

Shelby County, Tennessee

Shelby County, Tennessee Meets COVID-19 Head On and Improves Customer Experience for Community Development Services

Shelby County, Tennessee, is the largest county in the state in both population and geographic area and encompasses 785 square miles. It is part of the Memphis, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas metropolitan region and lies on the banks of the Mississippi River. Not only is Shelby the home to Elvis Presley and some of the best barbecue in the country, it is also a hub for economic growth and development.

The Memphis and Shelby County division of planning and development serves both the city of Memphis as well as unincorporated Shelby County with contractual agreements to serve four additional municipalities. The division of planning and development consists of six departments collaborating to meet the County's community development needs, with the help of Accela technology.

A Goal to Improve the Customer Service Experience

Shelby County's customers have always been a priority. However, in the past, planning and permitting processes have been somewhat siloed and disjointed. Traditionally, project owners were required to drive to one office for planning proposals and land development projects and drive to another office for building permits and inspections. Ultimately, the County realized things had to change to provide a more seamless customer experience. As a result, Shelby developed a new customer-centric initiative for the development community. At the heart of the initiative is a new modern customer service center located in downtown city hall. This center brought both planning and building functions under one roof and will serve as the hub of collaboration for all partners with a role in the development process.

As part of the customer-centered initiative, the agency decided to partner with Accela. Now, with the right tools in hand, Shelby County could serve their customers no matter where they were. Planning proposals and permit applications could be submitted online, back office staff could review and approve plans, and operations could be optimized for quicker turnaround times, increased transparency and improved customer satisfaction.

COVID-19—Changing the Way Government Does Business

Unfortunately, mid-way through the Accela deployment the County's plans were thrown for a loop when the coronavirus pandemic hit close to home, disrupting the way Shelby County did business and the way citizens consumed services. Though the County did not have anywhere near the number of virus cases many other metropolitan areas had, within a few weeks the planning and development divisions had to close their doors on March 23, only allowing customers to pick up and drop off forms.



Population

937,166

Challenge

Continue to deliver excellent, customer-centric community development services through the COVID-19 government shutdown mandates

Solutions

Accela Online Citizen Services

Results

Fast Solution Implementation – Accelerated Accela solution launch and within weeks, implemented Accela's COVID-19 Response Solution for Online Citizen Services, enabling customers to complete forms, upload documents and submit applications electronically

Quick Customer Adoption – After only one week of deployment agency saw 91 new user accounts and 55 applications submitted through system

Physical Barriers Eliminated – Agency staff empowered to work from home, keeping staff and citizens safe during COVID-19 pandemic

Fortunately, the agency had a technology partner that could be leveraged to remove physical barriers within planning and permitting processes. The agency decided to fast-track the launch of their Accela solution, and **within a matter of weeks the agency successfully deployed one of Accela's COVID-19 Response Solutions for Online Citizen Services.** Shelby County and Accela went to work to provide citizens a way to register for an account, complete a form, upload documentation, and submit an application regardless of the location or device. And the results were profound.

In the words of Nidia Logan Robinson, Deputy Director in the Division of Planning and Development for Shelby County, **“One week after deployment, we had 91 new user accounts and 55 applications submitted.”** Customer adoption was immediate. Logan Robinson went on to say, “We emailed a series of customer communications announcing the online option and citizens are now navigating the system on their own with success. The comments we are receiving from the public have been positive, thanking us for an added option, which traditionally has been paper-based and is now available online.”

Not only are customers able to work from home at their own convenience, **agency staff have also been empowered to process applications from home and conduct the majority of their business remotely** with Accela.

Leveraging the Right Tools to Thrive Under Difficult Circumstances

With building momentum behind digital technology, customers and staff alike are excited to see what's next with the implementation of additional Accela solutions.

A combination of Accela Online Services and the County customer service center has redefined the customer experience within Shelby County's limits and has made them a model agency among their peers. Through difficult times, Shelby County and the team working in the planning and development division has proven to be resilient, resourceful and impactful in helping citizens continue to do business and propel economic development forward within their community.

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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