

MCALLEN, TEXAS

McAllen, Texas, Streamlines Building Permitting and Offers Online Citizen Access

Located near the southern tip of Texas about 10 miles from the Mexico border, McAllen is the largest city in Hidalgo County. In 2012, the *Wall Street Journal* ranked the McAllen MSA as having the best housing market in the nation.

MANAGING NONSTOP GROWTH

Like many municipalities, the City of McAllen was experiencing rapid growth in 2006 and struggled to keep up with the demand for new building permits. McAllen's Building Permits and Inspections Department used a software product to track permits and result inspections. However, it was only visible to department staff, could not be shared across departments and was only accessible from a computer. Residential permits took up to three weeks and commercial permits took up to two months. Builders and contractors expressed frustration with turnaround times, and had to physically visit the office during business hours and call for status updates.

Depending on the type of building and occupancy being permitted, internal plan reviews required 4-5 sets of construction documents that in turn required onsite storage. Additionally, inspectors had to carry original building plans with them in the field for reference and then come back to the office to manually enter the results.

HOW ACELA EMPOWERS MCALLEN

The City chose Accela Land Management for building permits and inspections, planning and zoning, and environmental health and code compliance. McAllen selected Accela based on usability, functionality and support; online access for internal staff and citizens; GIS integration; and mobile capabilities for real-time inspections in the field. According to Luis Vasquez, Chief Building Official for McAllen, "We did not have an online presence, and Accela made that easy for us."

Automated workflows eliminate interdepartmental inefficiencies and a lack of transparency. Electronic plan review provides automated routing to multiple departments

"We were able to reduce turnaround times for residential permits from approximately three weeks to three days and for commercial permits from two months to 5-10 days."

Luis Vasquez, Chief Building Official, Building Permits and Inspections Department



Population
130,000

Challenge

Reduce building permit issuance time and streamline review, approval and inspection process for contractors across the state

Solutions

Accela Land Management, Accela GIS, Accela Mobile Office, Citizen Access

Results

1,600 permits per quarter, with 35% of all sub-permits handled online

85% reduction in residential permit turnaround times

83% reduction in commercial permit turnaround times



Saving time for agency staff and contractors

and allows concurrent reviews. This passes on additional savings to contractors by only requiring one set of construction documents.

Empowering mobile employees with real-time data has greatly increased productivity, particularly for building inspectors, code enforcement officers and health inspectors. Through integration with the agency's Esri GIS solution, inspectors can visualize work orders on a map and plan their routes to be more efficient in the field. Using Microsoft Surface Pro tablets, inspectors access all documents required for permit approval and enter inspection results in real time.

"With Accela, the whole dilemma with everyone not being on the same page internally was resolved," shares Jose Peña, Application Services Manager, Information Technology. "Now, all our departments work with each other, which in turn allows us to provide better customer service to our citizens, contractors and developers." Other departments benefiting from this transparency include Planning and Zoning, Environmental/Health Code Compliance, Engineering, Public Works, Fire and Public Utilities.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With Accela, the City of McAllen was able to reduce permit issuance time to keep builders doing what they do best. According to the ICMA Center for Performance Measurement, the City now processes residential building permits 5 ½ times faster and commercial building permits 2 ½ times faster than its peer cities' national average. In Texas, electrical, mechanical and plumbing contractors all hold state licenses. One of their biggest challenges is travelling to local agencies to secure the necessary permits. In 2013, McAllen implemented online building sub-permit self-issuance and now handles 35 percent of all sub-permits online, which frees up staff for other priorities.

The City also introduced credit card payments for any permit type with the PayPal PayFlow Pro Payment Adaptor, and improved its financial reconciliation procedures by integrating credit card payments with its Microsoft Dynamics GP Financial module. Additionally, McAllen has improved internal auditing processes. The solution automatically assesses the appropriate fees and records all actions and changes, such as voiding a fee or issuing a permit before the fee has been paid, providing a historical archive and accountability.

For McAllen, one of the biggest benefits of implementing the Accela Civic Platform was the ability to grow over time. "We didn't do everything at once," comments Peña. "We continued to grow and utilize it even more, and our solution scaled with us." In the future, McAllen plans to expand online permits for swimming pools, signs and garage sales, among others. The City also intends to explore the introduction of electronic plan submittal, licensing for online registration and asset management for Public Utilities and Public Works.

About Accela

Accela provides cloud-based productivity and civic engagement solutions to more than 2,200 government agencies worldwide. The Accela Civic Platform includes solutions for asset management, citizen relationship management, environmental health, finance and administration, land management, legislative management, licensing and case management, recreation and resource management, right of way management, and utility billing. More than fifty percent of America's largest cities use the Accela Civic Platform. The Company is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with offices in San Francisco, New York, Boston, Portland, Melbourne and Dubai.

Learn more

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