing projects. The study also seeks to examine whether these issues vary depending on project type, which requires attention to meanings, processes, and context rather than only quantifiable variables. Aspers and Corte (2019) define qualitative research as an iterative process through which improved understanding is achieved by getting closer to the phenomenon studied and by making meaningful distinctions based on the empirical material. This understanding-oriented approach is highly relevant for a study of permitting-related delays, where the research interest lies in how actors describe the process, where they locate the main problems, and how they understand differences between projects.

Another reason for choosing a qualitative design is that the study focuses on a process that is institutionally and organizationally complex. Permitting issues in housing projects are shaped by rules, responsibilities, coordination, routines, and interactions between several public and private actors. Such conditions are difficult to capture through a purely quantitative approach, especially when the purpose is to understand how the process works in practice. Aspers and Corte (2019) emphasize that qualitative research involves closeness to the phenomenon and an iterative movement between theory, empirical material, and analysis. In this study, that was important because the research process required continuous interpretation of both the literature and the interview material in order to identify relevant patterns and distinctions.

The research design is therefore based on a qualitative combination of systematic literature review and semi-structured interviews. The literature review was used to identify previous research on lead times, permitting issues, planning processes, and housing project variation. The interviews were used to gain empirical insight into how these issues are understood and handled by actors working in or close to Swedish housing development. In line with Aspers and Corte (2019), the study did not treat theory and empirical material as separate stages. Instead, the research process developed through an ongoing interaction between concepts, literature, and empirical findings. This made it possible to refine the focus of the study during the work and to interpret the findings in relation to Institutional Theory.

3.2 Systematic Literature Review

The literature review in this study was conducted using a systematic literature review approach. This approach was chosen in order to make the review process more

transparent, structured, and replicable than a traditional narrative review. Snyder (2019) describes a systematic literature review as a way of identifying and critically appraising relevant research through a systematic, transparent, and reproducible process. In a similar way, Tranfield et al. (2003) argue that systematic review helps reduce bias by making search procedures, selection decisions, and review criteria explicit. For the present study, this was important because the research topic covers several overlapping areas, including permitting, planning, housing development, lead times, and Swedish urban projects. A structured review process was therefore necessary in order to identify the most relevant literature and to create a clear foundation for both the theoretical and empirical parts of the study.

The literature review was designed to support the overall aim of the study and the two research questions. In line with Snyder (2019), the starting point was to define the purpose of the review and then develop a search strategy appropriate for that purpose. The review was not intended as a statistical meta-analysis, but as a structured qualitative review of peer-reviewed research relevant to permitting issues, lead times, and variation between different types of housing projects. Snyder (2019) notes that the stated purpose of the review should guide the rest of the process, including search strategy, selection of studies, and analysis. In this study, the purpose of the review was to identify previous research on lead times and permitting in housing projects, understand how these issues are described in Swedish and international literature, and create an analytical basis for the interview study and later analysis chapter.

The search process was mainly conducted through academic databases, with Scopus and ScienceDirect used as the main search platforms. Additional searches were made through Google Scholar and ResearchGate in order to identify accessible versions of relevant publications and trace related research. Literature specifically connected to BoStad2021 was also identified through Chalmers' research pages and reference tracking in already selected sources. In accordance with Tranfield et al. (2003), the search strategy was based on explicit keywords and inclusion criteria in order to ensure a more rigorous and traceable process. The search terms were developed from the research topic, preliminary reading, and recurring concepts in the literature. Tranfield et al. (2003) explain that systematic searches begin with the identification of keywords and search terms built from the scoping study, the literature, and discussions within the review process.

The following keywords and keyword combinations were used during the search process:

- **lead times**
- **planning delays**
- **permitting delays**
- **building permit process**
- **housing projects**
- **housing development**
- **residential development**
- **planning and permitting**
- **municipal planning**
- **urban development**
- **spatial planning**
- **housing shortage**

- **institutional theory**
- **Swedish housing projects**
- **BoStad2021**
- **infill housing**
- **project development**

These terms were used both individually and in combination, depending on the focus of the search. Broader terms were first used to gain an overview of the field, after which narrower combinations were used to identify more specific literature relevant to the study's focus on Swedish housing projects and permitting-related issues.

The review process also involved a clear selection procedure. Abstracts were first read in order to assess whether a source was relevant to the topic. If the abstract indicated a strong connection to permitting, planning, lead times, housing development, project variation, or Swedish planning conditions, the full text was retrieved and reviewed in more detail. Snyder (2019) emphasizes that a systematic review requires an explicit search strategy that includes search terms, databases, and inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following this logic, the inclusion criteria in the present study were that sources should be academically relevant to the topic, primarily peer-reviewed, and clearly linked to one or more of the following areas: housing projects, planning and permitting processes, delays or lead times, project development, and Swedish or international planning contexts. Sources were excluded if they focused mainly on later construction stages, topics unrelated to permitting or planning, or sectors that were not relevant to housing development.

Tranfield et al. (2003) describe the selection of studies as a multi-stage process in which potentially relevant studies are first identified, then screened, and finally assessed in more detail against the inclusion criteria. This logic was followed in the present review. After the initial search, potentially relevant sources were screened based on title and abstract. Sources judged to be relevant were then read in full text, after which a final selection was made. In addition to topic relevance, preference was given to studies published in recognized academic journals and to sources that offered either strong empirical findings or conceptual relevance to the study. This process helped reduce the volume of material while maintaining a clear connection to the research questions.

The analysis of the selected literature was conducted in a thematic and iterative way. Snyder (2019) notes that the review process involves not only identifying literature, but also collecting and analyzing data from the selected research. In this study, the literature was organized thematically around the main areas that later shaped both the theory chapter and the literature review chapter, such as lead times, permitting issues, Swedish planning context, variation across project types, and strategies for addressing delays. The literature review was therefore not treated as a separate background exercise, but as an active part of the research design that informed interview questions, theoretical framing, and later analysis. In this sense, the review served both as a method for mapping previous research and as a basis for the empirical work that followed.

3.3 Empirical Study

The empirical part of the study was based on semi-structured interviews with actors involved in or closely connected to Swedish housing development and planning. This

interview format was considered suitable because the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how permitting-related issues are experienced, interpreted, and addressed in practice. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) describe semi-structured interviews as a dialogue guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments. This made the method relevant for the present study, since it allowed common themes to be covered across interviews while still giving room for role-specific experiences and reflections (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The interview study included a total of eight interviews with respondents from different professional backgrounds. The aim of this selection was not statistical representativeness, but to include interviewees with insight into planning, permitting, project development, and housing policy from different positions in the process. The respondents included two Heads of Projects at Framtiden Byggutveckling, one Project Manager at Stadsbyggnadsförvaltningen, one researcher on BoStad2021 at Chalmers, one Project Manager on BoStad2021 at Göteborgs Stad, one expert in housing and urban development, and two politicians who were members of the City of Gothenburg Exploitation Committee. This variation in respondent roles was important because the study focuses on a multi-actor process in which different professional and institutional perspectives shape how permitting issues are understood and handled. The professional role of each interviewee is described in Table 1.

Table 1 Profession role of interviewees

Interviewee	Professional role
Respondent 1	Head of projects Framtiden Byggutveckling
Respondent 2	Project manager at Stadsbyggnadsförvaltningen at Göteborgs Stad
Respondent 3	Head of projects Framtiden Byggutveckling
Respondent 4	Researcher on Bostads2021 at Chalmers
Respondent 5	Project manager on Bostads2021 at Göteborgs Stad
Respondent 6	Expert in Housing and Urban Development
Respondent 7	Politician from Vänsterpartiet and Member of the City of Gothenburg Exploitation Committee
Respondent 8	Politician from Centerpartiet and Member of the City of Gothenburg Exploitation Committee

The interviewees were contacted by email and informed about the topic of the study and what participation would involve. They were given the opportunity to participate either in person or through Microsoft Teams. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), careful planning of the practical aspects of interviews is important, including how potential participants are contacted, informed, and prepared for the interview. In line with this, respondents in the present study could also receive the interview

questions in advance if they wished to do so. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the expected time commitment, and the format of the interview before participation. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) emphasize that potential participants should know what to expect in terms of purpose, format, and length, which was also followed in this study.

The interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to over one hour, depending on the role of the respondent and the depth of the discussion. The interview guide included six to seven predetermined questions together with follow-up questions that were used depending on the respondent's answers. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) explain that semi-structured interviews usually involve a short list of guiding questions, supported by planned and unplanned follow-up questions. This was consistent with the approach used in the present study. The interview guide provided a common structure across interviews, but it was also adapted to the role of the interviewee and developed further as the researchers' understanding of the topic deepened during the study. This flexibility was important because the respondents had different types of experience, and not all questions were equally relevant to every role.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) recommend audio recording in order to allow the interviewer to focus on the interaction rather than extensive note-taking, and they further note that verbatim transcription makes it possible to return to the exact words of the participants during the analysis. This approach was followed in the present study, since the interviews formed an important part of the empirical basis for identifying recurring permitting issues, strategies for addressing them, and differences between project types. The interviewees were anonymized in the study and are referred to as Respondents in order to reduce identifiability while still making it possible to distinguish different perspectives in the empirical material.

DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) also note that meaningful qualitative interview studies may be carried out with relatively small samples, and they refer to examples with as few as eight to twelve participants. This was relevant for the present study, since the purpose was to gain detailed and informed insights from strategically selected respondents rather than to collect a large number of brief responses. The empirical study was therefore designed to prioritize depth, flexibility, and relevance to the research questions. In this way, the interviews made it possible to explore not only what permitting-related issues exist, but also how they are experienced by different actors and how they are addressed in practice within Swedish housing development.

3.4 Analytical Approach

The analytical approach of this study was inspired by Dubois and Gadde (2002) and their concept of systematic combining. This approach was considered suitable because the study did not follow a strictly linear sequence in which theory, literature, data collection, and analysis were treated as fully separate stages. Instead, the research process developed through a continuous movement between the empirical material and the theoretical framework. Dubois and Gadde (2002) describe systematic combining as an abductive approach in which the researcher moves back and forth between theory

and empirical observations, allowing both the analytical framework and the understanding of the phenomenon to evolve during the study.

In the present study, this meant that the literature review, the interviews, and the analysis were closely interconnected. The preliminary theoretical framework was developed through the literature review and provided an initial basis for understanding permitting-related issues, lead times, and project variation. At the same time, the interview material contributed new insights that led to further refinement of the analytical focus. In this sense, the study did not apply theory in a purely deductive way, nor did it aim to generate concepts from empirical material alone. Rather, the process involved an ongoing interaction between empirical findings and theoretical concepts, which is central to the abductive logic described by Dubois and Gadde (2002).

Dubois and Gadde (2002) further argue that systematic combining is characterized by continuous “matching” between theory and reality, together with “direction and redirection” during the research process. This was relevant for the present study because the focus of the analysis became clearer as the work progressed. Themes identified in the literature influenced the interview guide and the initial interpretation of the empirical material, while the interview findings in turn helped highlight which issues were most significant in practice. This back-and-forth movement made it possible to refine both the understanding of permitting-related challenges and the relevance of Institutional Theory for interpreting them.

The interview material was therefore analyzed thematically, but in a way that remained open to revision during the process. Initial themes were linked to the research questions and to the theoretical concepts presented earlier, such as rules, responsibilities, institutional constraints, coordination, and external expectations. However, these themes were not treated as fixed from the outset. In line with Dubois and Gadde (2002), the analytical framework was gradually adjusted as new patterns became visible in the empirical material. This approach made it possible to interpret the data in a way that was both theoretically informed and empirically grounded.

Another important aspect of systematic combining is that it places emphasis on analytical inference rather than statistical generalization. Dubois and Gadde (2002) argue that case-based and qualitative studies must rely on analytical reasoning grounded in logical coherence and empirical relevance rather than on statistical inference. This is consistent with the present study, which does not aim to produce statistically generalizable findings about all housing projects in Sweden. Instead, the aim is to develop a deeper analytical understanding of how permitting-related issues emerge, how they are addressed, and why they may vary between different project types.

For this reason, the analytical approach was not limited to describing the empirical material. It was used to interpret how permitting-related challenges are shaped by the institutional setting of Swedish housing development. By moving iteratively between literature, interview data, and theory, the study sought to identify not only what kinds of issues arise, but also how these issues can be understood in relation to rules, organizational roles, coordination demands, and external expectations. This made systematic combining a suitable analytical approach for the study’s overall purpose and research questions.

3.5 Quality and Ethical Considerations

Several measures were taken to strengthen the quality of the study. Since the research is based on a qualitative design, the aim was not statistical generalization, but to achieve a credible and well-grounded understanding of permitting-related issues in Swedish housing projects. One important aspect of this was to ensure a clear connection between the purpose of the study, the research questions, the literature review, the interviews, and the analytical framework. The use of Institutional Theory provided a consistent basis for interpreting both the literature and the empirical material, which contributed to analytical coherence throughout the study.

The quality of the empirical material was also supported by the choice of semi-structured interviews. This format made it possible to cover the same general themes in all interviews while still allowing the respondents to elaborate on issues that were especially relevant to their own professional role and experience. Interviewees were selected in order to represent different perspectives within housing development, planning, policy, and research. This variation was important because the study concerns a process involving several actors with different responsibilities and interests. By including respondents from different parts of the process, the study was able to capture a broader and more nuanced picture of permitting-related challenges and how they are addressed in practice.

Another important quality consideration was transparency in the research process. The literature review was conducted in a structured way, and the empirical material was collected through recorded and transcribed interviews. This made it possible to return to the original interview material during the analysis and reduced the risk that conclusions would rely only on general impressions. At the same time, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The number of interviews that could be conducted for this study was limited, and the findings therefore reflect in-depth perspectives rather than a complete picture of all housing projects in Sweden. In addition, the respondents represent particular professional roles, which means that other actors may have interpreted the same process differently. However, the purpose of the study was to develop analytical understanding rather than statistical representativeness, and the selected respondents were considered relevant in relation to the research questions.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of the research and about what participation would involve before the interviews were carried out. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were given the opportunity to decide whether the interview should take place in person or online. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed only with the consent of the participants. To reduce the risk of identification, the respondents were anonymized in the study and are referred to in a generalized way rather than by name. Interview recordings and transcripts were handled with care throughout the research process. The material was stored in password-protected digital environments and was only accessible to the authors of the study. Interview data were used only for the purposes of this thesis and were not shared with external parties. This was considered especially important because some interviewees hold professional roles connected to public authorities, political decision-making, or specific development organizations.

Ethical consideration was also important in the handling and interpretation of the material. The interview data were used only for the purposes of this study, and care was taken to represent the respondents' statements fairly and in context. Since the study deals with professional experiences and institutional processes rather than sensitive personal matters, the ethical risks were limited, but confidentiality and careful treatment of statements were still necessary. The intention was to ensure that the respondents could contribute openly without concern that individual comments would be directly attributed to them.

AI was also used as a supportive tool in the study. In this study, AI was used to streamline some parts of the research process. It was used to help structure parts of the report, improve the clarity of the writing, and summarize reports and source material. The main AI tool used in the study was ChatGPT. Scopus AI was also used to some extent in order to identify potentially relevant literature. However, AI was not used as an independent source of analysis or interpretation. The responsibility for selecting sources, evaluating relevance, interpreting findings, and writing the final content remained with the authors. In this way, AI functioned as a practical support tool rather than as a substitute for academic judgement.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. According to Noble and Smith (2015), validity in qualitative research refers to the integrity and appropriateness of the methods used, and whether the findings accurately reflect the data. Reliability concerns the consistency and transparency of the analytical procedures used in the research process (Noble & Smith, 2015).

The validity of this study is connected to whether the findings are useful for understanding permitting-related delays in Swedish housing projects. Since the study is qualitative, the aim is not to produce statistically generalisable results, but to provide a deeper understanding of how permitting issues are experienced, addressed, and shaped by different project conditions. This is in line with qualitative research, where credibility and trustworthiness are central when evaluating the quality of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015).

The connection between the research questions, the literature review, the interview material, and the analytical framework strengthens validity. Literature provides a broader research-based foundation, while the interviews add practical insights from actors involved in housing development, planning, research, and political decision-making. Noble and Smith (2015) also emphasize that qualitative findings become more credible when researchers use clear methods and when the findings are closely connected to the data.

The findings are considered useful because they combine several perspectives on the planning and permitting process. However, the validity is limited by the number of interviews and by the fact that the respondents represent specific roles and contexts. The results should therefore not be interpreted as representing all Swedish housing projects, but rather as providing analytical insight into common patterns, challenges, and possible explanations.

Reliability concerns how trustworthy and consistent the research process and data are. In this study, reliability was strengthened by using a structured literature review, semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, and transcriptions. This made it possible to return to the material during the analysis and reduce the risk of relying only on memory or general impressions. This also supports reliability, since qualitative researchers should make their research process clear, transparent and possible to follow (Noble & Smith, 2015).

The interview findings were also compared with previous literature, which helped identify patterns that were supported by both empirical data and earlier research. Noble and Smith (2015) describe this type of comparison between different sources and perspectives as one way to strengthen the credibility of qualitative research.

At the same time, exact repeatability is difficult in qualitative research. The interviews were influenced by the respondents' roles, experiences, and the follow-up questions asked during each interview. Another researcher might therefore interpret some answers differently. To address this, the study has aimed to describe the research process transparently, including how the literature was selected, how the interviews were conducted, and how the material was analysed. This supports the trustworthiness of the study and makes it easier for the reader to understand how the findings were developed.

4 Literature Review

This chapter reviews previous research relevant to lead times and permitting in housing projects. It first outlines how lead times and permitting processes are discussed in the literature and then situates these issues in the Swedish planning and permitting context. The chapter also includes international research in order to place the Swedish case in a broader perspective and to identify permitting issues and responses that recur across different planning systems. It then examines the major permitting issues highlighted in previous research, how such issues are addressed, and whether they vary depending on project type and permitting conditions. In this way, the literature review provides the foundation for analyzing both the main permitting challenges in Swedish housing projects and how these relate to wider international patterns in the literature.

4.1 Lead Times and Permitting in Housing Projects

Lead times and permitting processes have become increasingly important topics in research on housing development because delays in the early stages of a project can shape whether housing is delivered at all, when it is delivered, and under what level of uncertainty. Although research on the time-related aspects of planning and permitting has historically been limited, Bröchner et al. (2021) note that slow and complicated procedures for obtaining permits have long been recognized by developers, even if they have only more recently received sustained academic attention. Their article places time and process duration at the center of urban housing development and shows that planning and permit procedures are now increasingly understood as policy-relevant barriers to residential delivery.

A useful starting point in the literature is that lead times are not simply about the passage of time between two events. Rather, they reflect how development processes are structured, sequenced, and governed. In housing projects, this usually means that time is consumed not only by design and construction activities, but also by entitlement procedures, formal reviews, consultations, negotiations, and permit approvals. Bröchner et al. (2021) describe their study as an examination of factors influencing the duration of planning, the building permit process, and ultimately the start of construction. In that sense, lead times in housing projects are closely linked to how planning and permitting are organized before construction begins.

A recurring theme in the literature is that the development process itself can become an obstacle to housing provision. Manville et al. (2023) argue that even when multifamily housing is legally allowed, a complicated, lengthy, or unpredictable development process may discourage it. In their study in Los Angeles, they distinguish between by-right and discretionary approval pathways and show that by-right projects were permitted 28% faster than discretionary ones, while also displaying less variation in approval times. Their findings are important because they show that permitting is not only a formal administrative step. It also affects speed, certainty, and the feasibility of housing production. As Manville et al (2023) emphasizes, slower and more uncertain approval processes can increase risks and discourage development.

