

Deschutes County, Oregon

Deschutes County Tackles Explosive Growth with Cloud Technology

Named for the river flowing through it, Deschutes County is comprised of 3,055 square miles and is the state of Oregon's fastest growing county, with a projected growth of 130% over the next 50 years. The county encompasses four cities which include Bend, Redmond, Sisters and La Pine.

The county boasts an outdoor lifestyle second to none, where locals live by the slogan "your vacation is our life". Bend, the largest of the four cities, has more than 80 parks, 48 miles of recreational trails, 25 nearby golf courses, whitewater rafting and fly-fishing, more than 1,000 climbing routes and 3,600 skiable acres.

With some of the fastest growing communities in the country, Deschutes is challenged by facilitating coordinated community growth through programs for land use planning, environmental soils, building safety, code enforcement, education and service to the public. To accomplish this, the county has partnered with Accela to deliver services to its citizens. The agency took a staged approach in implementing Accela technology, starting with Accela's building solution, then added planning and code enforcement. Today, the County of Deschutes has 55 Accela users processing nearly 6,500 permits a year - which include alterations, residential, commercial, manufactured homes, demolition, electrical and mechanical permits - and perform 48,000 building inspections a year. The agency also leverages Accela planning to process nearly 900 land use applications yearly.

With a goal to facilitate orderly growth and development across the county, Deschutes has positioned itself to meet and exceed citizen expectations.

Swapping Legacy Technology with a Modern Solution

Prior to Accela, the County of Deschutes was running their planning and permitting functions using an IBM pick system that was built and maintained internally. The system was completely customized to fit the needs of the agency. However, their homegrown custom solution came with some heavy baggage as it began to age. The county's IT department eventually stopped supporting the software, making it difficult to maintain and upgrade. In addition, the hardware required to support the system was becoming harder to come by. Plus, the system required staff to use paper forms and enter data manually, which added time and resources to already cumbersome processes. As a result, the county began looking at new ways to automate and digitize their application, permitting and inspection processes. Ultimately, they needed a modern solution to better serve their community.

Game Changing SaaS Technology

Accela fit the agency's need to facilitate community growth efficiently and effectively by moving daily operations to the cloud. Deschutes quickly saw results with better insight into agency performance.



Population

187,621

Challenge

Facilitate high influx of incoming planning and building applications with a digital SaaS solution to optimize internal processes

Solution

Accela Planning

Accela Building

Accela Code Enforcement

Accela Mobile

Accela Citizen Access

Results

Leveraging reports and dashboards for agency performance

Now able to track permit processing time

Processing more applications with fewer resources

Delivering citizens complete visibility into requests

Providing customers online access to submit applications, schedule inspections and pay associated fees

Optimizing inspector productivity with mobile technology



In reference to improved reporting capabilities delivered by cloud technology, Senior Management Analyst for the county, Sherri Pinner states, “With information being stored in Azure, we have access to the data in a real-time setting. We don’t have to wait for a system to upload or to get feedback information from the state of Oregon. Communication between departments has increased and communication between stakeholders has increased. I’m able to report on metrics shortly after the month closes.”

Angie Havniear, Administrative Manager at Deschutes adds, “We can now track our workflow data, measure application processing time, and we have even designed performance metrics to set department goals. Further converting the data to a standardized format has opened up a new window into our operations. Now it is much easier to understand the data. We can get reports almost in real-time through Microsoft Azure and feed data directly into Microsoft Power BI to create reports and dashboards. This gives us a better picture into what’s going on in our department.”

New insights from reporting is not the only benefit the agency has come to rely on. Moving to a digital SaaS platform ensures the county is always on the latest software version, has the most current security and compliance measures in place, and eliminates much of the work required by manual paper-based processes.

Optimizing Agency Productivity

Today, office staff can handle more requests with fewer resources. And it’s not just the backoffice enjoying the benefits. Building developers can now easily access the agency’s online portal to submit planning and building proposals and applications. They can also pay any associated fees for agency services wherever, whenever. This means they no longer have to come into the office throughout the planning and building process, saving them time and money.

With faster turnaround times, project owners can schedule more effectively to keep their jobs on time to avoid costly delays. They also have complete visibility into the application process. Havniear goes on to say, “People were often

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, service request management, 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.

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calling in to see the status of their inspection. Now they can see that real-time. They can see notes from the inspectors for corrections and address those to reschedule for the next day. Also, as far as the application process, they can go online and see where their application is at in the submittal process.” Customers can see if their request has been approved by the plans examiner, planning department, environmental soils department and more. Once their request is approved, an automatic email is sent out to notify the customer and inform on any outstanding fees required.

As of today, contractors and licensed septic installers are able to submit their applications online. Because services are now being offered online, the agency is experiencing lower office foot-traffic and fewer phone inquiries, freeing-up staff to work on more strategic initiatives.

Since going live, Deschutes County is also taking advantage of Accela mobile technology with 21 inspectors using the mobile application to perform and result inspections in the field. This optimizes productivity of employees by allowing them to sync with agency information on the device of their choice without the need to come into the office. The county’s inspectors also use Accela GIS to route their inspections for added efficiencies. Now, there’s a clear path for staff to follow to achieve maximum performance.

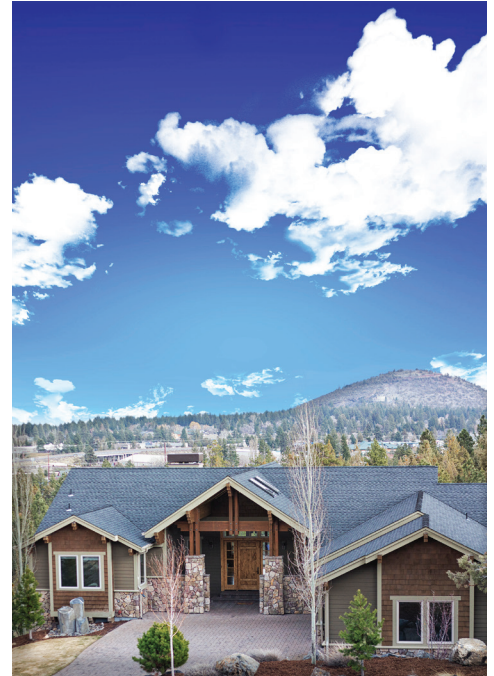
Ensuring Seamless Adoption

Deschutes County has taken a proactive approach to ensure agency staff and citizens alike understand the benefits of using technology like Accela, and how to use it. The county offers classes to contractors regularly. Now, even their contractors are training customers how to go online to pay outstanding fees for services. The community as a whole is embracing Deschutes’ plan to increase efficiencies and speed community development.

Part of a Larger Community

Accela technology is embraced by more than 2,000 government customers, which greatly benefits businesses and residents. Contractors and developers that work across county and city lines don’t need to struggle with one-off technology depending on the geographic location of their project. They’ve most likely seen it and used it before. This makes it easy for builders to do business with Deschutes.

With a large community of Accela users and automated digital services on their side, the county is now equipped to handle the increased demand for building permits and housing developments. In the words of Bend Assistant City Manager Jon Skidmore, “We haven’t been under the delusion that growth is all of the sudden going to slow down, our planning efforts and infrastructure efforts all focus on that continued growth.”* These are not just empty words, as the county is continually striving to implement efficiencies to facilitate this kind of growth.



* <https://www.bendbulletin.com/localstate/6164662-151/deschutes-county-again-listed-among-fastest-growing-in-nation>