

Charlotte, North Carolina

A Seamless Transition: Adapting to New Norms Amid COVID-19

The City of Charlotte, North Carolina has been ranked one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation and is an economic, cultural and transportation hub. Charlotte is the second largest city in the southeastern United States and encompasses 308 square miles. Among the City's many industries, banking is at the forefront – it is home to Bank of America and Truist Financial headquarters and handles the east coast operations for Wells Fargo. Charlotte's growth stems from the increasing economic development brought in by these types of businesses and requires a solid infrastructure to meet project owners demands for more and faster services. That's where Charlotte's Land Development Departments have stepped up to the plate.

Charlotte's Land Development Services team includes staff from Planning, Transportation, Engineering, Urban Forestry, Erosion Control and Site Inspection. This team looks at the horizontal aspect (site) of development. The team reviews and inspects commercial projects and subdivision developments in order to ensure compliance with City ordinances and standards for public street infrastructure. Charlotte partners with Mecklenburg County in the issuance of building permits and certificates of occupancies. These teams help to make the Charlotte community a place where people want to live and do business.

It is estimated that nearly 60 people move to Charlotte every day.* In a growing community with a constant stream of requests coming into the agency, Charlotte has worked to streamline planning processes and make the customer experience simple and painless.

Strategic Move to Improve Processes and Customer Satisfaction

In an effort to speed and simplify the customer experience, the City has built a new development center that houses service departments from engineering to fire, to erosion control to plan review. Now, not only are Charlotte's land development services in a single location, but their strategic focus is aligned across departments. And that's just the beginning.

The City of Charlotte implemented Accela Automation in 2008. In December of 2009, using a hybrid model, customers submitted electronic plans via email and back office staff reviewed them in Accela. By January 2012, plans were required to be submitted electronically through Accela Citizen Access. Transitioning from paper to digital has made all the difference, especially as the impact of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic was felt.



Population

872,498

Challenge

Improve the customer experience with faster services while overcoming challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.

Solutions

Accela Planning
 Accela Building

Results

Able to create a 100% completely digital customer experience by moving planning processes online

Overcame physical challenges presented by COVID-19 empowering staff to work remotely, while delivering quality service to citizens

Increased efficiencies in processing projects to introduce expedited reviews, resulting in a significant additional source of revenue

*<https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/development/article209156384.html>



A Digital Solution Helping Charlotte Overcome COVID-19 Challenges

On March 18th, 2020, the city of Charlotte, like most communities across the country, found themselves facing big decisions with regards to the health and safety of citizens and agency staff. That's when it was decided to limit the number of those coming in to work in the agency office. However, within a few days the Governor had closed the office completely. With government shutdowns and mandates in place, Charlotte had to face the realities of working remotely. Fortunately, this was no setback for the City and Charlotte tackled the challenge with relative ease. This was possible because of the processes and procedures they had established previously utilizing the Accela Planning solution.

With the help of Accela, the City was already accepting submittals and applications, conducting rezoning and more electronically. Everything was online. That made coping with office shut-downs due to the pandemic all that much easier. It was a seamless transition from working at the office to working remotely with no physical barriers to overcome. All the City had to do was ensure staff had the right hardware equipment to do their jobs at home.

In the words of Nan Peterson, Business Relationship Manager, for the city of Charlotte, "We haven't really seen a glitch in anything. I think maybe from the customers there are some projects that have been put on hold, but from the City standpoint, we have basically walked out the door that Tuesday night and Wednesday people were back to work at their home office wherever that might be, working seamlessly." The City continues to meet regularly using Webex software for customer meetings and staff trainings and meetings, so all remain in sync on strategic initiatives, but in general, it's business as usual for Charlotte.

Peterson goes on to say, "The City, being an early adopter of Accela, and using the product, has made what could have been a horrible experience, almost seamless, and that's what our customers have said to us over and over, between the virtual meetings and being able to submit everything electronically."

Breaking Physical Barriers for Safe Operations

By converting City planning functions to a 100% digital standard, Charlotte has been able to provide customers quality service during a time when traditional methods would have impeded or stopped project owners in their tracks. With a population of just under a million people, now the city of Charlotte can move forward with confidence that their staff, and the people they serve are safe while meeting high market demands in community development.

About Accela

Accela provides market-leading solutions that empower state and local governments to build thriving communities, grow businesses and protect citizens. 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 challenges in the future. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with additional offices around the world.

Learn More

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