The literature also shows that the effects of delay extend beyond simple scheduling problems. Long approval processes can generate uncertainty, which is often just as important as duration itself. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) explicitly analyze both planning time and planning time uncertainty in relation to housing supply. Their results

show that uncertainty in planning time has a negative effect on housing starts, meaning that unpredictable planning processes may constrain delivery even when projects are otherwise viable. They also connect planning delays to issues such as objections, institutional load, and transparency, suggesting that delays are shaped by both procedural complexity and institutional design. This makes their work highly relevant for understanding why lead times matter not only operationally, but structurally.

Earlier research has also linked land-use regulation more generally to delays and slower adjustment in housing supply. Mayer and Somerville (2000) argue that regulation can add explicit costs, uncertainty, and delays to the development process, and that regulations which lengthen development tend to have particularly strong negative effects on new construction. Their study demonstrates that regulation does not only influence the level of housing supply in the long run, but also the speed at which supply responds to changing market conditions. This is a useful point for the literature review because it shows that lead times are connected to the broader regulatory environment rather than only to project-level management. In other words, development delays can be built into the institutional and procedural structure of housing delivery (Mayer & Somerville, 2000).

In addition to planning delay in a broad sense, more recent research has focused on specifically on building permit processes as a crucial element in housing and urban development. Fuath et al. (2025) describe building permit processes as a “crucial gatekeepers” for urban development because they regulate compliance with building codes, land-use policies, and safety and environmental standards. Their comparative study of 17 European countries shows that permit processes vary widely across jurisdictions due to legal, cultural, technological, and institutional factors. This makes permit processes highly relevant to research on lead times since they are formal approval mechanisms, but also organizational processes shaped by local arrangements and external requirements. Fuath et al. (2025) therefore position permitting as both a procedural necessity and a source of variation in development performance.

Other literature highlights that building permit systems are not only important, but also highly complex. Noardo et al. (2022) define a building permit as the public authority’s authorization to begin the construction phase of a project and stress that it is part of a broader spatial planning process involving many requirements and disciplines. Their review of digital building permitting shows that the permit process itself is complex, involving multiple workflow steps, diverse expertise, and several technical and regulatory challenges. Although the article focuses on digitalization, it is useful for understanding permitting as not just a single administrative event. It is a multi-step process involving different actors, regulatory checks, and organizational interfaces, all of which may affect time and predictability.

The role of coordination is also highly visible in the literature. Bröchner et al. (2021) examine a Swedish housing program launched to accelerate urban densification and show that stronger coordination can help produce plans more rapidly, but that permit-related delays may still persist. Their study highlights a complex pattern of delay causes and shows that coordination practices were weaker in the permit process than in the planning stage. They also point out that weak coordination risks leaving important issues unresolved before the detailed planning stage is reached. This suggests that lead

times are often not the result of one single bottleneck, but of how multiple steps and actors are connected across the development process (Bröchner et al., 2021).

Another recurring point is that delays are often shaped by the degree of discretion in the system. Manville et al. (2023) show that discretionary review frequently involves negotiation, public hearings, and in some cases political votes. This can expose projects to more political or legal opposition and make approval both slower and more uncertain. Their article therefore helps explain why permitting should not be understood only as technical compliance review. It can also involve negotiation, contestation, and external scrutiny, all of which affect the duration of housing development processes. That insight is important for the broader literature review because it prepares the ground for later discussion of specific permitting issues and how they are addressed.

The literature shows that lead times and permitting in housing projects are shaped by a combination of regulation, process design, uncertainty, discretion, coordination, and institutional complexity. The studies reviewed here suggest that long lead times are not simply project-level inefficiencies; they are closely related to how planning and permitting systems are organized and how approval processes are structured. This broad understanding provides the basis for the next sections of the literature review, which move from the general issue of lead times to the Swedish context, the major permitting issues identified in research, the ways these issues are addressed, and the extent to which they vary between different types of housing projects.

4.2 The Swedish Planning and Permitting Context

The Swedish planning and permitting context is frequently described in the literature as a municipality-led and legally structured system in which housing development is strongly shaped by public planning instruments and formal decision-making procedures. Rather than being treated as a purely market-driven or technical process, housing development in Sweden is typically understood as taking place within a framework defined by the Planning and Building Act (PBL), municipal authority, and legally regulated planning stages. This makes the Swedish context particularly important when examining lead times and permitting related challenges in housing projects.

A central feature of this context is the municipal planning monopoly. Persson (2020) explains that Swedish spatial planning is mainly undertaken at the municipal level and that municipalities both initiate and adopt their own plans. He also notes that detailed development plans are main legal instrument regulating development rights, and that building permits must conform to these plans. This gives municipalities a particularly strong role in shaping the conditions under which housing development can take place. At the same time, planning is still carried out within a national legislative structure, meaning that local decision-making remains closely tied to formal legal structures (Persson, 2020).

Granath Hansson (2015) provides a more specific account of how the Swedish planning process is structured. She explains that the system is organized around two main plans. The two plans are the comprehensive plan, which is not legally binding, and the detailed development plan, which is binding and regulated development in a particular area. Building permits are generally based on the detailed development plan, which means

that the plan occupies a central position in the Swedish permitting context. Granath Hansson (2015) also shows that the detailed planning stage has increasingly become a crucial point in the housing development process, since many important project decisions are effectively settled before the project reaches the building permit stage (Granath Hansson, 2015).

The literature also suggests that the Swedish planning context has become increasingly complex. Koglin (2017) argues that Swedish spatial planning has changed significantly over time and that planning today is shaped by more actors, more collaboration, and more complicated power relations than before. Although municipalities hold formal authority over land-use planning, the process involves consultation, negotiation, and legal coordination with other actors and interests. This means that the planning and permitting context is not only rule-based, but also organizationally complex. As a result, housing development is influenced not only by formal legal requirements, but also by the practical need to coordinate across multiple stakeholders and institutional settings (Koglin, 2017).

The literature therefore presents the Swedish planning and permitting context as a structured but demanding institutional environment. The Planning and Building Act, the municipal planning monopoly, the detailed development plan, and the increasing complexity of multi-actor planning all shape the conditions under which housing projects are developed.

4.3 Major Permitting Issues in Housing Projects

This section reviews the major permitting issues identified in previous research on housing projects. It first examines the Swedish literature, where particular attention is given to issues related to legal complexity, detailed planning, coordination, and appeals. It then turns to the international literature in order to identify broader patterns and recurring permitting challenges across different contexts. The section concludes by comparing similarities and differences between the Swedish and international findings.

4.3.1 Major Permitting Issues in the Swedish Context

The Swedish literature on housing development shows that permitting-related problems are rarely described as isolated administrative delays. Instead, they are presented as part of a broader planning and development process in which legal rules, detailed planning practices, organizational structures, and actor coordination interact in ways that shape both the speed and predictability of project delivery. In this context, permitting issues are not limited to the building permit itself. They emerge across the transition from detailed planning to implementation and are often rooted in how the overall planning system is organized. Bröchner et al. (2021) make this point clearly by showing that delays in Swedish housing development are linked to a complex pattern of interrelated causes rather than to one single bottleneck.

One major theme in the Swedish literature is legal and regulatory complexity. Granath Hansson (2015) argues that obstacle to housing construction in Sweden have been intensely debated and that the town planning process has been repeatedly identified as one of the main problem areas. Her overview of reform debates shows that the shows

that the Swedish planning process is affected by multiple regulatory and procedural constraints, including complicated plans, extensive legal requirements, and far-reaching appeal rights. In this sense, the literature portrays the permitting context as rule-heavy and institutionally demanding. The process is not only formalized but also burdened by overlapping concerns linked to planning law, municipal land issues, and the broader governance of housing provision (Granath Hansson, 2015).

A closely related issue is that detailed development plans may become too rigid or too detailed. Granath Hansson (2015) highlights that one of the recurring problems in the Swedish planning process is the use of highly detailed plans, which can reduce flexibility in later project stages. This matters because it shifts many important decisions into the early planning phase and makes adaptation more difficult once a project moves closer to implementation. Bröchner et al. (2021) reinforce this argument by showing that some projects had a strong early focus on the physical design in the detailed plan rather than on identifying coordination-needs across later stages. As a result, developers were reluctant or unable to begin detailed design early, which weakened the intended parallel processing of planning and permitting. Together, these studies suggest that the way detailed plans are formulated can itself become a permitting issue, especially when detailed control creates rework, inflexibility, or delay later in the process.

Another major theme is coordination problems between actors. Bröchner et al. (2021) show that weak coordination risks leaving crucial issues unidentified and unresolved before the detailed planning stage is reached. Their findings suggest that even where municipalities try to accelerate housing delivery through collaboration and interdepartmental coordination, unresolved dependencies between actors may still slow down progress. Varela et al. (2022) report similar findings. Based on survey and interview material from Swedish municipalities, they identify lack of coordination between stakeholders as one of the most prominent reasons for delays or even failure to implement a project. They also note that different actors, including municipalities, landowners, county administrative boards, and public agencies, often work separately rather than through integrated processes. This fragmentation creates a setting where disagreements over basic issues can take significant time to resolve, especially where municipal and state interests are conflicted (Varela et al., 2022).

The literature also points to appeals and objections as a recurrent Swedish permitting problem. Granath Hansson (2015) explicitly identifies far-reaching appeal rights as one of the obstacles associated with the Swedish planning process. Although appeal rights are closely connected to legal certainty and democratic participation, they are also presented in the literature as a factor that may prolong project delivery and reduce predictability. In the Swedish context, this issue is especially important because formal plan decisions may be contested through legal channels, meaning that the process can be extended even after a municipality has completed its own planning work. In this way, permitting-related delay is not only an internal municipal issue, but also a result of how rights of objection are institutionally embedded in the planning system (Granath Hansson, 2015).

A further issue concerns lack of predictability and transparency. Granath Hansson (2015) notes that uncertainty and weak transparency in municipal development agreements have been identified as part of the broader problem structure surrounding

Swedish housing development. Bröchner et al. (2021) also point to a lack of predictability, particularly where weak comprehensive planning increases the need for coordination once detailed planning begins. Their discussion suggests that projects may enter the planning process without enough clarity about what problems will arise later, which increases the likelihood of delays. Predictability is therefore not only a matter of timing, but also of how clearly responsibilities, requirements, and likely obstacles are identified early in the process.

The Swedish literature also highlights administrative and organizational barriers. Varela et al. (2022) identify political, organizational, and technical barriers in the urban planning process. They point to lack of standard structures, framework, schedules, roles, and tools, as well as lack of resources and staff, especially in smaller municipalities. Respondents in their study also describe unclear division of roles within municipalities and the difficulty of bringing together many interests in the same planning process. These findings are important because they show that permitting issues are not only legal in nature. They are also organizational, depending on internal capacity, competence, and the ability to manage complex coordination demands.

Finally, the literature repeatedly points to uncertainty and unresolved issues between stages. Bröchner et al. (2021) show that when coordination is weak, crucial issues may remain unresolved before detailed planning begins. Varela et al. (2022) add that the legal framework appears linear on paper, while in practice the process may stop, be delayed, or restart depending on political or social factors. This mismatch between formal process design and practical implementation creates uncertainty and increases the risk of rework. The Swedish literature therefore suggests that major permitting issues are often generated not only by the existence of many rules, but by how those rules interact with fragmented coordination, unclear responsibilities, and unresolved dependencies across stages.

4.3.2 Major Permitting Issues in the International Literature

The international literature on permitting highlights several recurring problems that affect housing and construction projects. These problems are often discussed in terms of regulatory complexity, uncertainty, stakeholder coordination, and administrative capability. Rather than focusing mainly on detailed plans, as in parts of the Swedish literature, international studies often examine how approval systems function as organizational and regulatory processes that may either facilitate or delay project delivery. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) treat planning delay as a housing supply issue, while Fauth et al. (2025) describe building permit processes as complex organizational processes involving multiple stakeholders. Ullah et al. (2022) further show that, even when permitting systems are being modernized, major barriers remain in the form of legal constraints, lack of expertise, and organizational challenges.

One important theme is legal and regulatory complexity. Fauth et al. (2025) show that building permit processes vary widely across countries because they are shaped by different legal frameworks, institutional structures, and administrative traditions. This means that permitting problems are often rooted in how systems are designed rather than in individual project weaknesses. Ullah et al. (2022) similarly identify legal context as one of the main factors affecting the functioning of building permit

processes. Together, these studies suggest that regulation is not only a framework around permitting, but also a major source of complexity within it.

Another recurring issue is lack of predictability and transparency. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) argue that the main problem is not only delay itself, but uncertainty about how long planning will take. Their study shows that this uncertainty increases financial risk and reduces incentives to build. They therefore emphasize the importance of clearer rules, predefined approval periods, and more transparent processes. From this perspective, permitting problems are closely linked to weak procedural clarity and to the inability of actors to predict how the process will unfold.

The literature also identifies appeals, objections, and stakeholder conflict as major permitting issues. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) show that objections are a legitimate part of the planning process, but they may also become a major source of delay when not handled efficiently. Fauth et al. (2025) make a related point by describing permit processes as stakeholder-linked workflows in which the roles of boards, agencies, and review bodies vary considerably between countries. This affects both transparency and the speed of decision-making. In international research, stakeholder complexity therefore emerges as an important permitting issue, especially where responsibilities are distributed across several actors or where objections create procedural uncertainty (Fauth et al., 2025).

A further theme concerns administrative and organizational barriers. Ullah et al. (2022) identify complexity, organizational culture, management support, training needs, and available expertise as key factors affecting building permit processes. Their findings show that permitting systems may be slowed down not only by regulation, but also by weak organizational readiness and limited competence. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) similarly argue that planning authorities need adequate funding and stronger monitoring in order to reduce delays and improve process quality. These studies suggest that permitting problems are often linked to administrative capacity and to whether organizations have the resources and capabilities needed to manage complex review systems effectively.

Finally, international research points to uncertainty and unresolved issues between stages. Fauth et al. (2025) show that process sequencing differs substantially between jurisdictions and that these differences affect both timing and stakeholder interaction. In some systems, key actors are involved before formal submission, while in others review stages are more fragmented. This suggests that delays are not only caused by the length of individual steps, but also by how stages are connected and how responsibilities are distributed between them. In this sense, permitting issues are often created by fragmentation and weak alignment between process stages.

4.3.3 Similarities and Differences Between the Swedish and International Literature

A comparison of the Swedish and international literature shows several clear similarities. In both contexts, permitting problems are repeatedly linked to legal and regulatory complexity, coordination difficulties, appeals or objections, lack of predictability and transparency, administrative or organizational barriers, and uncertainty between stages. The literature therefore suggests that permitting delays are

rarely caused by one single factor. Instead, they tend to emerge from the interaction between formal rules, fragmented processes, and multiple actors with different responsibilities. This pattern is visible in both the Swedish studies and the international research reviewed above.

At the same time, some issues appear particularly prominent in the Swedish literature. Swedish studies place stronger emphasis on the role of the detailed development plan, especially the problem of plans becoming too detailed, too rigid, and difficult to adapt in later stages. They also highlight the importance of appeal rights and the specific institutional position of municipalities, county administrative boards, and courts within the planning system. In addition, the Swedish literature pays particular attention to weak coordination between municipalities and state bodies, as well as uncertainty created by fragmented responsibilities across planning stages.

The international literature, by contrast, places somewhat greater emphasis on differences in process architecture, stakeholder workflows, and organizational capability across permitting systems. It focuses more explicitly on how approval systems vary between jurisdictions and how legal, institutional, and administrative design shape timing and efficiency. The main difference, then, seems to lie less in the existence of problems and more in how those problems are structured by context, system design, and actor configuration.

4.4 How Permitting Issues are Addressed

This section reviews how previous research has addressed permitting-related problems in housing development. It first examines approaches discussed in the Swedish literature, including both broader process-oriented responses and the more specific example of BoStad2021. It then turns to the international literature in order to highlight additional strategies for reducing delays, improving coordination, and increasing predictability in the permitting process. This section concludes by summarizing the main approaches identified across the literature.

4.4.1 Approaches to Addressing Permitting Issues in the Swedish Literature

The Swedish literature does not only identify major permitting-related problems; it also discusses a range of ways in which these problems have been addressed or are proposed to be addressed. A useful pattern in this literature is that responses are described at two levels. First, there are approaches already being implemented in practice, such as improved coordination, digitalization efforts, and organizational adjustments within municipalities. Second, there are reform-oriented proposals aimed at changing the planning system itself through facilitated procedures, new incentives, and different allocations of responsibility. Taken together, these studies suggest that the Swedish response to permitting issues has developed as a combination of practical process improvement and broader institutional reform.

A first set of responses concerns changes already being implemented in the planning process itself, particularly through digitalization and process support. Varela et al. (2022) show that Swedish municipalities have already introduced a range of digital tools, especially GIS and CAD-based systems, and that more advanced tools are beginning to appear in some municipalities. Their discussion makes clear that

digitalization is not presented simply as a technological trend, but as a response to the increasing complexity of urban planning. In the literature, digitalization is seen as having the potential to support more data-driven, coordinated, and efficient decision-making. This is important because many of the permitting issues identified in the previous sections, such as fragmented workflows, lack of common structures, and unclear coordination, are partly addressed through more integrated digital processes (Varela et al., 2022).

At the same time, Varela et al. (2022) are careful not to present digitalization as a simple solution. They emphasize that institutional and organizational changes are necessary if digital tools are to improve the planning process in practice. According to their findings, municipalities still face major political, organizational, and technical barriers, including unclear roles, lack of common frameworks, insufficient resources, and the absence of shared data platforms. This means that the Swedish literature tends to frame digitalization not as a stand-alone remedy, but as part of a broader effort to create more structured, coordinated, and transparent planning processes. In this sense, the response to permitting issues is not merely to add new tools, but to reorganize the process around clearer structures and more consistent information flows (Varela et al., 2022).

A second group of responses focuses on coordination and organizational adaptation. Koglin (2017) describes Swedish spatial planning as increasingly shaped by collaborative approaches and shifting power relations, where planners have moved from being autonomous planners to becoming coordinators and collaborators. Although his article is not primarily about solutions, it still suggests that one existing way of dealing with growing complexity is to rely more on collaboration across organizational boundaries. In practice, this means that Swedish planning increasingly addresses permitting-related problems through broader actor engagement, negotiation, and inter-organizational coordination. However, Koglin also shows that this response is ambivalent. Collaboration may help address fragmented governance, but it may also make planning more complex and place new demands on planners. The literature therefore suggests that coordination is both a necessary response to permitting problems and a source of new challenges in itself (Koglin, 2017).

Granath Hansson (2015) provides a more explicit discussion of reforms that have already been implemented or investigated in the Swedish planning system. She notes that the center-right government identified a large number of processes in need of reform and that many state investigations had led to proposals intended to improve the planning process. Her article shows that the Swedish debate has already moved beyond merely describing problems. Reform has for some time been treated as an important policy response to housing shortage and slow development. In this literature, responses include efforts to strengthen municipal housing strategies, improve regional cooperation, reconsider appeal procedures, and address weaknesses in development agreements and land allocation practices. What is striking is that many of these responses aim at making the process more predictable and better prepared rather than simply making it shorter. This indicates that Swedish research does not frame permitting reform only as acceleration, but also as an effort to improve consistency, transparency, and institutional readiness (Granath Hansson, 2015).

Beyond already implemented changes, the Swedish literature also discusses proposals for further reform. Granath Hansson (2017) is particularly important here because she

moves from diagnosing the weaknesses of the Swedish planning process to considering what kinds of reform might reduce the uncertainty, duration, and cost of residential planning. Drawing on the German context as a comparative reference point, she proposes a facilitated and accelerated development planning procedure for housing projects, the introduction of greater private initiative in development planning, and improvements in the organization and incentives of planning authorities. These proposals are especially relevant because they address several of the key issues identified in previous research, such as lengthy procedures, weak capacity in planning authorities, and the need to separate more complex cases from simpler housing cases that could potentially be processed more efficiently (Granath Hansson, 2017).

