

Charlotte County, Florida

Connected Government in Action – Leveraging an Enterprise Solution to Revolutionize Services

Charlotte County, Florida leverages Accela solutions to increase data-sharing, remove duplicate efforts and enable simultaneous plan reviews in cross-functional departments. As a result, the County has processed a record number of permits in half the time.

Located along the west coast of Florida, Charlotte County comprises the Punta Gorda, Florida metropolitan statistical area. The County boasts a growing population of nearly 189,000 residents within 858 square miles.

This growth has continued to stay strong, even with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the County has seen a near record high demand for services such as licensing and permitting since March 2020. With Charlotte County busy leveraging the Accela system to provide their citizens the services they need, the County has not only been able to keep pace with increased demand but has also improved service levels in the process. This is a result of Charlotte’s cross-department collaboration and use of an enterprise solution that removes duplicate efforts while streamlining workflows.

Building bridges – community development’s link to dependencies

Within Charlotte County, the community development department handles the intake for development and permitting, whether it’s looking at plats or plan development, or working to permit single family homes, new construction, remodels and more.

Once a request is received, these permits are farmed out to different departments and divisions within the county for review and processing, such as Charlotte’s utilities department, public safety department, fire department, public works department, community services, or even to various real estate services. Because the permits go to different agencies inside and outside the county, the county depends on the various agencies within the jurisdiction to maintain good communication, data-sharing capabilities, and connected workflows to deliver services fast.

Putting digital processes to the test

With tested digital processes in place across departments, Charlotte County was prepared for anything, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which became a showstopper for many government agencies. Charlotte County, however, was able to continue to do business as usual because they had already established processes using touchless technology.

With regards to data sharing, Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator for Charlotte County, FL stated, “As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, every department



Population

188,910

Challenge

Leverage an enterprise solution to collaborate across departments to streamline processes and deliver better services to constituents, even with market disruptions

Solutions

Accela Planning
 Accela Building
 Accela Service Request Management
 Accela Business Licensing
 Accela Occupational Licensing

Results

Removed duplicate efforts by leveraging Accela enterprise solution

Enabled simultaneous plan reviews between agencies within the county

Added data-sharing capabilities for cross-department collaboration

Processed record number of permits for single family homes in half the time (6 weeks)

was closed, so it was important to already have that connectivity between departments. This made it possible for a customer to go online and submit a permit for something like a commercial building, for example, and that permit could then be distributed to different departments for review.”

Jubb goes on to say, “Various departments then utilize the document review tool to mark-up plans and submit them back to community development to collate the plans and collaborate with the customer without them ever having to come into the office. Because we already had those processes in place to collaborate between agencies within the county, we did not skip a beat through the entire pandemic. In fact, we even improved our level of services because we didn’t have customers coming into the office, freeing us up to do reviews more quickly and keep those people in the industry working.”

In addition to providing customers an enhanced user experience, the county has also been able to eliminate duplicate efforts and waste by collaborating across departments.

For example, when building a commercial structure on site, agency staff come in and do a site plan review. These multi-department reviews look at things like storm water, traffic concurrency, permitting, environmental work, utilities capacity, and more. Prior to implementing the Accela solution, the county would ask the applicant to bring 12 hard copies of documentation into the office, which in some cases could be thousands of pages of plans. These copies would then have to be distributed to each department for review and comments.

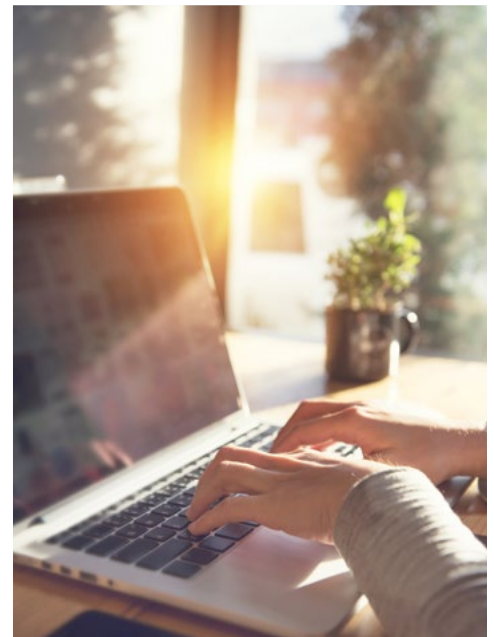
But Accela’s digital solution was leveraged for more than just data sharing during the pandemic, it was also critical for plan reviews. “Using Accela makes it so much easier for us to do all that,” Jubb adds. “An applicant can submit online and upload all necessary documents using ePermitHub (an Accela partner). From there it’s distributed to the different agencies for review and mark-ups. And then it goes back out to the applicant. There’s no paper. There’s no running around.”

“The customer doesn’t have to go to different agencies and have the same conversation over and over. They go solely through community development.”

COVID-19 has pushed the county to collaborate via the Accela solution in new ways. Prior to the pandemic, roughly 25% of applications were submitted online. However, as things escalated, that number rose substantially, and now over 80% of all applications are submitted electronically via the county’s website.

The pandemic has also pushed customers to work differently and has educated them to the types of services available to them via the Accela system. They can now go online and see every aspect of their review and read any associated comments.

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Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator for Charlotte County

Today, various departments can work to conduct reviews simultaneously, which has ultimately led to reduced turnaround times. All of this has been critical with a booming housing market.

Hot housing market creates the need for speed in permitting

Throughout the pandemic, things have not slowed down where community development in Charlotte County is concerned. To the surprise of many, demand has never been greater.

When asked about the increasing volume of permits received by the county, Jubb states, “We’re doing volumes that we haven’t seen since the 2004-2005 time period and at that time we were running about 12 weeks for a single-family home permit to get through the entire process. We’re doing the same level of volume now but turning them around in six weeks, or half the time. Over the past year and a half, we’ve seen a 40% increase in requests for single family homes. As a result, we topped nearly 250 single family home permits issued in the month of May 2021. And that’s the first time we’ve done that.”

Doing more with less has become the new norm for Charlotte County, and there’s no looking back. Since the office has reopened to the public, the county is seeing fewer and fewer people come into the office, which is evidence that COVID-19 has truly changed the way residents are choosing to do business. Accela’s enterprise solution has been there to support and facilitate this change helping Charlotte County, FL continue to do business as usual through challenges and disruptions in the market.

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.

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