Tacoma, Washington

Improving The Permit Process – A Quest to Hear The Customer and Support Innovative Solutions Services

On the banks of the Puget Sound, south of Seattle, lies the urban port city of Tacoma. As the third largest city in the state of Washington, Tacoma has been dubbed one of the "most livable areas" in the United States. Incorporated in 1875, the city hosts numerous cultural events and is home to a number of museums and outdoor activities.

Tacoma leverages Accela Building for permitting, site permitting, mechanical, plumbing, historic preservation and land use permitting. The city also plans to roll out other functions using Accela technology including long range planning.

With 130 Accela users across multiple departments and 10,000 customer contacts, Tacoma is a permitting powerhouse that helps facilitate the economic growth within its community. The agency continually strives for excellence and their quest to "hear the customer" and "support innovative solutions" makes the city stand out amongst its peers.

Trying to Fit a Square Peg in a Round Hole – Tacoma’s Technology Challenge

Prior to adopting Accela Building, Tacoma was utilizing an enterprise-wide solution that became their permitting tool for Planning and Development Services. However, the agency quickly came to understand the solution was not built for permitting, and it could not meet their needs. Staff made double entries due to a lack of automation, creating inefficiencies in the permitting process. Citizens were also not afforded the ability to pay fees online or check the status of an application. These inefficiencies reflected largely on the citizen experience.

Jennifer Ward, from Tacoma’s Planning and Development Services Department shared, “The citizen experience was difficult, because customers felt like there was a wall up between us and them. They had no way to see into the process and understand their application status, what was happening next, and who was reviewing it. As a result, they felt they had to call in, email staff, or come to the office for every single need. They were completely in the dark.”

Results
Saved 30 hours a month in processing over-the-counter permits
Saved 44 hours a month by offering ePermits
Eliminated third-party applications for application submission
Gained access to reports and open data to share across departments
Reduced office foot traffic and service calls
Not Just About Improving Permit Processes

Another one of the most significant improvements the City of Tacoma found after implementing Accela were the reporting capabilities. Pre-Accela, the agency required a full-time employee to gain visibility into the number of permits being issued by the City and respond to customer inquiries.

Today, while permitting data reports are essential, other reports used by the organization range from level of service, staff time tracking to help guide business decisions around, and workload management. Reports are automated and open data can be shared across departments and the public. The data from these reports have been further enhanced by adding maps to graphically show the data. These reporting improvements only added to the growing momentum behind the agency’s focus to “hear the customer” and “support innovative solutions”.

“We are looking forward to what’s next, and with everything changing so fast, we really don't know what's next out there. Regulations are changing quickly, and citizens and entrepreneurs are coming up with new ideas that change our landscape so rapidly, and it's exciting that we have a tool that can respond to that.”

Jennifer Ward
Tacoma’s Planning and Development Services Department
Adaptive Solutions for Changing Demands

Over the past three years, Tacoma has experienced many of the benefits Accela technology has to offer. However, this is just the beginning to an ever-evolving journey. The City is committed to innovate as its citizen’s demands change.

Jennifer Ward continued, “We are looking forward to what’s next, and with everything changing so fast, we really don’t know what’s next out there. Regulations are changing quickly, and citizens and entrepreneurs are coming up with new ideas that change our landscape so rapidly, and it’s exciting that we have a tool that can respond to that.”

At the end of the day, the City of Tacoma measures its success by asking these two questions – Did we solve a problem? Did we deliver a product that met a need? And now, when it comes to improving City permitting, they can confidently answer yes.

About Accela

Accela provides market-leading SaaS solutions that empower governments worldwide to build thriving communities, grow businesses and protect citizens. From planning, building, licensing and permitting, to asset and service request management, finance, environmental health and more, Accela’s offerings accelerate efficiency and transparency in governments of all sizes. Powered by Microsoft Azure, Accela's open and flexible technology helps agencies address specific needs today, while ensuring they are prepared for any emerging or complex challenge in the future. Accela’s solutions serve more than 80 percent of America’s largest cities. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with additional offices around the world.

Learn More

Visit www.accela.com or call us at (888) 722-2352