A central idea in Granath Hansson's (2017) article is that reform should not only focus on changing legislation in the abstract, but also on how planning work is organized in practice. She suggests that planning authorities with limited capacity should concentrate their active planning efforts on more complex projects and reduce their involvement in decision-making in less complex cases. This proposal is significant because it connects legal reform to organizational prioritization and capacity management. It also reflects a broader pattern in the Swedish literature: permitting issues are addressed not only through calls for fewer rules, but through attempts to make the existing system work more selectively, predictably, and efficiently. In this way, the literature frames reform as a question of both institutional design and administrative organization (Granath Hansson, 2017).

Another recurring proposal in the Swedish literature concerns the need for clearer procedures, stronger incentives, and more transparent conditions. Granath Hansson (2015) highlights that lack of predictability and transparency in development agreements and land allocation has been identified as a problem, which implies that one route to improvement is to make these parts of the process more open and standardized. Varela et al. (2022) point in a similar direction when they identify the lack of standard structures, schedules, roles, and tools as barriers to both digitalization and the planning process more broadly. The literature therefore suggests that a key way of addressing permitting issues is to reduce ambiguity, whether through clearer agreements, more standardized internal routines, or shared frameworks for communication and decision-making (Varela et al., 2022).

Taken together, the Swedish literature presents a relatively clear picture of how permitting issues are addressed. Existing responses include greater use of digital tools, stronger emphasis on coordination, and continued public debate and policy attention to reforming the planning process. Proposed responses go further by calling for facilitated procedures for housing projects, better organization and incentives in planning authorities, more private initiative in planning, and greater transparency and standardization in municipal practice. The common thread across these approaches is that permitting problems are not addressed through one single remedy. Instead, the literature suggests that they require a combination of organizational adjustment, process clarification, and institutional reform. This provides a useful transition to the next subsection, where a more concrete Swedish example, namely BoStad2021, is examined as a practical attempt to accelerate planning and permitting in housing development.

4.4.2 BoStad2021 as a Swedish Example of Accelerated Planning and Permitting

A particularly relevant Swedish example of how permitting issues have been addressed in practice is BoStad2021, a housing program launched in Gothenburg with the aim of accelerating the production of 7,000 additional dwellings by linking housing delivery to the city's 400-year anniversary. The program is highly relevant in this literature review because it did not merely propose general reforms, it attempted to address planning and permitting delays through concrete organizational and procedural changes. As Bröchner et al. (2021) explain, the program was designed to accelerate the process from the inception of planning to the award of building permits, while the broader follow-up research by Svensson et al. (2022) shows how the program was later evaluated in relation to time, quality, and implementation.

The core idea of BoStad2021 was that delays could be addressed through stronger coordination, closer collaboration, and more parallel processing than in ordinary planning practice. Bröchner et al. (2021) identify three main acceleration strategies which are interdepartmental coordination, collaboration with developers, and parallel processing of plans and permits. The program therefore addressed several of the major issues discussed earlier in the literature review, especially fragmented coordination, weak links between planning and permitting, and the sequential organization of the development process. Instead of treating these issues as isolated bottlenecks, BoStad2021 attempted to restructure the process itself.

One of the most concrete measures was the strengthening of internal municipal coordination. According to Bröchner et al. (2021), Gothenburg created a group of three project managers from different departments and physically co-located staff to support closer interdepartmental collaboration. The program also attempted to move from sequential to parallel processing, especially between detailed planning and building permit work. Building permit officials were brought in as advisers already during the detailed planning stage, which was intended to reduce later rework and improve continuity between stages. This is important because it illustrates a practical response to one of the recurring permitting issues in the Swedish literature which is unresolved issues emerging too late in the process.

BoStad2021 also addressed permitting issues through closer collaboration with developers. Bröchner et al. (2021) describe how the city organized collaboration through several formal fora, including a Coordination Group, Project Groups, and Working Groups. Developers were encouraged to organize themselves, and collaboration agreements were signed between the city and each developer. This indicates that the program did not rely solely on faster internal municipal work, it also attempted to improve coordination across public and private actors. In addition, developers engaged in pre-planning dialogues with residents beyond the minimum required in the formal process. These early dialogues were intended to reduce later conflict and resistance, thereby addressing the risk of objections and implementation delays.

The literature suggests that these strategies had mixed but important results. Bröchner et al. (2021) report that BoStad2021 did accelerate the planning stage, but that the permit process remained more difficult to speed up. This is reinforced by Svensson et

al. (2022), who note that while the planning process was accelerated by roughly twenty per cent, the average duration of building permit processes was much longer than intended. In other words, BoStad2021 appears to have been more successful in addressing planning-related delays than permitting-related delays. This makes the program particularly interesting in the present study, since it shows that some permitting issues can be mitigated through coordination and project organization, while others remain more resistant to change.

The follow-up research also highlights that acceleration was not pursued without concern for quality. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2024) show that the program had two formal deadlines, one for plan approval and one for project completion, and that 24 of the development plans met the original planning deadline. Svensson et al. (2022) further state that the quality of BoStad2021 projects was intended to be at least as high as in other comparable infill projects. Their later assessments found similar general quality levels, even though some projects still suffered from traffic problems and insufficient green and play spaces. This is an important point in the literature, because it suggests that accelerated processes were not necessarily understood as a trade-off with quality, even if some spatial and design limitations remained.

At the same time, the program also revealed clear limitations and new tensions. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) show that informal early dialogues with residents did not eliminate complaints. Their study of the 30 BoStad2021 plans found that 647 individuals submitted complaints, despite developers having supported early dialogue. The authors note that swift planning may increase the risk of complaints reaching the courts and delaying implementation. They also argue that early dialogues should not be too narrow or site-specific, but should instead address a broader range of development issues and urban consequences. This makes BoStad2021 a particularly useful example in the literature because it shows both the value and the limits of accelerated planning. It shows that attempts to move faster can still generate conflict if public concerns are not addressed in a sufficiently broad and credible way.

The broader evaluation of the program produced several practical recommendations. Svensson et al. (2022) argue that the fragmented development process should be replaced by a process management model supported by digital tools, allowing projects to be monitored throughout the full process from start to completion. They also recommend a more unitary municipal project organization, with a project manager operating across departments for each development project. In addition, they suggest that plans highly dependent on regional and central public authorities should be avoided if rapid processing is the goal, and that larger and more coherent areas of expansion may be preferable to small projects on unsuitable sites. These recommendations are important because they move beyond description and point to how Swedish municipalities may continue to address permitting issues in practice.

BoStad2021 therefore stands out in the Swedish literature as a practical experiment in accelerated planning and permitting. It addressed permitting issues through stronger coordination, earlier collaboration, attempts at parallel processing, and more explicit political prioritization. At the same time, the literature shows that acceleration did not remove all bottlenecks. Permit durations remained longer than intended, complaints still delayed implementation, and some project types proved less suitable for rapid delivery. This makes BoStad2021 a valuable example not because it solved the problem

completely, but because it shows how permitting issues can be actively addressed through process design, while also revealing the limits of acceleration in a legally structured and multi-actor planning environment.

4.4.3 How Permitting Issues are Addressed in the International Literature

The international literature suggests that permitting issues are addressed through a combination of process simplification, greater predictability, and clearer coordination between actors. Rather than relying on one general solution, the studies reviewed here point to a set of approaches that aim to reduce uncertainty, shorten approval times, and make permitting systems easier for both authorities and developers to manage. In this literature, reforms are often presented as responses to specific weaknesses in the approval process, especially discretion, fragmented stakeholder roles, and low transparency (Fauth et al., 2025).

One important approach is to reduce the role of discretionary approval and create more opportunities for by-right permitting. Manville et al. (2023) show that by-right approvals in Los Angeles were not only faster than discretionary approvals but also less variable in duration. On this basis, they recommend that planners create more opportunities for multifamily housing to be permitted by right. Their argument is that a more rule based process can improve certainty, reduce carrying costs, and make housing development more feasible. This is an important international response to permitting issues because it directly addresses two recurring problems identified earlier in the literature, namely long approval times and uncertainty about outcomes (Manville et al., 2023).

A second major approach concerns streamlining the planning and approval process. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) argue that policy should focus less on delay in the abstract and more on reducing uncertainty and increasing transparency. They propose a process built around clear milestones, predetermined approval periods, and a clear set of rules. They also suggest that plans which deviate from planning law should be directed into a separate track so that they do not slow down the rest of the pipeline. This approach is particularly relevant because it responds to several issues at once. It aims to make the process more predictable, deal with objections more efficiently, and reduce ambiguity for developers and planning authorities alike. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) also stress the value of preliminary dialogue between developers, municipalities, and planning authorities in order to reduce later conflict.

The international literature also highlights administrative capacity and stakeholder coordination as key areas for improvement. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) argue that planning authorities need sufficient funding and closer monitoring if delays are to be reduced effectively. They also recommend better education and guidance for developers so that submitted plans are more mature and better aligned with official expectations. This is important because it frames solutions not only in terms of legal reform but also in terms of institutional capacity and competence.

A related response is found in Fauth et al. (2025), who emphasize the need to understand permit processes as organizational business processes involving multiple stakeholders. Their comparative study suggests that the first step toward improvement

is a better understanding of how current systems actually function. By mapping permit processes across Europe, they show that differences in legal frameworks, institutional structures, and local practices shape how permitting works in practice. This implies that international solutions often begin with process analysis and comparison, followed by efforts to streamline workflows, improve service provision, and support mutual learning across jurisdictions. Fauth et al. (2025) also point to ongoing interest in digitising permit systems as a way to improve process performance, while recognizing that local conditions still shape what kinds of change are possible.

4.4.4 Summary of Main Approaches in the Literature

The literature reviewed in this chapter shows that permitting issues are generally addressed through a combination of process improvement, organizational adaptation, and institutional reform. In the Swedish literature, much attention is given to stronger coordination, digitalization, clearer procedures, and reforms aimed at increasing predictability and transparency in the planning and permitting process (Granath Hansson, 2015). These approaches are not presented as isolated technical fixes, but as responses to broader problems of fragmentation, weak coordination, limited administrative capacity, and uncertainty between stages. Varela et al. (2022) similarly suggest that organizational structures, common frameworks, and better information management are important if planning processes are to function more effectively in practice.

A more concrete Swedish example is provided by BoStad2021, where acceleration was pursued through stronger interdepartmental coordination, closer collaboration with developers, and attempts at parallel processing (Bröchner et al., 2021). At the same time, the literature shows that acceleration does not remove all bottlenecks. Some issues, particularly those connected to appeals, implementation, and coordination across actors, appear more resistant to change than others. This suggests that responses to permitting problems must address not only the speed of the process, but also the institutional conditions that shape how the process works.

The international literature points in a similar direction, although it places somewhat greater emphasis on process simplification, reduced discretion, and more predictable approval pathways. Studies such as Rubin and Felsenstein (2019), Manville et al. (2023), and Fauth et al. (2025) indicate that permitting issues are often addressed through clearer rules, predefined milestones, stronger administrative capacity, and earlier dialogue between stakeholders. International research also highlights the importance of understanding permitting as a structured workflow rather than as a single approval decision.

A recurring finding across both the Swedish and international literature is that permitting issues are most often addressed through a combination of improved coordination, clearer procedures, and efforts to reduce uncertainty in the approval process. No single measure appears sufficient on its own. Instead, the literature suggests that permitting problems are handled most effectively when legal, organizational, and procedural measures are combined. This provides a useful basis for the next section, which examines whether the character of permitting issues differs depending on the type of housing project being developed.

4.5 Variation Between Different Types of Housing Projects

This section reviews whether permitting issues are described in the literature as similar across housing projects, or whether they vary depending on project type and permitting conditions. The chapter first identifies how previous research distinguishes between different forms of housing development and different approval pathways. It then examines how permitting issues such as delay, uncertainty, coordination problems, and objection appear to vary across these categories. In this way, the section addressed whether permitting challenges should be understood as general features of housing development or as issues shaped by the specific characteristics of different projects.

4.5.1 Types of Housing Projects and Permitting Conditions

The literature reviewed for this section suggests that permitting conditions are not discussed as uniform across all housing developments. Instead, previous research distinguishes between different types of housing projects and different approval conditions, and these distinctions shape how projects move through planning and permitting systems. In both Swedish and international research, variation appears in relation to project form, project size, urban location, and the type of approval pathway that a project must follow. This subsection therefore focuses on how the literature categorizes housing projects and how these categories are linked to different permitting conditions.

One important distinction in the Swedish literature is between housing projects and other forms of urban development. Granath Hansson (2017) argues that housing projects tend to be more similar to one another and less complicated than many other developments. On that basis, she proposes that housing development could be treated through a facilitated planning procedure designed specifically for residential projects. This distinction is important because it implies that project type matters already at the level of legal and procedural design. Residential projects are described not only as a policy priority, but also as a category that may justify different permitting conditions from more complex or mixed development projects.

Granath Hansson (2017) also points to variation within housing development itself. Her discussion of a facilitated housing development plan suggests that some residential projects are simpler and more standardized, while others may require fuller procedures because of environmental concerns, site conditions, or other complications. She argues that when planning authorities have limited capacity, more active planning effort should be concentrated on complex projects, while less complex residential projects could be handled through more selective and less extensive procedures. This means that the literature does not treat housing as one single permitting category. Rather, project complexity becomes part of the distinction between different types of housing cases and their corresponding approval conditions (Granath Hansson, 2017).

A second key distinction in the Swedish literature concerns infill projects. Bröchner et al. (2021) focus specifically on urban housing infill and show that this type of project has particular permitting conditions because it is carried out within already developed urban environments. Infill projects are often located in areas with existing residents, transport systems, public space pressures, and multiple municipal departments involved in the process. These conditions make infill different from more straightforward

expansion projects. The article therefore treats infill housing as a project type with its own coordination demands and planning constraints, which is important for the following subsection on how permitting issues vary across project types.

The Swedish literature also distinguishes between different subtypes of infill projects. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) analyses 30 Gothenburg infill plans and show that complaints varied with factors such as urban context, building type, density, and scale of infill. Their cases include situations where neighboring semi-detached houses were affected, as well as projects involving housing cooperatives and parking restructuring. This is useful because it shows that even within a single broad category such as suburban infill, the permitting environment differs depending on the local physical setting and the kinds of neighboring actors involved. Project type in the literature is therefore not only a matter of tenure or dwelling form, but also of spatial context and stakeholder exposure.

Another important distinction, especially in the international literature, concerns approval pathways rather than physical project form. Manville et al. (2023) distinguish between by-right and discretionary multifamily housing approvals. In by-right processes, developers can apply directly for a building permit if objective requirements are met. In discretionary processes, a public body must vote to entitle the proposal before it can proceed to permit review. This distinction is central because it shows that permitting conditions may vary even when the housing product is similar. In other words, two multifamily housing projects may differ less by form than by the decision structure that governs their approval. Manville et al. therefore treat approval pathway as a defining condition that shapes the timing and predictability of housing development (Manville et al., 2023).

Manville et al. (2023) also make clear that project type and approval condition interact with one another. Their study focuses on multifamily housing in Los Angeles and notes that analyses of approval pathways are often confounded by project size and complexity. This is an important observation because it suggests that variation in permitting cannot be understood through a single variable. Multifamily projects, infill projects, larger projects, and projects processed through discretionary review may overlap, creating different bundles of permitting conditions. The literature therefore points to the need to consider both the substantive type of project and the institutional route through which it is approved.

The sources used in this section therefore identify several relevant categories for the analysis of housing projects and permitting conditions. These include housing versus other developments, more complex versus less complex residential projects, infill projects as a distinct urban development type, and by-right versus discretionary approval pathways. Some studies also suggest variation related to density, building type, project scale, and the kinds of neighboring actors affected by the development. These distinctions provide the basis for the next subsection, which examines more directly how permitting issues such as objections, coordination problems, uncertainty, and delay vary between these project types and approval conditions.

4.5.2 How Permitting Issues Vary Between Different Types of Housing Projects

The literature suggests that permitting issues are not evenly distributed across housing projects. Instead, they vary depending on project type, urban context, project scale, and the approval pathway through which the project moves. Building on the distinctions introduced in the previous subsection, this section focuses on how the character of permitting problems changes across different housing projects rather than assuming that all residential development faces the same conditions. In both the Swedish and international literature, variation is most clearly visible in relation to complexity, stakeholder exposure, and the degree of discretion built into the approval process.

A first pattern in the literature is that infill projects appear to face particularly demanding permitting conditions. Bröchner et al. (2021) show that urban housing infills in Gothenburg were associated with substantial coordination challenges, especially where planning and building permit work were expected to proceed in parallel. Their analysis suggests that infill projects often involve multiple municipal departments, complicated site conditions, and dependencies that are difficult to identify early. This means that permitting issues in infill development are often tied to unresolved matters between stages, weak coordination, and the challenge of integrating permit considerations into the planning process from the outset. In this type of project, the main issue is not only formal review time, but the number of interactions and adjustments required before formal approval can move forward (Bröchner et al., 2021).

The Swedish literature also indicates that different forms of infill may generate different kinds of objections and delay risks. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) show that complaints against infill plans in Gothenburg varied with factors such as urban context, building type, density, and scale of infill. This is important because it shows that variation is not limited to a contrast between infill and greenfield development. Even within infill development, certain project types appear more exposed to conflict than others. Projects close to existing low-rise residential areas or projects that imply significant change in neighborhood character may create stronger resistance than projects that fit more smoothly into the surrounding environment. In such cases, permitting issues are more closely linked to complaints, public resistance, and implementation risk than to technical permitting alone (Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al., 2025).

A second pattern concerns the role of project complexity. Granath Hansson (2017) argues that housing projects should not always be treated in the same way as more complex developments, because many residential projects are more standardized and less complicated than other forms of urban development. On that basis, she proposes that less complex housing projects could be processed through more facilitated procedures, while planning authorities should concentrate more effort on complex cases. This is highly relevant to the present section because it implies that permitting problems are partly shaped by whether a project is institutionally treated as complex or routine. More complex projects are likely to generate more extensive review, more coordination needs, and more opportunities for delay, while simpler projects may be better suited to standardized or accelerated procedures (Granath Hansson, 2017).

The international literature identifies a similar but more explicit distinction in terms of approval pathways. Manville et al. (2023) show that multifamily housing projects permitted by right moved significantly faster than projects requiring discretionary approval. They also show that by-right approvals were less variable in duration, which suggests that these projects were exposed to less uncertainty during the process. This is important because it demonstrates that permitting issues may vary even between projects that are otherwise similar in housing form. What changes is not necessarily the physical character of the project, but the procedural route through which it must pass. Projects that require discretionary approval are more exposed to hearings, political judgement, negotiation, and contestation. As a result, they face different permitting risks than projects that can proceed through a more rule-based and administrative route (Manville et al., 2023).

This distinction also helps explain why uncertainty varies between project types. In projects that depend on discretionary review, delay is not only a matter of processing time. It is also a matter of unpredictability, since developers may have less certainty about how the process will unfold and whether opposition will alter the outcome. By contrast, projects that fit within clearly defined rules and can be processed by right are more likely to face a narrower set of issues, even if they are not entirely free from delay. Manville et al. (2023) therefore suggest that the type of permitting condition attached to a project shapes not only how long approval takes, but also how stable and predictable the process becomes.

The literature also indicates that variation in permitting issues is connected to actor structure and stakeholder exposure. Infill projects, as discussed by Bröchner et al. (2021) and Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025), are often located in already developed urban areas where many interests are already present. This increases the likelihood of neighborhood concerns, objections, and coordination demands. In contrast, the distinction highlighted by Granath Hansson (2017) suggests that some housing projects may be relatively straightforward precisely because they involve fewer conflicts, less site-specific negotiation, and lower procedural complexity. This means that the type of project affects not only its legal pathway, but also how many actors become actively involved and what kinds of permitting issues become dominant.

