

Rochester, Minnesota

Shaking things up in an epicenter fueled by economic boom and growth

Rochester is often referred to as a mecca in the science and medical communities, with the Mayo Clinic at its heart. In fact, Rochester has even established a new initiative called “Destination Medical Center,” which is the largest public-private economic initiative ever in Minnesota’s history and the catalyst for exponential growth within the City over the next ten to twenty years. With a solid plan in place, developers are working to build an epicenter fueled by economic boom and dramatic growth.

The City of Rochester, Minnesota has now been tasked with handling the infrastructure and logistics of this growing and thriving community. And the City’s building and planning departments are leading the way by ensuring building safety through permits, trade permits, and building inspections.

Community Growth Demands Digital

Since adopting Accela community development solutions in 2007, Rochester has consistently worked to improve processes and increase efficiencies in planning and permitting. Prior to implementing the solutions, the agency was utilizing outdated technology that was no longer meeting the needs of their employees or citizens. The City was concerned with the system’s ability to scale and keep up with the community’s growth. That’s when Rochester decided things needed to change. After 13 years of working with Accela, the City continues to scale and innovate to streamline processes and better serve their community.

Slashing Turnaround Times for Faster Services

In recent years, the City of Rochester has utilized data collected through the Accela system to identify trends and determine areas for improvement. With this information, the City quickly saw that incoming requests for trade permits such as plumbing, electrical and mechanical were among the City’s most requested. The City also saw that the number of these requests were increasing from year to year.

To put this into perspective, in 2010 the total number of trade permits requested by citizens was 6,444. Over the next eight years the City saw a 7% annual increase in trade permits. By 2019, Rochester was processing 10,492 trade permits.

The agency also found the average time it took to process a request was roughly four and a half minutes. The City went to work to improve efficiencies and leverage their Accela solutions to cut processing times in half. And those applications that were paid for online using credit cards took only 30 seconds to process, an 89% reduction in time savings. Rochester achieved these



Population

115,733

Challenge

Streamline building processes such as trade permits and inspections for faster service delivery

Solutions

Accela Planning
Accela Building

Results

Over 50% reduction in processing time for trade permits

With time savings, able to repurpose nearly half of a full time employee’s bandwidth to other strategic focuses

Moved manual paper-based processes online resulting in fewer emails, faxes and phone inquiries

Provided access to reporting and analytics for better decision-making

Achieved mobile inspections from the field for faster services



efficiencies by moving services online and into a digital environment. Work was easily routed, reviewed and approved or denied, and payments were processed all through the Accela system.

Prior to starting online trade acceptance, a citizen had to complete a fillable PDF application or print and fill it out by hand. The citizen would then have to save or scan the application and email, fax or drop it off to the City office. These manual and sometimes paper-based processes, took up valuable time and resources. Today, improvements in operations make it possible for the agency to repurpose nearly half of a full-time employee's bandwidth for more strategic initiatives. Now, not only are agency resources freed up, but Rochester is providing better services to their customers.

In regards to the systems success, Rob Ronnenberg, Office Services Coordinator for the City stated, "The difference was almost immediate how quickly the online permit applications climbed in submissions." Within a year of launching the program 51% of permits were being submitted online. Plus, the number of emails and faxes coming into the office were greatly reduced. Ronnenberg goes on to say, "We don't have companies sending us 15 emails a day where we have to print something out, fill it in, scan and send it back." Moving to a digital environment has removed these challenges from the City's building processes.

In addition to online application submissions, Rochester utilizes Accela technology to empower their inspectors in the field. Using a mobile application, inspectors can perform end result building inspections in real time. Inspectors can look up permit records, history, add comments, and interact with the back office on the go.

A Technology Partner You Can Grow With

Online Trade permit submissions and mobile inspections are just a few of the benefits Rochester has achieved and that's just the beginning. Rochester plans to roll out electronic plan reviews in the coming months and continues to grow and scale with the City's technology partner. With exponential economic growth and development on the horizon, spurred by initiatives such as "Destination Medical Center," Rochester's building and planning departments are now empowered to foster and encourage this type of growth.

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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