Another important point is that project categories may overlap. A project may be an infill project, a multifamily project, and a discretionary project at the same time. This combination can intensify permitting issues because several types of complexity are layered together. Bröchner et al. (2021) show that even attempts to accelerate urban infill planning may struggle when multiple dependencies remain unresolved. Manville et al. (2023) show that discretionary pathways create additional timing and uncertainty burdens. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) add that certain urban and physical contexts increase the risk of complaints. These studies therefore suggest that variation in permitting issues is not caused by one single characteristic, but by how different project conditions combine in practice.

The literature reviewed in this section therefore shows that permitting issues vary across housing projects in meaningful ways. Infill projects appear especially exposed to coordination problems, neighborhood objections, and context-specific conflict. More complex projects tend to require more intensive review and greater administrative effort. Projects subject to discretionary approval face more uncertainty and a higher risk

of delay than projects permitted by right. Simpler and more standardized housing projects, by contrast, may be better suited to facilitated procedures and more predictable approval pathways. This variation is important for the overall study because it suggests that permitting issues should not be analyzed as uniform across residential development, but as shaped by project type, procedural route, and the institutional conditions surrounding each case.

5 Empirical Data

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the interviews. The analysis is based on eight interviews with respondents working in different parts of the Swedish housing and permitting system. To protect anonymity, the interviewees are referred to as Respondent 1 to Respondent 8. The material includes perspectives from municipal planning, municipal housing development, project implementation, building permit and planning practice, research, and politics. This spread is important because the chapter examines how lead times, planning processes, permitting-related challenges, and project differences are understood across the housing development system, not from one position only.

The chapter is organized by theme. It focuses on perceptions of lead times, the planning and permitting process in practice, key permitting-related challenges, strategies used to deal with these challenges, and differences across housing project types. The goal is not to present each interview one by one. The goal is to bring the material together and show recurring themes, differences in emphasis, and places where respondents describe the same process in different ways.

The interviews do not describe long lead times as the result of one single cause. Delay grows through the interaction of legal requirements, weak coordination between organizations, political intervention, stakeholder influence, appeals, step by step working methods, land conditions, and project complexity. Several respondents stressed that the main problem is not only that projects take a long time. The problem is also that the process often includes long periods with very little movement. Projects move forward, stop, get revised, get appealed, get reconsidered, or change direction. Lead time is not only a question of calendar duration. It is also a question of how the process develops, where momentum is lost, and which parts of the process seem to create value in relation to the time they take.

A short introduction to the respondents helps explain the basis of the analysis. Respondent 1 was a senior architect and project leader in municipal planning with long experience of detailed development plans. Respondent 2 worked in municipal housing development and had long experience of driving housing related detailed plans. Respondent 3 worked as a project leader in the municipal exploitation organization and had direct experience from Bostad 2021. Respondent 4 contributed a research perspective linked to the study of Bostad 2021 and housing lead times. Respondent 5 had experience from small municipality planning, building permit practice, municipal planning, developer side work, and project management in a public development organization. Respondent 6 represented a senior professional perspective with broad knowledge of planning and urban development practice. Respondent 7 contributed a political and research informed perspective based on work in the exploitation committee and doctoral research in urban studies. Respondent 8 contributed an additional political perspective based on work in the exploitation committee, municipal boards, and regional development work connected to urban development and mobility.

The chapter stays close to the interview material. It follows the structure of the respondents accounts, the links between themes, and the practical distinctions they make.

5.1 Perceptions of Lead Times in Housing Projects

Lead times in housing projects were often experienced as very long, especially in the detailed development plan process. Even relatively limited projects could remain in process for several years. One example was a so called “frimärksplan” involving one property and a relatively small land use change. The case followed the comprehensive plan and concerned a limited site, though the process had started around September 2021 and was expected to reach legal force about five years later. A duration closer to one and a half years was described as much more reasonable in that case (Respondent 2).

The same case was not described as unusually controversial, technically extreme, or politically explosive. That was part of why the duration stood out so clearly. The project was small in scale, the land use change was limited, and the case followed the broader planning direction already in place. Even under those conditions, the process was still expected to take around five years. That kind of timeframe was described as hard to accept in relation to the size and character of the project. The contrast between the limited scope of the case and the length of the process was central in the way this example was presented (Respondent 2).

That same kind of duration was connected to the practical difficulty of managing a project over time. A project that remained in process for several years became harder to control, harder to predict, and more exposed to changed conditions. Costs could rise, political preferences could shift, market conditions could change, and assumptions that looked stable in the beginning could become uncertain later in the process. Time was therefore experienced as something that changed the conditions of the project while the project was still moving through the system (Respondent 2).

Long duration was also described as affecting the level of security around a project. The longer the process continued, the more difficult it became to rely on the conditions that had existed at the beginning. A project could be prepared under one set of assumptions and then continue under another. In that description, time did not only mean waiting. Time meant that the project remained open to change while money, work, and attention were already tied to it. This was described as one of the reasons why long lead times created frustration from a housing development perspective (Respondent 2).

Long duration was also linked to the internal organization of planning work. Administrative routines and the sequencing of investigations were described as important parts of why the process became long. When investigations were handled one after another instead of in parallel, substantial time could pass before consultation was even reached. Long preparatory phases before consultation were described as familiar, especially where many issues remained inside internal handling for a long period before the proposal moved forward (Respondent 1).

A related issue concerned the amount of work kept inside the process before the proposal reached consultation. Too many questions could remain in internal preparation because the organization tried to solve them before exposing the proposal to broader reactions. Consultation itself was described as one of the stages where important

comments and clarifications entered. Keeping the project too long in internal preparation therefore meant that those reactions were delayed as well (Respondent 1).

This meant that part of the lead time built up before the proposal had even reached one of the stages where outside comments could start to shape the process more concretely. Long duration was therefore described not only in relation to what happened after consultation or during formal decisions, but also in relation to the long period before the proposal was exposed more broadly. In that account, the sequence of work inside the organization was one reason why time accumulated early (Respondent 1).

The same description also pointed to the practical difficulty of trying to make the proposal too complete before moving it forward. If the organization waited too long in order to solve every issue before consultation, the project could remain in early preparation for an extended period. Questions that might have become clearer through consultation were instead kept inside internal work for longer. The length of the process was therefore connected not only to the amount of required work, but also to when that work was done and how long the proposal was held back (Respondent 1).

Planning was also described as the stage that took the most time within Bostad 2021. Part of that duration was tied to investigations needed to determine whether a plan was feasible in legal, technical, and practical terms. Time in planning was therefore connected to the need to test whether the proposal actually worked before moving forward. The duration of planning was not spoken about in the same way as waiting in queues or repeated redesign. It was tied to feasibility work and clarification of conditions (Respondent 3).

That description placed emphasis on the amount of checking and clarification needed before a project could move further. The work was not described as abstract. It concerned whether the proposal was workable in practice, whether it could meet legal and technical demands, and whether the project could stand on firmer ground before later stages. In that sense, part of the long duration in planning was described as belonging to the work of establishing whether the project could proceed at all (Respondent 3).

The same point also made the planning phase look different from later delays in the process. Time used to determine feasibility was described in relation to what had to be known before moving ahead. This included technical conditions, legal conditions, and practical conditions. The planning stage was still described as very time consuming, though not every part of that duration was spoken about in the same way. Some of it was linked directly to the need for more knowledge before the project could continue (Respondent 3).

Close to thirty different causes of delay had appeared across the projects studied in Bostad 2021. Delay was therefore not reduced to one or two repeated explanations. Different projects had been delayed for different reasons, and several of those reasons could also appear in the same project over time (Respondent 4).

This description made the picture of lead times broader. Delay was not presented as following one stable path across all projects. One project could be slowed by one set of conditions, while another could be slowed by something else. A project could also move

through several different kinds of delay at different stages. The point here was not to identify one cause above all others, but to describe a broad spread of causes appearing across the material connected to Bostad 2021 (Respondent 4).

Time spent on investigations, legal review, environmental assessment, coordination, consultation, and design development was described differently from time spent waiting between actors, moving questions across organizations, redoing work, or handling late changes. Long periods with little visible movement were described as especially difficult. Queues, repeated redesign, and prolonged circulation of issues were mentioned in that context (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

This difference mattered in the way the length of the process was talked about. Some parts of the process were described in relation to work that had to be done. Other parts were described in relation to time that built up because the project was waiting, moving between actors, or returning to issues that had already been worked on. Long stretches with limited visible movement were described in sharper terms than time connected to work that clearly moved the project forward (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

The boundary around the term lead time was also wider than the formal statutory planning phase in some parts of the material. Delays could exist before formal plan work began and after legal force had been reached. The time from early project thinking to completed housing could therefore be much longer than what appeared in descriptions limited to the detailed development plan alone (Respondent 6).

That broader description meant that the experience of long lead times was not only tied to the formal planning document itself. Time could build up before the formal process had started, for example while the project was being prepared or discussed, and time could continue to build after legal force, during later steps connected to implementation and delivery. In that account, a narrow focus on the plan alone did not capture the whole duration that actors were dealing with (Respondent 6).

Lead times were also described from a political perspective in relation to housing supply and the wider development of the city. An earlier period with around five to six thousand completed dwellings per year was contrasted with a current level closer to around fifteen hundred. Long duration was described not only as a problem for housing provision, but also as something that delayed the improvement of streets, parks, infrastructure, and the broader work of building the city together through exploitation. When projects delayed, both housing supply and urban development were affected (Respondent 8).

Very long duration in relatively straightforward projects was described in sharper terms. Longer duration in projects involving central urban locations, many actors, infrastructure implications, environmental sensitivity, or strong conflict was spoken about in relation to the amount of work and coordination required. The same material still included repeated descriptions of long periods where the process moved very little, including in projects that did not appear unusually complicated (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

This meant that the judgment of whether a lead time felt reasonable or unreasonable was linked to the character of the project. A long process in a highly complex setting

was not described in the same way as a long process in a limited and more straightforward case. Even so, long stretches with little movement were described as difficult in both kinds of situations. The presence of complexity did not remove the experience of waiting, delay, or slow progress (Respondent 1; Respondent 2).

Substantial investments could already be tied up while a project was still moving through a long process. In those cases, time affected uncertainty, exposure, and feasibility directly. The longer the process lasted, the more open the project remained to changed conditions and accumulated risk (Respondent 2).

A long process therefore affected more than the schedule. Work could already have been done. Money could already have been committed. Expectations could already have been formed around the project. At the same time, the project could still be waiting for the next step, still be exposed to change, and still be open to interruption. That was one of the practical realities attached to long lead times. (Respondent 2).

A different side of the timing question was also raised. There could already be a large number of dwellings in legally valid plans that were not being built because of market conditions. Delay was therefore not described only inside the municipal process. Time could also continue to pass after formal planning had been completed because projects remained inactive even when they were ready to move further (Respondent 8).

5.2 The Planning and Permitting Process in Practice

The process did not move in a straight line from initiation to consultation, review, adoption, legal force, and implementation. Long preparatory phases, repeated returns to earlier questions, late changes, internal circulation, and continued interaction between several actors were part of how the work moved forward.

A long stretch before consultation was described by Respondent 1. Projects could remain in preparatory work for a long time before they reached consultation, especially when investigations were handled one after another instead of in parallel. Many issues stayed inside the organization and were addressed step by step. A large amount of time could pass before the proposal had even entered one of the stages where broader comments and reactions became visible.

The same account also placed consultation in a central position. Consultation could not simply wait until every issue had been fully solved. Important information, reactions, and clarifications entered at that stage. Some questions became clearer only after the proposal had been sent out and discussed more openly. Keeping the project too long in internal preparation meant that these reactions were delayed as well (Respondent 1).

Consultation was also described in very concrete terms by Respondent 5. It included publication, public meetings, and the gathering of comments from the public. At that stage, the proposal became visible in a broader setting, and comments from residents, authorities, and other actors entered more directly. The proposal was no longer only an internal planning document. It became something that had to be handled in relation to outside reactions.

The movement from consultation to review was described as delicate. A project could be far advanced and still become unstable again if new requirements or new political preferences appeared. Respondent 2 described projects that had already moved forward and still faced major disruption before review. Substantial work could already have been carried out, though the project still remained open to change.

Political handling entered at several points. According to Respondent 5, the detailed development plan process included many moments and many decisions. Politics did not appear only at the end. Political influence was present at key stages, including between consultation and review and later between review and adoption. A project could advance through one stage and still return to discussion because another decision had to be made.

Respondent 8 described politics more as setting conditions, resources, leadership, priorities and guidelines, while the day to day movement in individual projects depended mainly on officials and developers. Progress in each project was therefore not described as something politicians managed directly at every step, even though projects could still return to politics at important points in the process.

The ordinary process was also contrasted with Bostad 2021. Respondent 3 referred to close coordination between exploitation, traffic, park and nature, and planning. In that setting, work was described as concentrated and focused. After returning to ordinary work, the difference in tempo was described as striking. The ordinary process appeared much slower because it lacked the same pace, the same concentration, and the same collective attention.

A similar point appeared in the way work across functions was described. Respondent 1 referred to the difference between working as a genuinely tight group and working in a more spread out way across different parts of the organization. Respondent 5 also described many interfaces in the process. Delay could build up because comments moved between departments, technical questions appeared late, internal anchoring took time, and implementation issues had not been handled early enough.

That kind of movement between functions did not only concern one office sending something to another. It also concerned the time taken to receive a reply, the need to anchor positions internally, and the need to revisit issues when another actor entered with new demands. A question that seemed manageable in one part of the process could become active again when another unit, another authority, or another decision point entered (Respondent 5).

The process also stretched beyond the formal plan itself. Respondent 6 referred to delays before formal plan work, during the plan, after legal force, and later in implementation. A project could lose time before the statutory process even began. It could lose time again during the formal plan. It could continue to lose time after legal force and later during implementation and delivery. The full path to completed housing was described as much longer than the formal planning stages alone.

Delay before formal plan work was also described in a more concrete way. Plan starts could be communicated for a certain year and then be moved several years forward without any single dramatic event. Time plans were described as being treated too much

as ambitions rather than as commitments. Projects could therefore lose time before the formal planning process had properly started, through reprioritization, weak adherence to announced time plans, and long waiting in the early part of the process (Respondent 8).

Questions that looked settled could also return later. Public comments could reopen issues. Appeals could stop progress after considerable work had already been carried out. Late investigations could introduce new demands. Institutional feedback could bring back questions that had already been discussed. Political reconsideration could also reopen matters that had seemed more settled earlier. Passing one stage did not mean that the proposal was secure (Respondent 1; Respondent 2; Respondent 5).

Timing between actors was also described as important. Questions did not only have to be answered. They had to be answered in the right order and by the right actors. A late answer from one function could hold back the next step. A question that was handled too late in one place could disturb several later parts of the process. Meetings, referrals, coordination rounds, and repeated adjustments could each seem manageable on their own and still result in a very long process when added together.

In some cases, movement depended on how much uncertainty the organization was willing to carry into the next stage. If too much had to be solved before consultation, the preparatory phase became long. If issues were allowed to move forward without enough clarification, they could return later in a more difficult form. This balance was part of what shaped the practical course of the process, especially in the early stages (Respondent 1).

The role of outside input also shaped how the process unfolded. Once the proposal entered consultation, it had to respond to more than the views inside the project group. Public reactions, objections, and responses from other institutions became part of the work. A proposal that had moved through internal preparation for a long time could still change direction after that wider input entered (Respondent 1; Respondent 5).

The process could also carry different tempos in different parts. One stage could move quickly, while another became stuck. One issue could be solved fast, while another remained open for a long time. A project could appear to move forward on paper and still contain periods where very little visible progress took place. That uneven rhythm was part of how the process was described by several respondents.

5.3 Key Permitting-Related Challenges

Appeals, political redesign, sequential investigations, fragmented coordination, resource constraints, land conditions, and repeated checking were all brought up in connection with long lead times.

Appeals were mentioned very clearly. Respondent 2 referred to an ongoing case where an appeal had already added about nine months to the process. During that time, the project remained uncertain while work, money, and attention were already tied to it. Respondent 5 described appealed detailed plans as cases that could be delayed by two or three years before reaching legal force. That kind of delay was described as serious because the project remained in an open and unstable position for a long period.

The legal side of appeals was also described. According to Respondent 2, the court assessed whether the process had been handled correctly and whether the appellant had standing and a relevant issue. Appeals were not described as something outside the planning system. They were described as part of it. The difficulty lay in the amount of time they could add after substantial work had already been carried out.

Political reprioritization and redesign were also described as major sources of delay. Respondent 2 referred to a case where the project team had already developed a review proposal and expected to move forward, though politicians later asked for a different urban form in the shape of fully enclosed blocks. That change came after about one and a half years of work and led to substantial redesign. The time already invested in the earlier proposal did not protect the project from having to go back and change direction.

Political influence also appeared in broader ways. Respondent 5 described politicians as having considerable influence at key stages in the detailed development plan process. Respondent 7 described political conflict in relation to what should be built, how it should be built, what kinds of housing were prioritized, and how far municipalities could shape outcomes. In that account, politics did not enter only through one decision. It remained present in the wider question of what kind of housing development could actually be carried through.

Political demands could also add pressure to the process when they became too far reaching in relation to specific projects. This included strong preferences for certain urban forms and requirements that could become cost driving or time driving if they were pushed too far. The difficulty was described as arising when ambitions, design preferences, or additional requirements became hard to combine with market conditions and project feasibility (Respondent 8).

Sequential investigations formed another recurring challenge. Respondent 1 criticized the handling of investigations one after another rather than in parallel. That way of working was described as one reason why a long period could pass before consultation. Respondent 3 also emphasized that important investigations had to be done early if feasibility was to be established sooner. If major issues remained unidentified in the early phase, they could appear later and force the project backwards.

Late discovery of issues was described as especially difficult. Respondent 1 referred to transport questions, physical layout problems, and changing functional requirements that could emerge after consultation if they had not been identified earlier. That kind of late appearance did not only add a new question. It could also affect work that had already been done and force revision of the proposal after it had already advanced.

Fragmented coordination between actors was also brought up several times. Respondent 1 described lead times as depending partly on whether the project group was tight and coordinated. The battery factory project was used as a contrast to ordinary planning because the work there had been much more closely coordinated. Respondent 3 described Bostad 2021 in similar terms. Respondent 5 described many actors, departments, interfaces, and decisions. Questions could circulate, wait for replies, be anchored internally, and then return again.

That kind of delay did not require direct conflict. Time could also be lost because one office had to wait for another, because several actors had to give input in sequence, or because the same matter had to be handled repeatedly in different parts of the organization. Even when everyone continued working on the project, the movement could still be slow because the work had to pass through many hands (Respondent 1; Respondent 5).

A lack of incentives in the process was also described as a challenge. Plan and exploitation costs could continue on running account, which meant that time and added work were not always felt in the same way on the municipal side. Part of the problem was described as weak pressure to shorten time when the cost of delay could continue to be carried elsewhere in the process (Respondent 8).

Resource constraints were also described as important. Respondent 1 referred directly to resources inside the municipal organization and among developers. The issue was not only that resources were limited in general. The issue was whether available capacity matched the number and intensity of projects being handled. Respondent 2 also referred to queues in institutions such as the County Administrative Board and the courts. Delay was not described as something created only inside one office. It could build up across several parts of the system at the same time.

The issue was also described as newer staff could need more support, more checking, and more time before decisions could be made with confidence. In that account, a lack of experienced personnel could slow the process even where positions had been filled (Respondent 8).

Land conditions and locational complexity also mattered. Respondent 1 referred to central urban locations, cultural environment concerns, and large numbers of opposing voices in attractive inner city settings. One example involved around 3,000 written objections. In that kind of case, opposition was not minor or isolated. It entered in large volume and added pressure to the process in a very direct way.

Respondent 7 described land allocation, market influence, public ownership, and the difficulty of turning political ambitions into lasting public control. In that account, the challenge was not only whether a permit could be processed. It also concerned who controlled the land, what kind of development could be pushed through, and how stable public influence remained once market conditions and ownership structures entered the picture.

Legal and administrative robustness also affected duration. Documents had to be correct. The process had to withstand scrutiny. Procedural errors could have serious consequences. Repeated checking and caution were described as part of the process. That kind of caution did not appear only as something unnecessary. It also appeared as a response to the risk of making mistakes that could later damage the whole project.

Respondent 4 said that reducing delay to one dominant cause had not been convincing in relation to Bostad 2021. Close to thirty different causes had appeared across the studied projects. One project could be delayed by one group of issues, and another by

something else. A single project could also move through several kinds of difficulty one after another.

The same project could begin with a long preparatory phase, later face a late technical issue, then be revised politically, and after that be appealed. Delay could grow stage by stage in that way. It did not need to come from one dramatic blockage. It could also build up through repeated interruption, return, and added handling across the life of the project.

5.4 Strategies for Managing Permitting Challenges

Early coordination came up repeatedly when the discussion turned to how problems could be handled before they grew larger later in the process. Attention to key risks at an early stage was described as important, especially where a project still looked promising on paper but could later run into difficulties that had not been addressed in time. In Respondent 2's account, the question was not only whether the project could move forward for the moment, but whether the most important risks had been identified early enough and whether the conditions that carried value in the project had been protected before too much time and money were already tied up.

The same issue also appeared in the way investigation work was described. Important investigations had to be done early enough to establish whether the plan was genuinely deliverable (Respondent 3). Waiting too long with major investigations could mean that critical problems appeared later, after the proposal had already advanced and after more work had already been done. Early investigation work was therefore described in connection with feasibility, timing, and the ability to avoid late reversals.

Moving the project forward toward consultation instead of leaving it too long in internal preparation was also brought up as part of handling delay (Respondent 1). Consultation was one of the points where important reactions entered, and holding the proposal too long inside internal work could postpone those reactions and postpone the handling of questions that would in any case have to be addressed later. Letting the project move forward earlier could therefore reduce some of the long waiting that built up before consultation.

Parallel investigations were described as another important way of reducing time. Respondent 1 argued that sequential investigations made the process longer than necessary and that more parallel work could shorten the path toward consultation and decision. This was described as a matter of how the work was arranged rather than as a change in legal requirements. The same tasks could still be necessary, though the time could become shorter if they were handled side by side instead of in a long sequence.

That way of working was also described as demanding. More parallel handling required more effort and more coordination at an earlier stage. In some cases, it also required more personnel. The time saved later in the process therefore depended on a greater concentration of work earlier on (Respondent 1). The effect did not come from doing less. It came from doing more at the same time.

The battery factory was used as a very clear example of this. A large number of investigations were handled in parallel, including demanding environmental and

species related work, and the plan was adopted after about eleven months (Respondent 1). The same example also included descriptions of very high workload and of the difficulty of sustaining that pace under ordinary conditions. It was presented as an example of what could be done when many things were carried out at once and when coordination was unusually strong.

Bostad 2021 was described in similarly concentrated terms. Close cooperation between exploitation, traffic, park and nature, and planning was part of the working setting there. Tight time plans and focused work were described as normal within that initiative (Respondent 3). The planning stage had been driven down dramatically in duration within the initiative (Respondent 4). The same accounts also described a clear difference in pace between Bostad 2021 and ordinary work after returning to the normal process.

Ordinary planning work was described as slower partly because the project group was not always sufficiently integrated (Respondent 1). In that description, work moved across several functions without the same concentration or shared tempo. Respondent 3 also described the contrast after leaving Bostad 2021, where ordinary work felt much slower and less focused. Pace, attention, concentration, and the ability to gather several functions around the same work at the same time were all part of that difference.

Risk management was also mentioned directly. Respondent 2 referred to a risk oriented approach and to identifying where the most significant risks lay. The issue was not only to keep the process moving, but to know what could later damage the project if it was not dealt with early enough. Respondent 6 also referred to the use of risk analyses. In those descriptions, risk work concerned identifying what could slow the project down, what could make it unstable later, and what had to be handled before those issues became larger obstacles.

Some strategies were also linked to public handling. Better cooperation with the public and improved information were described as ways of reducing the chance of later appeals (Respondent 3). Earlier and clearer communication was connected to the possibility that concerns could be identified sooner and handled before becoming more difficult later in the process. Respondent 1's emphasis on moving projects to consultation earlier also fits with that, since consultation was one of the stages where those reactions became visible.

The connection between earlier contact and reduced later friction was also described in practical terms. If concerns entered earlier, they could be dealt with earlier. If the public and other actors received clearer information, the proposal might move into later stages with fewer surprises than if major concerns first became visible at a later point (Respondent 3). This did not remove disagreement, though it was described as one way of reducing some of the later pressure.

Prioritization and dedicated capacity also appeared repeatedly. Tight time plans and focused work were part of the description of Bostad 2021 (Respondent 3). Drive and resources were described as important if municipalities genuinely wanted faster progress (Respondent 6). These descriptions placed attention on the ability to keep work moving, to keep actors focused on the same project, and to avoid long periods where the process lost momentum because capacity had been spread too thinly.

Clearer prioritization was also described as important. The issue was not only that more housing should be built, but which areas and projects should move first, in what order, and under which market conditions. A more selective approach to plan starts, land instruction and project sequencing was described as one way of reducing time spent on projects that were unlikely to move forward in the near term (Respondent 8).

Stronger public control over land and development was also brought up in relation to capacity to shape outcomes (Respondent 7). In that account, handling delay was not only a matter of better internal routines. It also concerned how much control municipalities had over land, how stable that control remained over time, and how far public actors could actually shape the direction of housing development instead of reacting to conditions set elsewhere.

Stronger follow up of time plans and earlier phases was also described as part of handling delay. If a plan start had been communicated, it should also begin unless there were strong reasons to change it. More explicit time discipline, better knowledge of how many old land instruction and early stage matters were still open, and clearer incentives around delay were described as ways of reducing tolerance for slow movement in the system (Respondent 8).

Not every part of the broader process was described as equally easy to accelerate. The detailed planning stage in Bostad 2021 had been shortened much more convincingly than building permits (Respondent 4). Attempts to move building permit work earlier in the process were described as difficult and not always attractive to firms, since this involved cost and risk if the plan later changed. In that description, there was a limit to how early some work could be pushed without shifting too much uncertainty onto the firms involved.

The same point also showed that a faster process in one part did not automatically mean a faster process everywhere else. Planning could be compressed more clearly in some cases, while later stages remained harder to shorten. Earlier work could also become risky if too much was done before the project had reached a more secure stage (Respondent 4).

The working methods associated with Bostad 2021 were also described as depending on unusually high levels of focus, staffing, support, and concentration (Respondent 4). Those conditions were not described as ordinary. This meant that the same pace could not simply be assumed in other settings without similar concentration of effort and similar organizational conditions.

The descriptions of strategies therefore included earlier identification of key risks, earlier investigation work, more parallel handling, faster movement toward consultation, tighter cooperation between functions, stronger focus around the same project, public dialogue earlier in the process, clearer information, tighter time plans, stronger resources, and in some accounts stronger public control over land and development.

5.5 Differences Across Housing Project Types

Differences between project types were described in several ways. The distinction was not presented only as a simple difference between one easy type of project and one difficult type. The descriptions returned instead to location, land conditions, number of actors, political visibility, technical complexity, and the amount of conflict around the site.

Densification projects in central urban locations were described as especially difficult in several accounts. Respondent 1 referred to cultural environment concerns, scarcity and sensitivity of land, and the large number of people who could oppose development in those locations. Objections were described as being connected to loss of views, loss of green space, and resistance to building in already valued urban environments. One project had received around 3,000 written objections. In that kind of case, the difficulty did not come only from technical design. It also came from the amount of reaction surrounding the site.

Projects in the middle of the city were also described as more exposed to political influence and democratic scrutiny because they were more visible and directly affected existing residents (Respondent 5). A project in that kind of location was not only a planning matter inside the organization. It was also something seen and felt more directly by people already living nearby. That increased the number of voices, the amount of reaction, and the level of attention around the proposal.

Respondent 2 described the issue in a somewhat different way. The decisive question was not always whether a project was densification or a new development area. The more important questions were how complex the conditions were, how many parties were involved, and how many dependencies existed within the project. In that account, two projects in different categories could still become similar in difficulty if the underlying complexity was similar.

This meant that project labels alone did not explain everything. A project could be called densification or expansion and still become difficult for reasons tied more directly to site conditions, coordination needs, number of actors, or the amount of work needed to move it forward (Respondent 2).

Large redevelopment and transformation areas were described differently from small central infill projects. Respondent 6 referred to extensive planning frameworks, many housing units, infrastructure interfaces, and long implementation horizons in large transformation areas. These kinds of projects might not face the same immediate neighborhood objections as a central infill project, though they could still become difficult because of scale, phasing, land coordination, and long delivery conditions.

That meant that difficulty took different forms in different project types. In one case, the pressure could come from opposition, visibility, and strong reaction from residents. In another case, the pressure could come from the size of the area, the number of stages in implementation, the amount of infrastructure involved, and the need to coordinate many interests over a long period.

Political and market dynamics also changed with project conditions. Respondent 7 described project difficulty in relation to questions of land control, housing priorities, and the ability to turn political ambitions into actual delivery. In that description, one project could be shaped by stronger public control, another by stronger market influence, and another by unstable conditions between the two. These differences affected how easily the project could be directed and how much room public actors actually had to influence the outcome.

Politically difficult situations were also described especially in existing villa areas and other already established neighborhoods. Projects that introduced new housing forms or more mixed tenure in those settings were described as meeting strong local protest and high political sensitivity. In that account, central or already built up environments could become especially difficult because local resistance entered quickly and strongly once new housing was proposed (Respondent 8).

The number of actors also appeared repeatedly as a major difference between project situations. Respondent 2 stated directly that more parties and more builders generally made the process more complex. Respondent 1 also connected long lead times to fragmented and conflict laden conditions in central urban settings where many interests were present. A project with many landowners, public bodies, consultants, developers, and neighboring interests was described as more difficult to handle than a project with fewer actors and clearer ownership conditions.

In those cases, complexity did not only come from the physical project. It also came from the amount of coordination required. More actors meant more views, more dependencies, more circulation of questions, and more opportunities for delay when something had to move from one part of the project to another (Respondent 2; Respondent 1).

Location also changed the form of delay. Respondent 3 suggested that some outer area projects could face less appeal risk than projects in highly contested central locations. This did not mean that outer area or expansion projects were simple. They could face other kinds of difficulty, including infrastructure demands, land preparation, market uncertainty, or weaker attractiveness for certain developers and households.

A similar difference was also described from another angle. Building farther out could in some cases be easier because there were fewer nearby residents and therefore less direct protest. Even so, that did not make such projects preferable in a broader urban development sense. Easier progress in those locations was described against a background where the city also wanted to build together more central parts and reduce fragmentation rather than only continue to build outward (Respondent 8).

This meant that one project type was not described as simply harder in every way. Central densification could involve strong reaction, high visibility, and many objections. Outer area projects could involve fewer objections and still become difficult because of infrastructure, attractiveness, implementation conditions, or the amount of preparation required before housing could actually be delivered (Respondent 3).

Different project types were also described as producing delay in different ways. A central densification project could be slowed by objections, consultation pressure, and

appeal risk. A large transformation area could be slowed by scale, phasing, infrastructure, and the need to coordinate many interests over time. A politically prioritized public project could move more quickly through planning under concentrated conditions and still face difficulties later in permitting or delivery. A project with weaker market attractiveness could face less local resistance and still remain uncertain because implementation conditions were weaker.

Environmental sensitivity and technical conditions also affected the difficulty of different projects. Central locations could involve cultural environment concerns and tighter spatial conditions (Respondent 1). Larger redevelopment areas could involve extensive interfaces with surrounding infrastructure and longer implementation chains (Respondent 6). In both cases, the type of technical or physical difficulty changed with the project setting.

The same issue appeared in the amount of public attention around the project. Central and already inhabited environments were described as places where more people reacted, where more objections could be expected, and where changes were more visible to those already using the area (Respondent 1; Respondent 5). Other project types could attract less direct objection from nearby residents and still become difficult in other ways.

The descriptions therefore did not place all difficulty in one single category of project. Central densification, large transformation areas, expansion projects, and projects in less contested locations were all described as difficult, though not in the same way. The form of the difficulty changed with location, conflict level, technical conditions, number of actors, ownership structure, market setting, and implementation demands.

The examples given across the interviews returned repeatedly to these differences. Central densification was connected to objections, visibility, and cultural environment concerns (Respondent 1). Highly visible inner city projects were connected to stronger political influence and democratic scrutiny (Respondent 5). Complexity, number of parties, and dependencies were described as more decisive than labels alone (Respondent 2). Large transformation areas were connected to scale, phasing, land coordination, and infrastructure interfaces (Respondent 6). Outer area projects were described as potentially facing less appeal risk, though still facing other difficulties (Respondent 3). Political and market dynamics were described as shaping how far ambitions could actually be turned into delivery (Respondent 7).

6 Analysis

This chapter analyses the findings from the literature review and the empirical material in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework. The purpose of the chapter is to move beyond a descriptive presentation of the data and instead interpret how permitting-related delays are created, addressed, and shaped by different project conditions in Swedish housing projects.

The chapter begins by identifying the main permitting issues found in the literature and interviews. It then analyses the role of different actors in the planning and permitting process, including municipalities, developers, consultants, political actors, public authorities, and courts. After this, the chapter examines how these issues are addressed in practice today and whether they vary depending on project type, complexity, location, stakeholder exposure, and approval pathways. The chapter then synthesizes the findings in relation to the research questions before presenting proposed measures for reducing permitting-related delays.

Institutional Theory is used as an analytical lens throughout the chapter. This means that delays are not only understood as practical or administrative problems, but also as outcomes of formal rules, routines, responsibilities, expectations, and legitimacy demands. The chapter therefore shows how lead times are produced through the interaction between legal requirements, organizational practices, actors, and project-specific conditions.

6.1 Main Permitting Issues

The main issues identified in this study are not limited to the formal building permit stage. Instead, they appear across the wider planning and permitting chain, from early preparation and detailed development planning to consultation, review, appeals, and later implementation. This is important because the research questions focus on how major challenges are addressed and whether they vary between different types of housing projects. Before these questions can be discussed, it is necessary to clarify what the main problems are and how they create bottlenecks in practice.

The analysis shows that delay is produced through the interaction between legal requirements, detailed planning practices, sequential working routines, fragmented coordination, political changes, stakeholder influence, appeals, administrative capacity, land conditions, market conditions, and project complexity. This confirms the pattern found in the literature, where lead times are not simply described as time passing between two formal stages. Instead, they are shaped by how development processes are structured, sequenced, governed, and coordinated. The empirical material supports this view. Respondents did not describe delay as the result of one single cause, but as something that grows when several conditions interact over time. Projects move forward, stop, return to earlier questions, change direction, or remain inactive for long periods. This means that the main problem is not one isolated bottleneck, but a chain of bottlenecks across the development process.

A first major issue concerns legal and procedural complexity. The literature describes the Swedish planning and permitting context as municipality led and legally structured, where the detailed development plan has a central role before a housing project can

move towards building permits and construction. This structure creates legal control and ensures that projects are tested against planning law, land-use rules, technical requirements, environmental concerns, and public interests. The empirical material confirms that this control is important. Several respondents described the detailed planning stage as a phase where many issues must be clarified before the project can move further. From this perspective, not all time in the process can be understood as unnecessary delay. Some time is connected to the need to test whether the project is legally, technically, and practically possible.

At the same time, this complexity becomes a problem when the number of requirements, checks, and decision points makes the process difficult to move through. The literature shows that permitting is not only a single administrative decision. It is part of a broader process involving many workflow steps, disciplines, regulatory checks, and organizational interfaces. This is also visible in the empirical findings. The respondents described a process where investigations, internal reviews, consultation, political handling, appeals, and later implementation are connected to each other. A delay in one part can therefore affect several later parts of the process. The problem is not only that formal requirements exist, but that they are handled in a system where each step can create new waiting time, uncertainty, or additional work.

A closely related issue concerns the detailed development plan. In the Swedish context, the detailed development plan is necessary because it creates the legal conditions for what can be built. It gives structure to later decisions and forms the basis for the building permit stage. The literature also shows that detailed plans can become too detailed or too rigid. When this happens, flexibility in later stages can be reduced. Important decisions are pushed into the early planning phase, and later adaptation becomes more difficult. This matters because housing projects often change over time. Costs, market conditions, technical knowledge, political priorities, and local reactions can shift while the project is still in process. A detailed plan can therefore become both a source of clarity and a source of delay. It creates certainty, but it can also make rework more difficult when conditions change.

The empirical material supports this tension. Respondents described projects where design questions, technical requirements, and political preferences could change after substantial work had already been done. Respondent 2's example of a project being redesigned after a political request for fully enclosed blocks shows this clearly. The project had already moved far in the process, but a change in direction forced earlier work to be reconsidered. This illustrates how detailed planning can become vulnerable when decisions are made late or when the direction of the project changes after the proposal has already been developed. The bottleneck is therefore not only the plan itself, but the difficulty of maintaining continuity between early planning decisions and later project development.

Sequential working routines form another major issue. The empirical material shows that investigations and internal work are often handled step by step rather than in parallel. Respondent 1 described how investigations can be carried out one after another, which means that a long period can pass before consultation is reached. This type of delay is important because it is not only caused by the amount of work. It is also caused by the order in which the work is organized. When one investigation waits for another, and when each question must be completed before the next one starts, time accumulates inside the process. This makes sequencing a bottleneck in itself.

This point connects strongly to the literature, which presents lead times as a result of how development processes are structured and governed. A legally necessary investigation can still slow the project if it is started late, handled separately, or allowed to hold back the next stage. The empirical material shows that this is especially important before consultation. If too many issues remain in internal preparation, the project may be delayed before it has even reached the stage where broader comments and reactions become visible. This creates a risk that the project spends a long time being prepared internally, while important external issues are still unknown.

Consultation is therefore a key point in the process. Respondent 1 described consultation as a stage where important comments, clarifications, and reactions enter. This means that consultation is not only a formal step. It is also a moment where hidden or unresolved issues become visible. If the project is held inside the organization for too long before consultation, the process may appear to move forward, but key questions may still remain untested. When external comments later arrive, the project may need to be revised, delayed, or partly reopened. In this way, the timing of consultation becomes part of the bottleneck. The problem is not only that consultation takes time, but that late exposure to external reactions can create rework after long internal preparation.

Fragmented coordination is another central issue. The literature repeatedly links delay to weak coordination, fragmented responsibilities, and unresolved issues between stages. The empirical material shows the same pattern. Coordination problems appear when questions move between departments, wait for replies, require internal anchoring, or return later with new requirements. This kind of delay does not always appear as a visible stop. It can instead appear as slow movement, unclear ownership, repeated checking, and small waiting periods that build up over time. Respondent 5 described a process with many interfaces and decisions, while Respondent 1 emphasized the difference between a tight project group and a more spread-out way of working. This shows that coordination is not only an organizational detail. It directly affects whether a project keeps momentum or loses time.

The issue here is that fragmented coordination creates weak continuity in the process. When planning, technical questions, implementation concerns, political handling, and external review are not aligned, problems can appear late and affect work that has already been completed. A project can formally move forward while still carrying unresolved issues from earlier stages. When these issues become active, the project may slow down or return to earlier questions. This creates a bottleneck because the process does not function as a clear sequence of completed steps. It becomes a process where earlier uncertainties continue to influence later stages.

Late discovery of problems is therefore another main challenge. The empirical material includes several examples of issues appearing after the project has already advanced. Respondent 1 referred to transport questions, physical layout problems, and changing functional requirements that could emerge after consultation if they had not been identified earlier. These late issues do not only add new tasks. They can affect drawings, investigations, political handling, and the basic direction of the proposal. This means that late discovery creates rework. It also weakens predictability, because actors cannot be sure that a project which has passed one stage will continue smoothly to the next.

This reflects a broader mismatch between the formal process and the process in practice. On paper, the planning and permitting process can appear linear. In practice,

the empirical material shows that projects can stop, restart, return to earlier questions, or change direction. The literature also points to unresolved issues between stages as a cause of delay. This is important because it shows that bottlenecks are not always created by one slow decision. They are often created when decisions are made without all necessary conditions being clear. The project then moves forward with hidden risk. When that risk becomes visible, delay is created later in the process.

Political change is another issue that can create bottlenecks. Planning is naturally political because it concerns land use, housing priorities, design, public interests, and the future development of the city. Political decision-making is therefore necessary and legitimate. The empirical material does not suggest that politics should be removed from the process. The problem appears when political priorities change late, or when new political demands enter after substantial work has already been completed. Respondent 2's example of the demand for fully enclosed blocks after about one and a half years of work shows how late political change can force redesign and reduce the value of earlier work.

Political influence also affects predictability. If political direction is clear early, it can guide the project. If it changes late, it can destabilize the project. Respondent 7 described political conflict around what should be built, how it should be built, and what kinds of housing should be prioritized. Respondent 8 also described how political ambitions or design preferences can become time-driving or cost-driving when they are difficult to combine with market conditions and project feasibility. This means that political influence becomes a problem when it changes the conditions of the project during the process. The bottleneck is not politics itself, but late and unstable political direction.

Appeals and objections form another important issue. The literature identifies appeal rights as a recurring source of delay in the Swedish planning process, while also connecting them to legal certainty and democratic participation. The empirical material reflects the same tension. Appeals are part of the legal system and can be necessary to test whether the process has been handled correctly. At the same time, they can add significant time after substantial work has already been carried out. Respondent 2 described an appeal that had already added about nine months to one project. Respondent 5 described appealed detailed plans as cases that could be delayed by two or three years before reaching legal force.

This makes appeals a particularly difficult bottleneck. They often appear late, when the project has already required time, money, coordination, political handling, and technical work. During the appeal period, the project remains open and uncertain. It cannot move forward with full confidence, but earlier investments have already been made. Appeals therefore create delay not only by extending the formal timeline, but by increasing risk at an advanced stage. This is why appeals are central to the analysis. They show how legal certainty and housing delivery can create tension inside the same process.

Stakeholder influence is closely connected to this. Consultation, public comments, objections, and appeals show that housing projects are not shaped only by formal planning documents. They are also shaped by residents, property owners, authorities, and local interests. This is especially important in infill projects, where new housing is placed into existing urban environments. Such projects may affect density, traffic, parking, green areas, sunlight, views, and neighborhood character. The literature shows

that infill projects are often more exposed to objections and coordination demands. The empirical material supports this by showing that public reactions can make important issues visible, but also reopen questions and extend the process. Stakeholder involvement can therefore improve legitimacy, but it can also create additional rounds of clarification, revision, and legal review.

Lack of predictability is another central issue. The literature emphasizes that uncertainty can be as damaging as delay itself, because actors need to know not only how long a process takes, but also how stable and reliable it is. The empirical material confirms this clearly. Respondent 2 described how long lead times make projects harder to control because costs, political priorities, market conditions, and earlier assumptions can change over time. A project that appears feasible at the beginning may become less secure if it remains in the planning and permitting process for several years. Time therefore does not only delay the project. Time changes the project's conditions.

This lack of predictability can appear before formal planning has even started. Respondent 8 described how plan starts can be communicated for a certain year and then moved several years forward without one dramatic event. This shows that delay can be built into the early part of the process before the statutory planning phase begins. Respondent 6 also emphasized that lead times should be understood more broadly than the detailed development plan alone. Time can accumulate before formal plan work, during the plan, after legal force, and later in implementation. This wider understanding is important because it shows that bottlenecks are spread across the whole housing development chain.

Administrative capacity also appears as a major issue. The literature highlights lack of resources, unclear roles, weak structures, limited staff, and insufficient organizational capacity as barriers to efficient planning and permitting. The empirical material supports this through descriptions of slow internal handling, waiting between actors, repeated checking, and the need for documents to be legally and administratively robust. Even when the legal framework is clear, the process depends on whether the organization has enough capacity to handle the work. If departments are overloaded, if responses take time, or if internal anchoring is slow, the project loses momentum.

This means that delay cannot be explained only by the number of rules. It must also be explained by the ability of the organization to manage those rules. A system with many formal requirements needs strong routines, enough staff, clear responsibility, and coordinated working methods. Without this, even normal project tasks can become time consuming. This helps explain why slow processes are not limited to large or controversial projects. A relatively simple project can also move slowly if the administrative system lacks the capacity or structure to process it efficiently.

Land conditions and market conditions are not permitting issues in the narrowest sense, but they affect how delays are experienced and whether projects can move towards implementation. Land ownership, municipal control over land, infrastructure requirements, and development agreements can shape the practical feasibility of a housing project. Market conditions also matter because a long process can expose a project to changed costs, changed demand, and changed investment conditions. Respondent 8 noted that there may already be many dwellings in legally valid plans that are not being built because of market conditions. This shows that formal approval does not always lead directly to housing delivery.

This point is important because it places permitting within the wider development chain. A project may pass through planning and still remain delayed if land conditions, infrastructure costs, or market conditions make implementation difficult. Long processes can make this worse because the longer a project remains in process, the more exposed it becomes to external change. In this sense, land and market conditions do not replace legal or organizational explanations of delay. They strengthen them by showing how time in the process can affect project feasibility.

Project complexity is the final main issue. The empirical material shows that respondents did not judge all long lead times in the same way. Longer processes were seen as more understandable in projects involving central urban locations, infrastructure implications, environmental sensitivity, many stakeholders, or strong conflict. In such cases, time is connected to real coordination demands and difficult planning conditions. The literature supports this by showing that challenges vary depending on project type, approval pathway, urban context, and stakeholder exposure. Infill projects, complex projects, and projects exposed to discretion or objections are more likely to face delay and uncertainty.

At the same time, the empirical material shows that long lead times can also occur in less complex projects. Respondent 2 described a small “frimärksplan” involving one property and a limited land use change. The project followed the comprehensive plan and was not described as unusually controversial or technically extreme. Still, it was expected to take around five years before reaching legal force. This example is important because it shows that delay cannot always be explained by complexity alone. Some bottlenecks appear to be structural. They are connected to routines, resources, responsibilities, and the general organization of the planning and permitting process.

6.2 Role of Different Actors

The role of different actors is central for understanding how lead times are produced in Swedish housing projects. The literature shows that planning and permitting processes are multi-actor systems shaped by legal frameworks, municipal authority, coordination demands, stakeholder involvement, and review procedures. Persson (2020) describes the Swedish planning system as municipality-led, while Granath Hansson (2015) shows that detailed development plans and building permits are central instruments in the Swedish permitting context. This is reflected in the empirical material, where delays are not described as the result of one actor alone, but as something that develops through the interaction between municipalities, developers, consultants, political actors, county administrative boards, courts, and other stakeholders.

The municipality appears as the most central actor in the process. In the literature, this is explained through the municipal planning monopoly and the municipality’s responsibility for initiating, coordinating, and adopting plans. Persson (2020) shows that municipalities both initiate and adopt plans, while Granath Hansson (2015) explains that detailed development plans regulate development rights and create the basis for building permits. In the interviews, this central role becomes visible in how municipal processes are experienced in practice. Respondent 1 described how lead times depend partly on whether the project group is tight and coordinated, while Respondent 5 described a process with many actors, departments, interfaces, and decisions. Questions could circulate between offices, wait for replies, be anchored

internally, and then return again. This suggests that municipalities both drive and slow the process. They drive it because they hold formal authority, but they may also slow it down through internal fragmentation and repeated coordination needs.

This does not mean that municipal delay should be understood only as inefficiency. Koglin (2017) describes Swedish planning as increasingly complex and shaped by collaboration, consultation, and coordination with multiple stakeholders. This helps explain why municipal actors may need to act carefully. In the empirical material, legal and administrative robustness was described as a reason why documents had to be checked, decisions had to withstand scrutiny, and procedural mistakes had to be avoided. Respondent 8 also connected delay to resource and competence issues, noting that newer staff may require more support, more checking, and more time before decisions can be made with confidence. From an institutional perspective, municipal actors are therefore not only delaying projects. They are also protecting legality, accountability, and procedural legitimacy.

Developers have a different role. The literature on BoStad2021 shows that developers can be important partners in efforts to accelerate planning and permitting. Bröchner et al. (2021) describe how collaboration with developers was one of the main strategies in BoStad2021, alongside interdepartmental coordination and parallel processing. In the empirical material, developers are similarly presented as actors who try to maintain momentum, prepare projects, and manage risk. Respondent 2 described how delays can tie up work, money, and attention while a project remains uncertain, especially in appealed cases. This shows that developers are project-driving actors, but not fully controlling actors. Their role is to push projects forward, while their ability to do so depends on municipal decisions, political priorities, investigations, and legal review.

Consultants and technical experts influence the process mainly through documentation, investigation, and technical problem solving. Noardo et al. (2022) describe the building permit process as a multi-step process involving different disciplines, regulatory checks, and organizational interfaces. This literature helps interpret the empirical finding, where late technical issues are repeatedly described as a sources of delay. Respondent 1 referred to transport questions, physical layout problems, and changing functional requirements that could emerge after consultation if they had not identified earlier. Respondent 3 also emphasized that Consultants can therefore reduce delays when they identify risks early and prepare robust material, but they can also become part of the delay structure when investigations are handled sequentially or when technical problems are discovered too late.

The County Administrative Board and the courts affect the process through review and legal control. In the literature, Granath Hansson (2015) identifies far-reaching appeal rights as one of the obstacles in the Swedish planning process, while Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) show that objections can be legitimate but still create delay when they are not handled efficiently. In the interviews, Respondent 2 referred to an appeal that had already added about nine months to one project, and Respondent 5 described appeal detailed plans as cases that could be delayed by two or three years before reaching legal force. Respondent 2 also explained that the court assesses whether the process has been handled correctly and whether the appellant has standing and a relevant issue. These findings show that legal review bodies may slow projects from a

delivery perspective, but their institutional role is to secure legal certainty and procedural correctness.

Political actors also play an important role in shaping lead times. The literature describes planning as a process influenced by formal decision-making, negotiation, public interests, and power relations. Koglin (2017) is useful here because he shows that Swedish planning is shaped by shifting power relations and interactions between public and private actors. In the empirical material, Respondent 2 described a case where politicians requested a different urban form after about one and a half years of work, which forced the project to be redesigned. Respondent 5 described politicians as having considerable influence at key stages in the detailed development plan process. Respondent 7 also connected delays to political conflict over what should be built, how it should be built, and what kinds of housing should be prioritized. This shows that political actors can both accelerate and redirect projects. They may create urgency and prioritization, but they may also introduce new demands that lead to redesign and additional time.

The comparison between literature and interviews shows that different actors influence the process in different ways because they operate under different institutional responsibilities. Municipalities coordinate and decide, but must also act legally and procedurally correctly. Developers try to move projects forward, but depend on decisions controlled by public actors. Consultants translate technical and legal requirements into material that can be reviewed. County administrative boards and courts may extend lead times, but they also protect legal certainty. Political actors may prioritize housing delivery, but can also reshape the direction of projects. This supports the literature's broader view that permitting delays are created through regulation, process design, uncertainty, coordination, and institutional complexity, rather than through one actor's failure alone.

From an institutional perspective, the role of actors is therefore not only about who does what in the process. It is about how formal responsibilities, routines, professional expectations, and legitimacy demands shape what each actor is able or expected to do. The empirical material supports this interpretation. Respondent 4 stated that reducing delay in BoStad2021 to one dominant cause was not convincing, since close to thirty different causes appeared across the studied projects. A single project could move through several kinds of difficulty, including a long preparatory phase, a late technical issue, political revision, and an appeal. This confirms the literature's argument that lead times grow through the interaction between stages, actors, and institutional requirements.

6.3 How the Issues are Addressed in Practice

The way permitting issues are addressed in practice appears to be less about removing formal requirements and more about trying to manage them earlier, faster, and in a more coordinated way. Both the literature and the interviews show that the current responses are mainly practical and organizational. They include early coordination, parallel work, stronger project focus, digital tools, public dialogue, risk management, and dedicated capacity. These measures do not necessarily change the institutional framework itself, but they are used to reduce uncertainty, avoid late surprises, and keep projects moving through the existing planning and permitting system.

One of the clearest strategies in the empirical material is early coordination. This connects closely to Bröchner et al. (2021), who show that weak coordination can leave important issues unresolved before the detailed planning stage and that stronger coordination can help produce plans more rapidly. In the interviews, Respondent 2 described the importance of identifying key risks early, especially before too much time and money had already been invested in the project. Respondent 3 made a similar point by emphasizing that important investigations need to be carried out early enough to determine whether a plan is actually deliverable. This suggests that early coordination is not only used to speed up the process, but also to protect projects from later reversals and rework.

A related practical response is to move important issues into the process earlier instead of allowing them to appear late. Respondent 1 argued that projects should move toward consultation rather than remain too long in internal preparation. The reason was that consultation brings in reactions, clarifications, and comments that will eventually need to be handled anyway. If these reactions are delayed, the process may appear to progress internally while key external issues remain unresolved. This finding supports the literature's broader argument that delays are often created by how stages are sequenced and connected. Bröchner et al. (2021) similarly show that unresolved issues between planning and permitting can weaken attempts to accelerate housing projects.

The empirical material also shows that parallel work is used as a way of addressing long lead times. Respondent 1 explained that sequential investigations make the process longer and that more parallel handling can shorten the path toward consultation and decision. However, this was not described as a way of doing less work. It was described as doing more work at the same time. Respondent 1 also noted that parallel handling requires more effort, coordination, and sometimes more personnel earlier in the process. This is important analytically because it shows that acceleration is not simply a matter of efficiency. It requires capacity to concentrate work earlier and coordinate several activities at once.

BoStad2021 is the clearest example in the literature of how this logic has been applied in practice. Bröchner et al. (2021) identify three main strategies in BoStad2021, namely interdepartmental coordination, collaboration with developers, and parallel processing of plans and permits. The program also brought building permit officials into the detailed planning stage as advisers, which was intended to reduce later rework and improve continuity between planning and permitting. In the empirical material, Respondent 3 described BoStad2021 as a setting with close cooperation between exploitation, traffic, park and nature, and planning. Respondent 4 also described how the planning stage was shortened substantially in the initiative. This shows that BoStad2021 functioned as a practical attempt to address delays by changing how actors worked together inside the existing system.

At the same time, both the literature and the interviews show that this approach has limits. Bröchner et al. (2021) report that BoStad2021 accelerated the planning stage, but that the building permit process remained more difficult to speed up. Svensson et al. (2022) also found that building permit durations were longer than intended, even though planning was accelerated. Respondent 4 confirmed a similar distinction by stating that the detailed planning stage in BoStad2021 had been shortened much more

convincingly than building permits. This suggests that coordination and parallel work can reduce some planning delays, but permitting issues are more difficult to manage when they depend on later technical certainty, developer commitment, or formal review requirements.

Another strategy used in practice is risk management. Respondent 2 described a risk-oriented approach where the most significant risks need to be identified before they damage the project later. Respondent 6 also referred to the use of risk analyses. This can be understood as a way of managing institutional uncertainty. Instead of waiting for problems to appear in later stages, actors try to identify what could slow the project down, make it unstable, or create conflict. This connects to the literature on permitting as a process shaped by uncertainty, fragmented responsibilities, and multiple actors. In practical terms, risk management becomes a way of anticipating institutional bottlenecks before they turn into formal delays.

Public communication and early dialogue also appeal as existing ways of addressing permitting problems. The literature on BoStad2021 describes how developers engaged in pre-planning dialogues with residents beyond the minimum required in the formal process, with the intention of reducing later conflict and resistance. In the interviews, Respondent 3 similarly described better cooperation with the public and improved information as ways of reducing the risk of later appeals. Respondent 1's emphasis on moving projects toward consultation earlier also fits this pattern, because consultation was described as a stage where reactions become visible. The analysis suggests that public dialogue is used to make conflict manageable earlier, rather than to remove disagreement altogether.

Digitalization is another existing response discussed in the literature, although it appears more as process support than as a complete solution. Varela et al. (2022) show that Swedish municipalities already use digital tools such as GIS and CAD systems, and that more advanced tools are starting to appear in some municipalities. The literature presents digitalization as a way to support more data-driven, coordinated, and efficient decision-making, particularly in response to fragmented workflows and unclear coordination. However, Varela et al. (2022) also stress that digital tools require organizational and institutional changes to be useful in practice. This means that digitalization addresses some permitting issues by improving information handling and structure, but it does not automatically solve problems linked to unclear roles, limited capacity, or political and legal complexity.

Prioritization and dedicated capacity are also important in the empirical material. Respondent 3 described tight time plans and focused work in BoStad2021, while Respondent 6 stated that drive and resources are necessary if municipalities genuinely want faster progress. Respondent 8 also described clearer prioritization as important, especially in deciding which areas and projects should move first and under which market conditions. This suggests that existing measures are not only about better methods, but also about how attention and resources are allocated. When capacity is spread too thinly, projects risk losing momentum. When actors are gathered around the same project with clear priorities, the process can move faster.

The comparison between literature and interviews therefore shows that the current ways of addressing permitting issues are mainly attempts to manage the existing system more

actively. Early investigations, consultation, parallel work, risk analysis, public communication, digital tools, and dedicated capacity all aim to reduce late surprises and keep projects moving. However, these measures also show that faster processes require more concentrated work earlier. They do not remove the need for legal review, political handling, technical documentation, or public participation. From an institutional perspective, the measures used in practice can therefore be seen as attempts to work within institutional constraints rather than escape them. The process is made faster when actors coordinate earlier and more intensively, but the basic need for legitimacy, legal certainty, and formal approval remains.

6.4 Variation between different types of housing projects

Permitting issues vary between housing projects because different projects place different kinds of pressure on the same formal planning and permitting system. The process may include similar stages, such as detailed development planning, consultation, review, political decisions, appeals, building permits, and later implementation. These stages do not create the same problems in every project. The source of delay changes with location, complexity, stakeholder involvement, infrastructure needs, political visibility, and the conditions for actually moving from planning approval to construction.

Granath Hansson (2017) separates less complex residential projects from projects that require more extensive planning because of site conditions, environmental issues, or other complications. This distinction is important because it means that housing projects should not be treated as one uniform category. Respondent 2 makes a similar point in practice by stressing that the decisive issue is often not whether a project is labelled as densification, expansion, or transformation, but how many parties, dependencies, and unresolved conditions the project contains. Project type therefore matters, but it matters through the specific pressures that each project brings into the process.

Central densification creates a clear example of this. These projects are often located in places where people already live, move, and attach value to the existing environment. Bröchner et al. (2021) describe infill housing as demanding because it takes place in already developed urban environments with existing residents, transport systems, public space pressures, and several municipal departments involved. Respondent 1 describes central projects in a similar way, where limited space, cultural environment concerns, and strong reactions from residents can make the process difficult. Objections may concern loss of views, loss of green areas, parking, neighborhood character, or resistance to new buildings in areas that are already considered valuable. In one case, around 3,000 written objections were submitted. The delay is therefore not only connected to technical planning work. It is created when the need for new housing enters a place that is already socially, spatially, and politically loaded.

Consultation becomes heavier in this type of project because it is often the point where local conflict becomes visible. Formally, consultation is part of the planning process in many detailed development plans. In central densification, it can become the moment when residents and local actors respond to a concrete change in their everyday environment. Respondent 5 describes inner-city projects as more exposed to democratic scrutiny and political influence because they affect existing residents more directly.

Granath Hansson (2015) and Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) both connect objections and appeals to longer and less predictable planning processes. The issue is therefore not only that comments must be handled. The deeper issue is that central projects can turn a formal planning stage into a contested social and political process.

The difficulty in central densification is created by the combination of physical constraints and public reaction. A dense site may involve limited space, existing buildings, traffic issues, cultural values, and technical limitations. The same site may also involve many actors with strong opinions about what should happen there. Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) connect complaints in infill projects to urban context, density, building type, scale, and neighboring actors. Respondent 1 and Respondent 5 describe the same type of sensitivity in central and already inhabited environments, where changes are more visible and objections are more likely. Central densification therefore becomes slow when technical constraints, local reaction, political visibility, and appeal rights are activated together.

Large transformation areas create another type of delay. These projects may not always face the same direct neighbor opposition as central infill projects, but they often depend on many systems being coordinated before housing can be delivered. Respondent 6 connects larger redevelopment and transformation areas to scale, phasing, land coordination, infrastructure interfaces, and long implementation chains. Bröchner et al. (2021) and Fauth et al. (2025) both treat permitting as a process shaped by coordination, multiple actors, and unresolved issues between stages. In this type of project, the main difficulty is not one strong local objection. It is the need to align land, infrastructure, technical systems, public investment, and implementation over time.

Planning in large transformation areas cannot be separated from delivery. Roads, public transport, water and sewage, schools, preschools, public space, land agreements, technical systems, and municipal investments can all affect when construction can start. If one part is delayed, the rest of the project may also slow down. A transformation area can therefore move forward in planning while still being difficult to realize because the surrounding systems are not ready. The bottleneck is spread across several interfaces instead of being concentrated in consultation or appeal.

This creates a different lead time problem than in central densification. A central project may lose time because many people react to a visible local change. A transformation area may lose time because the project cannot move faster than the infrastructure, land coordination, and public investments it depends on. Both project types can take many years, but the delay is produced in different ways. In central densification, the process is pressured by conflict around place. In transformation areas, it is pressured by coordination across systems.

Project size matters, but size does not explain delay by itself. Large projects often involve more investigations, more actors, more technical interfaces, and more decisions before construction can begin. This can increase lead times. Large projects may also receive stronger political attention, more resources, and clearer prioritization. Smaller projects may look easier, but they can still become slow if they are located in sensitive areas, require changes to the detailed development plan, or create strong local opposition. Respondent 2's emphasis on complexity, parties, and dependencies is therefore more useful than a simple distinction between large and small projects.

Outer area and expansion projects show the same logic from another angle. Respondent 3 suggests that projects outside highly contested central locations can face less appeal risk because fewer nearby residents are directly affected. Respondent 8 also describes building farther out as easier in some cases because there are fewer direct protests from existing neighbors. This reduces one source of delay. The project may not create the same direct conflict over an already used urban place.

Lower local resistance does not make these projects simple. The bottleneck can move from objections to delivery conditions. New housing in outer areas may require roads, public transport, water and sewage capacity, schools, preschools, land preparation, and other public investments. The project may also depend on whether the location is attractive enough for developers and households. A project can therefore be easier to accept locally but harder to realize in practice. Fewer objections do not automatically mean shorter lead times.

Respondent 8 adds that legally valid plans can exist without housing being built when market conditions are weak. This widens the understanding of lead times. The time problem does not always end when the detailed development plan gains legal force. In some projects, the bottleneck shifts from planning and permitting to construction feasibility. Central projects may face stronger objections, appeals, and political debate, but they may also have stronger market attractiveness. Outer area projects may face fewer objections, but they may require more infrastructure investment and carry weaker market certainty. Large transformation areas may have strong long-term potential, but they often require heavy coordination before housing can be delivered.

Political sensitivity also changes with project type. Visible projects in central or already established areas are more likely to become politically sensitive because they affect existing residents and can become part of public debate. Manville et al. (2023) connects discretionary approval to negotiation, contestation, and variation in approval time. Respondent 7 connects project difficulty to land control, housing priorities, and the ability to turn political ambition into actual delivery. Respondent 8 places more weight on political leadership, resources, prioritization, and time discipline. Politics can slow a project when priorities change, redesign is required, or public resistance becomes difficult to handle. It can also support delivery when it gives the project clearer direction, stronger resources, and pressure to move forward.

Permitting issues should therefore be understood as project specific rather than uniform. A project with many objections can be delayed even if the technical issues are manageable. A project with few objections can still be delayed if infrastructure is missing or market demand is weak. A large project can receive more resources and still lose time through phasing and coordination. A small project can appear simple but become difficult if it triggers local conflict or requires changes to the detailed development plan. Project type matters because it changes which pressures become strongest in the process. Central densification tends to activate objections, appeals, cultural environment concerns, and political sensitivity. Large transformation areas tend to activate infrastructure dependency, phasing, land coordination, and long implementation chains. Outer area projects may reduce some forms of local conflict but increase dependence on infrastructure, public investment, market demand, and delivery capacity. Lead times are created when these project conditions meet a formal process

that must handle legal requirements, coordination, public participation, political judgement, and implementation.

6.5 Synthesis of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

This section of the analysis answers the two research questions by bringing together the main patterns from the literature and empirical material. The purpose is to clarify what the analysis shows in relation to the questions that guided the study.

6.5.1 How are the major permitting issues in Swedish housing projects being addressed?

The major permitting issues in Swedish housing projects are mainly addressed through earlier preparation, stronger coordination, parallel work, risk management, public dialogue, digital support, prioritization, and dedicated capacity. These responses do not remove the formal requirements of the Swedish planning and permitting system. Instead, they aim to make the existing process more manageable. This is important because the delays identified in the analysis are rarely caused by one isolated factor. They develop through the interaction between legal requirements, municipal routines, technical investigations, political decisions, public participation, appeals, and limited organizational capacity.

A central response is to move important questions earlier in the process. The analysis shows that many problems become more difficult to handle when they appear late, after time, money, and expectations have already been invested in the project. Earlier risk identification and earlier investigations are therefore used to reduce uncertainty before it becomes formal delay. This is visible in the interviews, where Respondent 2 emphasized the need to identify key risks early, while Respondent 3 stressed that important investigations must be carried out early enough to assess whether a plan is actually deliverable. This means that early preparation is not only a technical task. It is also a way of testing whether the project can move forward without later redesign, conflict, or repeated clarification.

Coordination is another central way of addressing delay. The analysis shows that many permitting-related problems arise between actors rather than inside one single organization. Municipal departments, developers, consultants, building permit officials, county administrative boards, courts, politicians, and residents all influence the process from different positions. This creates a need for stronger coordination across organizational boundaries. BoStad2021 illustrates this point, since the program tried to shorten lead times by strengthening cooperation between different municipal functions and by involving building permit competence earlier in the planning stage (Bröchner et al., 2021). The main lesson is that faster progress depends on how actors work through the formal steps, not only on the steps themselves.

Parallel work is also used to reduce long lead times. Instead of allowing investigations, internal reviews, and other tasks to follow each other one by one, actors try to handle several issues at the same time. The interviews show that this can shorten the path toward consultation and decision-making. Respondent 1 described sequential investigations as one reason why the process becomes longer than necessary. At the same time, parallel work does not mean that less work is done. It means that more work

is moved to an earlier stage. This requires stronger project management, clearer roles, and enough resources at the beginning of the process. Without this, parallel work can create confusion and rework rather than reduce delay.

Risk management is another way of addressing these problems. In the analysis, risk management appears as a practical response to uncertainty. Actors try to identify what may later slow the project, create conflict, lead to appeals, or make the project unstable. This includes legal risks, technical risks, stakeholder risks, political risks, and risks connected to weak documentation. From an institutional perspective, this is important because the risks are not only technical. They are also connected to formal responsibilities, legitimacy, public trust, and the need for decisions to withstand later review.

Public dialogue and consultation are also used to manage delay. The analysis shows that public participation can extend the process, especially when many objections are raised. At the same time, dialogue can also make conflicts visible earlier. If residents and other stakeholders are involved too late, the project may face stronger resistance, late redesign, or appeals. Earlier dialogue does not remove disagreement, but it can make disagreement easier to understand and handle. This is especially important in infill projects, where new housing is placed close to existing residents, infrastructure, green areas, parking, and other local interests.

Digital tools are also used, but the analysis shows that they should be understood as process support rather than a complete solution. Digitalization can improve information handling, overview, documentation, and coordination. Varela et al. (2022) show that digital tools can support more data-driven and coordinated planning processes. These tools do not solve problems linked to unclear responsibility, limited capacity, political uncertainty, or legal complexity by themselves. Digitalization can therefore support better permitting processes, but only when it is connected to organizational change and clearer ways of working.

Prioritization and dedicated capacity are also important. Respondent 3 described how tight time plans and focused work were central in BoStad2021. Respondent 6 emphasized that municipalities need drive and resources if faster progress is expected. Respondent 8 also described clearer prioritization as important, especially when deciding which areas and projects should move first. This shows that addressing permitting issues is not only about methods. It is also about how attention, competence, and resources are allocated. When capacity is spread across many projects, momentum can be lost. When actors are gathered around a clear priority, the process can move more effectively.

The answer to the first research question is therefore that major permitting issues are addressed mainly by managing the existing system more actively. The main responses are earlier preparation, early risk identification, parallel investigations, stronger coordination, public dialogue, digital support, clearer prioritization, and dedicated capacity. These measures help reduce late surprises and improve project flow. They do not remove the need for legal review, political handling, technical documentation, public participation, or formal approval. Swedish housing projects are therefore not accelerated by bypassing the planning and permitting system, but by working earlier, more closely, and more systematically within it.

6.5.2 Are the issues the same for all housing projects, or do they vary depending on the type of project?

The analysis shows that permitting issues are partly shared across housing projects, but they are not the same in every case. Some problems are common because all housing projects must operate within the Swedish planning and permitting framework. These include municipal handling, legal requirements, documentation demands, consultation, political decision-making, possible appeals, and coordination between several actors before construction can begin. This means that even projects that appear simple can face delay if the process is fragmented, under-resourced, or dependent on several sequential decisions.

At the same time, the type of project affects which problems become most important. Project type should not only be understood as building form or tenure. It is also shaped by location, scale, complexity, stakeholder exposure, planning conditions, and approval pathway. A project that already fits within an existing detailed development plan does not face the same conditions as a project that requires a new or amended plan. A small project may still be delayed by municipal routines or appeals, but a larger infill project is more likely to face stronger stakeholder reactions, more investigations, political sensitivity, and coordination problems.

Infill projects appear to be especially exposed to permitting-related challenges. Since they are located in already developed urban environments, they often affect existing residents and local functions. Questions about traffic, parking, green areas, schools, noise, daylight, cultural environment, and local identity can become central. This increases the likelihood of objections, appeals, and political pressure. In such projects, the issue is not only whether housing can be built. The issue is also how new housing can be fitted into an existing place without creating effects that are seen as unacceptable by residents, authorities, or political actors.

Larger and more complex projects also tend to face more demanding permitting conditions. They often require more investigations, more coordination between municipal departments, and more interaction with external authorities. When several technical, environmental, legal, and political questions must be solved before the project can proceed, the risk of delay increases. The delay does not need to come from one clear obstacle. It can grow through the number of dependencies between actors, stages, and decisions.

The approval pathway also matters. The literature shows that projects may face different permitting conditions depending on whether they follow a predictable route or a more discretionary approval process (Manville et al., 2023). In the Swedish context, this is closely related to whether the project can move forward within existing planning conditions or whether it needs a new detailed development plan. When a new plan is required, the project becomes exposed to consultation, review, political adoption, legal force, and possible appeals before later permitting can proceed with more certainty. This makes the process longer and less predictable than in projects where the planning conditions are already settled.

The analysis also shows that complexity alone cannot explain all delays. Some smaller projects can still experience long lead times. This means that permitting problems are

not only linked to project size. They are also linked to municipal routines, available resources, internal coordination, legal caution, stakeholder exposure, and how work is sequenced. A small project can become slow if it gets stuck between actors, if documentation needs repeated correction, or if the project enters a sensitive local context. A large project can move faster if it is strongly prioritized and handled through concentrated coordination. This shows that project type matters, but it does not work alone.

Permitting issues vary between housing projects, but within a shared institutional system. All projects are shaped by the same overall planning and permitting framework, but the actual problems differ depending on location, complexity, scale, stakeholder exposure, approval route, and available capacity. Simpler projects may mainly face documentation, municipal handling, or resource-related delays. Infill projects are more likely to face local objections, political sensitivity, and appeals. Large urban projects are more likely to face coordination problems because many actors and technical systems must be aligned. Projects requiring a new detailed development plan are usually more exposed to uncertainty than projects that already fit within existing planning conditions.

6.6 Proposed Measures for Reducing Permitting Related Delays

Based on the preceding analysis, this section presents proposed measures from the literature and interviews that could reduce future lead times. The focus is therefore not only what actors currently do, but on what could be improved in the planning and permitting process. The proposed measures are grouped thematically in order to show how different types of solutions respond to different causes of delay.

The literature and empirical material suggest that permitting-related delays cannot be reduced through one single measure. Instead, the proposed improvements point towards a combination of earlier preparation, stronger coordination, clearer municipal process management, greater predictability, differentiated processes based on project complexity, and stronger capacity and public dialogue. Some proposals focus on working more effectively within the existing system, while others arise broader questions about responsibility, private initiative, and the institutional organization of planning. In this way, the section analyses proposed measures not only as practical tools for shortening lead times, but also as potential changes in how actors, responsibilities, and procedures are organized within the Swedish planning and permitting system.

6.6.1 Earlier Risk Identification and Preparation

One proposed measure for reducing permitting-related delays is to identify risks and prepare key project conditions earlier in the process. Both the literature and the empirical material suggest that delays often become more difficult to manage when important issues are discovered late, after time, money, and expectations have already been invested in the project. Granath Hansson (2015) argues that several reform discussions in the Swedish planning context aim to make the process more predictable and better prepared, rather than only shorter. This is reflected in the interviews, where

early risk identification, early investigation, and earlier exposure to external reactions were described as important ways to avoid later rework and delay.

Respondent 2 emphasized that key risks need to be identified early, especially before too much time and money have already been tied up in the project. This indicated that early risk identification is not only a technical planning task, but also a way of reducing uncertainty and protecting project feasibility. If risk are not clarified early, a project may continue to move forward while still carrying unresolved issues that can later lead to redesign, delays, or conflict.

Early investigations were also highlighted by Respondent 3, who argued that important investigations need to be carried out early enough to determine whether a plan is actually deliverable. This is closely connected to Bröchner et al. (2021), who show that unresolved issues between detailed planning and building permit stages weakened attempts to accelerate the process in BoStad2021. In that program, one response was to involve building permit officials already during the detailed planning stage, in order to reduce later rework and improve continuity between planning and permitting.

Another aspect of preparation concerns when projects are moved toward consultation. Respondent 1 argued that projects should not remain too long in internal preparation before consultation, because consultation is where important reactions and objections become visible. If these reactions are postponed, they may still need to be handled later, but under greater time pressure. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) make a similar point in the international literature, where preliminary dialogue between developers, municipalities, and planning authorities is presented as a way to reduce later conflict and ambiguity.

The interviews also suggest that earlier preparation is connected to how investigations are organized. Respondent 1 argued that sequential investigations make the process longer, while more parallel investigations can shorten the path toward consultation and decision. However, this also requires more coordination, resources, and capacity at an early stage. From an institutional perspective, earlier risk identification does not remove legal requirements, consultation, or review. Instead, it makes potential obstacles visible earlier and gives actors a better chance to manage them before they become formal delays.

6.6.2 Stronger Coordination and Parallel Work

A second proposed measure for reducing permitting-related delays is stronger coordination and more parallel work between the actors involved in planning and permitting. Both the literature and the interviews show that delays often arise when work is organized sequentially, when actors wait for each other, or when important questions are handled separately in different parts of the organization. Bröchner et al. (2021) show that BoStad2021 tried to address this by strengthening interdepartmental coordination, increasing collaboration with developers, and introducing more parallel processing between detailed planning and building permit work. This suggests that shorter lead times may depend less on removing formal steps and more on changing how actors work through those steps.

The empirical material supports this argument. Respondent 1 described sequential investigations as one reason why the process becomes longer than necessary. According to this view, the same investigations may still be needed, but the total time can be reduced if they are handled side by side instead of one after another. However, Respondent 1 also stressed that parallel work requires more effort, more coordination, and sometimes more personnel early in the process. This means that parallel work is not simply a faster version of the ordinary process. It requires a greater concentration of work at an earlier stage.

The importance of coordination is also visible in the contrast between ordinary planning work and more concentrated project settings. Respondent 1 used the battery factory project as an example where many investigations were handled in parallel and where unusually strong coordination contributed to a much faster process. At the same time, the example was also described as demanding and difficult to sustain under ordinary conditions. Respondent 3 described BoStad2021 in a similar way, where close cooperation between exploitation, traffic, park and nature, and planning created a more focused working environment. Respondent 4 also stated that the planning stage in BoStad2021 had been shortened significantly.

This is consistent with the literature on BoStad2021. Bröchner et al. (2021) explain that Gothenburg created a group of project managers from different departments and co-located staff to support closer collaboration. Building permit officials were also brought into the detailed planning stage as advisers, which was intended to reduce later rework and improve continuity between stages. In this way, BoStad2021 addressed fragmented coordination and weak links between planning and permitting by reorganizing the process rather than changing the legal framework itself.

The interviews also show why stronger coordination is needed. Respondent 5 described the planning process as involving many actors, departments, interfaces, and decisions, where questions may circulate, wait for replies, be anchored internally, and then return again. This type of delay does not necessarily come from direct conflict. It can also arise because responsibility is fragmented and because different offices depend on each other in sequence.

From an analytical perspective, stronger coordination and parallel work can therefore be understood as ways of reducing institutional fragmentation. They do not remove the need for legal review, technical investigations, or political decision-making, but they can make these activities better connected. The main challenge is that this approach requires capacity, shared priorities, and clear project organization. Without that, parallel work risks becoming additional pressure rather than a real reduction in lead times.

6.6.3 Clearer Municipal Process Management

A third proposed measure is clearer municipal process management. While the previous sections focused on earlier preparation and stronger coordination, this measure concerns the municipality's ability to keep the full process moving, follow up time plans, and maintain clear responsibility across stages. The literature suggests that permitting-related delays are not only caused by individual problems, but also by fragmented municipal organizations and unclear routines. Svensson et al. (2022) propose that the fragmented development process should be replaced by a process management model

supported by digital tools, where projects can be monitored from start to completion. They also recommend a more unitary municipal project organization, with a project manager working across departments for each development project.

This connects closely to the empirical material. Respondent 8 described clearer prioritization as important, not only in terms of building more housing, but in deciding which areas and projects should move first, in what order, and under which market conditions. A more selective approach to plan starts, land instructions, and project sequencing was described as a way of reducing time spent on projects that are unlikely to move forward in the near future. This suggests that clearer process management is not only about managing ongoing projects more efficiently, but also about choosing which projects should enter the process in the first place.

The interviews also show that process management is closely connected to follow-up and time discipline. Respondent 8 argued that if a plan start has been communicated, it should also begin unless there are strong reasons to change it. Stronger follow-up of time plans, better knowledge of old land allocation and early-stage matters, and clearer incentives around delay were described as ways of reducing tolerance for slow movement in the system. This supports the literature's emphasis on clearer procedures, stronger incentives, and more transparent municipal practice. Granath Hansson (2015) and Varela et al. (2022) both point to predictability, standardized routines, and clearer structures as important ways of reducing ambiguity in the planning process.

6.6.4 Private Initiative and Changed Responsibility in Planning

Another proposed measure concerns changing how responsibility is distributed in the planning process. This measure is closely connected to the municipal planning monopoly, since municipalities have a central role in deciding when and how detailed development plans move forward. In the literature, Granath Hansson (2017) argues for greater private initiative in development planning as one possible way to reduce uncertainty, duration, and cost in residential planning. The idea is not that private actors should replace the municipality's formal decision-making role, but that developers could take greater responsibility for preparing planning material, investigations, and plan proposals under municipal review.

This is relevant because several delays identified in the empirical material are connected to municipal capacity, prioritization, and fragmented responsibility. Respondent 8 described weak incentives and limited pressure to shorten time when costs could continue on running account. Respondent 1 also connected delays to available resources inside the municipal organization and among developers, while respondent 8 noted that lack of experienced personnel could slow the process even when positions had been filled. These findings suggest that changed responsibility could potentially reduce pressure on municipal resources, especially in less complex projects where private actors may be able to prepare more of the material earlier.

At the same time, the interviews also show that this measure is not straightforward. Respondent 7 emphasized public control over land and development, and connected project difficulty to the ability of public actors to shape outcomes rather than only react to market conditions. This indicates that increased private initiative could shorten some

parts of the process, but it may also raise questions about public control, legitimacy, and accountability.

From an institutional perspective, this measure would therefore not simply make the process faster. It would change the balance between public authority and private project responsibility. The municipality would still need to safeguard legal certainty and public interests, while private actors could potentially take a larger role in preparing projects for formal review.

6.6.5 Increased Predictability and Standardisation

Another proposed measure is to increase predictability and standardisation in the planning and permitting process. This measure is closely connected to earlier risk identification and clearer municipal process management, but the focus here is on making the process easier to understand, follow and anticipate for all actors involved. In the literature, Granath Hansson (2015) identifies lack of predictability and transparency in Swedish planning and development agreements as part of the broader problem structure. Bröchner et al. (2021) also connect weak predictability to situations where projects enter detailed planning without enough clarity about what problems may arise later.

The international literature points in the same direction. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) argue that planning policy should focus on reducing uncertainty and increasing transparency. They propose clearer milestones, predetermined approval periods and a clear set of rules as ways to make the process more predictable for both developers and planning authorities. Manville et al. (2023) also show that more rule-based approval pathways can reduce variation in permit duration, which suggests that predictability is not only about speed but also about reducing uncertainty around outcomes.

This is also reflected in the empirical material. Respondent 8 emphasized stronger follow-up of time plans and earlier phases as a way of handling delay. If a plan start had been communicated, it should also begin unless there were clear reasons to change it. Respondent 8 also described clearer incentives around delay and better knowledge of old land allocation and early-stage matters as ways of reducing tolerance for slow movement in the system.

From an analytical perspective, predictability and standardization would not remove all complexity from the process. However, clearer rules, routines, time plans and expectations could reduce ambiguity and make it easier for actors to understand what is required, when decisions should be made and where responsibility lies.

6.6.6 Differentiated Processes Based on Project Complexity

A recurring idea in both the literature and the interviews is that housing projects should not necessarily move through the planning and permitting process in the same way. Some projects are relatively standardized and less conflict-sensitive, while others involve complex site conditions, many stakeholder, infrastructure dependencies, or high appeal risk. Granath Hansson (2017) argues that less complex housing projects could be better suited to standardised or accelerated procedures, while planning authorities with limited capacity should concentrate more active planning effort on

complex cases. This frames shorter lead times not only as a matter of working faster, but also as a matter of using administrative resources more selectively.

The empirical material supports this distinction. Respondent 2 described complexity, number of parties, and dependencies as more decisive than project labels alone. Respondent 3 suggested that outer-area projects may sometimes face less appeal risk than highly contested central projects, although they may still involve infrastructure demands, land preparation, and market uncertainty. Respondent 6 also connected large transformation areas to scale, phasing, land coordination, and infrastructure interfaces. These findings indicate that different project types require different forms of process management rather than one uniform planning model.

This also connects to the literature on project variation. Bröchner et al. (2021) and Gregorowicz-Kipszak et al. (2025) show that infill projects often involve existing residents, coordination demands, neighbourhood concerns, and context-specific conflict. Manville et al. (2023) add that approval conditions also matter, since by-right projects were faster and less uncertain than projects requiring discretionary approval. The key point is therefore that permitting processes may need to be differentiated not only by physical project type, but also by approval pathway, conflict level, and stakeholder exposure.

A differentiated approach could help reduce delays by matching the level of review, coordination, and administrative effort to the actual complexity of the project. Simpler projects may benefit from clearer and more standardised procedures, while complex projects may require more resources, earlier coordination, and deeper institutional attention. This would not remove legal requirements, but it could make the system more proportionate and reduce unnecessary delay in projects with lower risk or fewer conflicts.

6.6.7 Capacity, Resources, and Public Dialogue

Capacity, resources and public dialogue form a final group of proposed measure for reducing permitting-related delays. The literature suggests that process improvements require not only better routines, but also enough organizational capacity to apply them. Rubin and Felsenstein (2019) argue that planning authorities need sufficient funding and closer monitoring if delays are to be reduced effectively. Varela et al. (2022) also point to organizational structures, common frameworks and better information management as important conditions for making planning processes more effectively.

This is not strongly reflected in the interviews. Respondent 6 argued that drive and resources are necessary if municipalities genuinely want faster progress, while Respondent 1 connected delays to whether available capacity inside the municipality and among developers matches the number and intensity of projects being handled. Respondent 8 also described how lack of experienced personnel can slow the process, since newer staff may need more support, more checking and more time before decisions can be made confidently.

Public dialogue is another important part of this measure. In the literature on BoStad2021, Bröchner et al. (2021) describe how developers engaged in pre-planning dialogues with residents in order to reduce later conflict and resistance. However, the literature also shows that early dialogue does not remove all complaints, which means

that public involvement should be understood as a way to manage conflict earlier rather than eliminate it.

The empirical material supports this interpretation. Respondent 3 described better cooperation with the public and improved information as ways of reducing the chance of later appeals. Respondent 1's emphasis on moving projects toward consultation earlier also fit the logic, since consultation makes public reactions visible earlier in the process. This suggests that capacity and dialogue are closely linked. Without sufficient resources, municipalities may struggle to communicate, respond and keep the process moving even when problems are identified early.

Overall, these proposed measures show that reducing permitting-related delays requires a combination of earlier preparation, stronger coordination, clearer municipal management, greater predictability, differentiated processes, sufficient capacity, and earlier public dialogue. The aim is not to remove legal review or public participation, but to reduce unnecessary delays within a system that must still protect legal certainty, democracy, and public interests.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the main findings of the study and presents the overall conclusions. The chapter first reflects on the meaning of the findings in relation to permitting-related delays, with particular focus on the balance between faster housing delivery, legal certainty, democratic participation, municipal responsibility, and project complexity. It then summarizes the main results in relation to the research questions and explains how the findings contribute to understanding long lead times in Swedish housing projects. Finally, the chapter presents suggestions for future research based on the limitations and findings of the study.

7.1 Discussion Points

The findings of this study show that permitting-related delays in Swedish housing projects are not only an administrative problem. They are also connected to broader questions about democracy, legal certainty, municipal responsibility, coordination, resources and institutional routines. This makes the issue difficult to solve, because some of the factors that create delays also have important functions in the planning system. Therefore, the main question is not simply how the process can become faster, but how unnecessary delays can be reduced without weakening public control, democratic participation or legal certainty.

An important distinction is the difference between necessary and unnecessary delays. Some delays are difficult to avoid because housing projects need to be investigated, reviewed and assessed before construction can begin. Consultation, environmental assessments, technical investigations and appeal rights exist to protect public interests and ensure that decisions are legally correct. These delays may be frustrating for developers, but they are part of a democratic and legally structured planning system. However, other delays appear to be more avoidable. These include delays caused by unclear requirements, weak coordination, internal municipal handovers, lack of resources and late changes in project direction. The challenge is therefore not to remove all delays, but to separate delays that protect important values from delays that mainly come from poor organization or unclear routines.

This distinction is especially important in relation to appeals. Appeals can extend the process significantly, but they also protect citizens' rights and the legitimacy of the planning system. Removing the possibility to appeal could shorten some processes, but it would also weaken democratic control. Introducing a fee for appeals could reduce the number of appeals, but it could also create inequality between citizens with different financial resources. The problem is therefore not easy to solve. A more realistic discussion is how objections and conflicts can be identified earlier, how dialogue can be improved, and how appeals can be handled more efficiently without reducing legal certainty or democratic rights.

The same balance is visible in relation to environmental and social considerations. Rules that protect trees, green areas, species or cultural values can delay housing projects, but they also protect long-term urban quality. At the same time, some projects may create major housing benefits, and a very rigid application of protective rules can make necessary development difficult. This does not mean that environmental protection should be weakened. Rather, it suggests that planning needs clearer ways of

balancing different public interests. In some cases, compensation measures, such as replacing removed trees or strengthening green qualities elsewhere, may be relevant. However, such solutions must be handled carefully so that compensation does not become a way to ignore important environmental values.

The municipality's role is one of the most important discussion points. The study shows that municipalities are not only "slow actors" in the process. They have a much more complex role. They are expected to enable housing development, coordinate actors, apply planning law, protect public interests, handle political priorities and ensure that decisions are legally robust. This means that municipalities can both drive and slow down projects. They drive the process because they hold the planning authority and coordinate planning work. However, they may also slow the process when internal organization is fragmented, when responsibilities are unclear or when different departments work sequentially rather than together.

This dual role makes municipal reform difficult. On one hand, the municipal planning monopoly gives municipalities strong control over land use and housing development. On the other hand, it also means that delays in municipal handling can have major consequences for the whole project. One possible way forward is to allow more private initiative in preparing planning material, investigations and plan proposals, while keeping the municipality's formal decision-making role. This could reduce pressure on municipal resources and make some processes faster. However, it would also raise questions about transparency, accountability and public control. The municipality cannot simply be replaced by private actors, because planning is not only a technical process. It is also a public responsibility.

Another key discussion point is that more resources alone will not solve the problem. Several findings point to the importance of capacity, competence and experience. Lack of experienced staff, too many cases per officer and insufficient knowledge can slow down the process. More staff and better training are therefore important. However, if the process itself remains fragmented, unclear and poorly coordinated, additional resources may not be enough. More resources need to be combined with clearer process management, stronger prioritization, better internal coordination and clearer requirements toward developers. Otherwise, the system may simply have more people working within the same unclear structure.

This also connects to investigations and documentation. Detailed development plans often require many investigations, including geological, ecological, social, economic and traffic-related studies. These investigations are important because they improve the quality of the final decision and reduce the risk of poor outcomes. However, the study also raises the question of whether all investigations are always needed at the same level of detail for all projects. Some projects may require extensive investigation because they are complex or conflict-sensitive, while simpler projects may not need the same level of review. A more differentiated process could help focus municipal resources on projects where the risks are highest.

Digitalization is another area that should be discussed carefully. Digital tools can support the planning and permitting process by improving information management, transparency, monitoring and coordination. They may help actors follow time plans, share documents and understand where projects are in the process. However,

digitalization is not a simple solution on its own. If responsibilities are unclear, if departments do not cooperate or if the process lacks clear ownership, digital tools will not solve the underlying problem. Digitalization can support a better process, but it cannot replace good organization, clear roles and sufficient competence.

Political decision-making is also important. Politics can help accelerate housing development when projects are clearly prioritized. However, political changes can also create uncertainty if projects that have already moved far in the process are forced to change direction because new planning ideals or political preferences appear. This creates risk for developers, especially when time and money have already been invested. A possible discussion point is therefore whether new political preferences or urban design trends should mainly apply to new projects, rather than forcing major redesigns of projects that have already been politically accepted. This would not remove political influence, but it could make the process more predictable.

The economic consequences of long lead times also need to be emphasized. Delays increase project costs because developers must keep capital, staff and planning resources tied up for a longer period. Even if developers initially carry these costs, they may eventually be transferred to housing prices. This means that long lead times do not only affect developers. They may also contribute to higher prices for future residents and worsen the broader housing shortage. In this sense, shorter and more predictable processes could support both housing delivery and affordability.

A short link to Institutional Theory helps clarify the overall meaning of these findings. The study shows that delays are not only caused by inefficient actors or poor project management. They are produced within an institutional system where actors follow rules, routines, responsibilities and expectations of legitimacy. Municipal officials must act carefully because their decisions need to be legally robust. Courts and appeal bodies may delay projects, but they also protect legal certainty. Developers want speed, but they must adapt to a public process. This means that many delays are institutionally embedded. They arise because the system is designed to balance speed with legality, transparency, democracy and public interest.

The main conclusion is that permitting-related delays in Swedish housing projects should be understood as a system issue rather than a single-actor problem. Some delays are necessary because they protect democratic and legal values, but many delays appear to be avoidable through better coordination, clearer municipal process management, earlier risk identification, stronger capacity, better use of digital tools and more proportionate processes for different project types. The goal should therefore not be to make the planning and permitting process fast at any cost. The goal should be to make it more predictable, better coordinated and more proportionate, while still protecting the public functions that make the process legitimate.

7.2 Summary of the Main Results

This study shows that permitting related delays in Swedish housing projects are not caused by one single issue. Long lead times are created through the combined effect of legal requirements, municipal responsibilities, actor coordination, technical investigations, political decision-making, public participation, appeals, limited resources, and project specific conditions. Permitting is therefore not only an

administrative step. It is a wider process where rules, actors, interests, and decisions must be aligned before construction can begin.

The largest permitting issues identified in the study are mainly connected to the early planning and permitting chain. Detailed development planning appears as a central bottleneck because many important questions must be clarified before a project can move forward. These questions often concern land use, infrastructure, environmental conditions, traffic, parking, schools, daylight, noise, cultural values, technical systems, public interests, and political priorities. The time required is not only created by the formal planning procedure itself, but also by the investigation, coordination, revision, and decision making that surround it.

A recurring problem is that risks are sometimes identified too late. When technical, legal, environmental, or stakeholder related issues appear after the project has already progressed, they can lead to redesign, repeated investigations, new coordination rounds, political reconsideration, or appeals. This means that a project may seem to move forward formally, while still losing time because earlier assumptions need to be corrected. Early preparation and early risk identification are therefore important for reducing uncertainty and avoiding unnecessary delay.

The sequential structure of the process also contributes to long lead times. A housing project may need a detailed development plan before the building permit stage becomes relevant, and a granted building permit does not allow construction to begin until a start notice has been issued. Within the planning process, investigations, consultation, review, political adoption, legal force, and possible appeals may also follow each other in a way that extends the total duration. When investigations and internal reviews are handled one after another, the process becomes slower than necessary. Parallel work can reduce this problem, but only if there is clear project management, enough resources, and a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The study also shows that many delays arise between actors rather than inside one single organization. Municipalities, developers, consultants, building permit officials, county administrative boards, courts, politicians, and residents all influence the process from different positions. The municipality has a particularly central role because it controls detailed planning, internal coordination, prioritization, political handling, and later permit related decisions. Developers and consultants also affect progress through the quality of their material, the timing of investigations, and their ability to respond to requirements. Weak coordination can therefore lead to slow information flows, unclear responsibilities, late comments, repeated work, and longer lead times.

Political decision making, public participation, and appeals are also important parts of the delay picture. Political priorities can affect which projects are prioritized, how plans are shaped, and whether earlier project assumptions need to be changed. Public participation is necessary because planning and permitting affect existing residents, public interests, land use, and local environments. At the same time, objections and appeals can add uncertainty and time, especially when they appear late or when the project affects sensitive local conditions. Earlier dialogue can make conflicts visible sooner and give actors better conditions to manage concerns before they develop into stronger resistance.

The main ways of addressing permitting related delays are earlier preparation, early risk identification, stronger coordination, parallel investigations, public dialogue, digital support, clearer prioritization, and dedicated capacity. These measures do not

remove the need for legal review, technical documentation, political handling, public participation, or formal approval. Instead, they aim to make the existing system more predictable and manageable. Faster progress is not achieved by bypassing the planning and permitting system, but by working earlier, more systematically, and with clearer coordination between the actors involved.

The findings also show that improvement depends on resources and process management. Early investigations and parallel work can reduce lead times, but only if municipalities and project actors have enough time, competence, and capacity to handle several issues at once. Digital tools can support documentation, overview, and information sharing, but they cannot solve unclear responsibility, lack of resources, political uncertainty, or legal complexity by themselves. Clear prioritization and dedicated capacity are therefore important, especially in complex projects where many investigations, interests, and decisions must be coordinated.

Permitting issues are not the same in all housing projects. Some problems are shared because all projects operate within the Swedish planning and permitting framework. These include municipal handling, documentation requirements, consultation, political decisions, legal review, and coordination between several actors. At the same time, the actual problems vary depending on project type, location, scale, complexity, stakeholder exposure, approval pathway, and available capacity.

Projects that require a new or amended detailed development plan are generally more exposed to uncertainty than projects that already fit within existing planning conditions. Infill projects are often more exposed to objections, political sensitivity, appeals, and additional investigations because they are located close to existing residents and established urban functions. Large urban development projects often face coordination problems because several landowners, municipal departments, infrastructure systems, technical investigations, public investments, and long-term phasing may need to be aligned. Smaller projects may appear simpler, but they can still experience long lead times if documentation is incomplete, municipal resources are limited, internal coordination is slow, or the project is located in a sensitive context.

The findings show that permitting-related delays are both system-related and project specific. They are system related because all housing projects operate within a formal planning and permitting framework shaped by law, municipal authority, public participation, political decisions, and possible appeals. They are project specific because the actual delay drivers differ depending on the site, the actors involved, the approval pathway, and the level of complexity. Reducing lead times therefore requires a combination of measures rather than one general solution. The central challenge is to make the process more predictable, better coordinated, and better adapted to the specific conditions of each housing project.

7.3 Future Study Ideas

Based on the findings of this study, several areas for future research can be suggested. A first possible direction is to compare planning and permitting processes in larger cities with those in smaller municipalities that appear to have shorter lead times. Such a study could help identify whether smaller municipalities work differently in terms of organization, decision-making, coordination, or project prioritization. This could

provide useful lessons for larger urban municipalities, where housing demand is often higher and the planning process tends to be more complex.

A second area for future research is the role of digitalization in improving the planning and permitting process. This study has shown that delays are often connected to coordination problems, unclear responsibilities, and fragmented information flows. Future studies could therefore examine whether digital tools, shared platforms, automated checks, or improved data management can make the process more transparent and efficient. It would also be useful to study whether digitalization actually reduces lead times in practice, or whether organizational and legal barriers still limit its effect.

A third important topic is the effect of appeals on the planning and permitting process. Appeals were identified as an important factor that can extend lead times, but they also play an important role in protecting legal certainty and public participation. Future research could study how appeals affect different types of housing projects, how much time they add to the process, and whether there are ways to handle appeals more efficiently without weakening democratic rights or legal review.

A fourth possible direction is to examine private initiative in the planning process. This could include studying how a larger role for private actors in preparing planning material, investigations, or plan proposals would affect municipal workload, project speed, and the balance between public and private responsibility. At the same time, future research should also examine how such changes would affect the municipality's role, public control, transparency, and legal certainty. This is important because faster planning should not only be evaluated in terms of time savings, but also in relation to accountability and the legitimacy of the planning system.

A fifth future study could examine whether incentives or sanctions could be introduced to encourage municipalities to shorten planning and permitting lead times. This could include financial incentives for meeting time targets, or penalties when processes take significantly longer than expected without clear justification. Such research could analyze whether these mechanisms would create more efficient municipal practice, or whether they could risk reducing legal certainty, public participation, or planning quality. This would be especially relevant for understanding how responsibility for delays can be managed without weakening the democratic and legal functions of the planning system.

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