

CASE STUDY

Memphis and Shelby County Grew Accela Agency Adoption 140% by Putting Governance First

City of MEMPHIS

Memphis & Shelby County, Tennessee

Across the region, agencies are asking to join because they see the return: lower costs, faster delivery, and a shared platform built for collaboration.

For most of the history of government technology, the hardest part of any shared system was convincing people to share it. Someone had to do the outreach, make the case, and absorb the skepticism. In Memphis and Shelby County, that dynamic has flipped. Partner agencies are now approaching Develop901 directly and asking to come aboard. Community Enhancement and Central Permits have joined the platform, and several other municipal agencies have expressed interest. The model no longer has to sell itself. It has become the thing other agencies want to be part of.

What Develop901 Actually Is

Develop901 is the joint development services platform for the City of Memphis and Shelby County, a single environment where city, county, and municipal agencies operate side by side rather than in isolation. The scale tells the story of how far it has come:

- 33,000+ public users
- 400+ internal users
- 73,173 record submissions
- 83% average annual adoption among public users across all partners, with some agencies consistently initiating more than 90% of permit activity online

When the platform went live in 2020, the focus was narrow: establish core workflows, configure the system, and drive adoption. The years that followed brought expansion, with new record types, new business processes, more staff utilization, and broader customer access. As more departments came to rely on it, demand for enhancements grew and so did complexity. Over the past year, the team recognized that continued scale depends on stronger governance and more strategic prioritization, and they are now building a roadmap for sustainable growth and modernization.

The Tenant and the Landlord

The structure behind that growth is deceptively simple. The Division of Planning and Development acts as the regulatory landlord. New agencies join as tenants, adopting an existing structure rather than building their own systems from scratch, and leveraging the significant investments already made in the technology.

"All of the structure is there, and the new agency comes in like a tenant of the landlord."

NIDIA LOGAN-ROBINSON

MPA, Deputy Director, Memphis & Shelby County Division of Planning and Development



"As we continue to grow, we have identified opportunities to strengthen our governance processes to ensure a streamlined and consistent customer experience. Without clear governance, too many competing inputs can create inconsistencies, like having too many chefs in the kitchen."

COLLEEN FUNK
Business & Technology Manager, Memphis & Shelby County Division of Planning and Development

The Governance Moat: Why It Scales

That 140% growth is the governance model's receipt. Develop901 launched with a core set of departments: Building, Licensing, Enforcement, and Planning in the joint City and County Division of Planning and Development, plus City of Memphis Engineering, with several review partners participating in building permit and planning workflows. Seven more departments have since chosen to join, including Shelby County Engineering, City of Memphis Fire Prevention, Public Works Environmental Engineering, Short-Term Rental Administration, Community Enhancement leading property code enforcement, and Central Permits for Beer/Alcohol, Haulers, and Events. None of them built a system. Each moved into a structure that already worked, which is only possible because governance kept that structure consistent as it scaled.

Technology can be replicated. Governance is the differentiator. Develop901's ability to scale comes from the maturity of its governance model, which evolved in three phases: from an informal implementation committee, to formal MOUs as the platform expanded, to a mature governance structure built to protect consistency, customer experience, and platform integrity.

What that looks like in practice is small but decisive course corrections. When multiple agencies carried the same permit type under the same name, the partners worked together to eliminate customer confusion. When a new partner wanted its own dedicated button on the portal's front page, the team explained that every agency has permits, so a separate button would only confuse residents, and instead showed them the right place to add their record types. Governance is what keeps a multi-agency platform feeling like one front door.

Why New Partner Agencies Want In

Three reinforcing drivers explain why agencies keep choosing to join, and why the model accelerates as it grows:

Cost. Joining requires licensing and support, not a full system build.

Speed to value. Pre-built workflows, integrations, and governance frameworks cut implementation time.

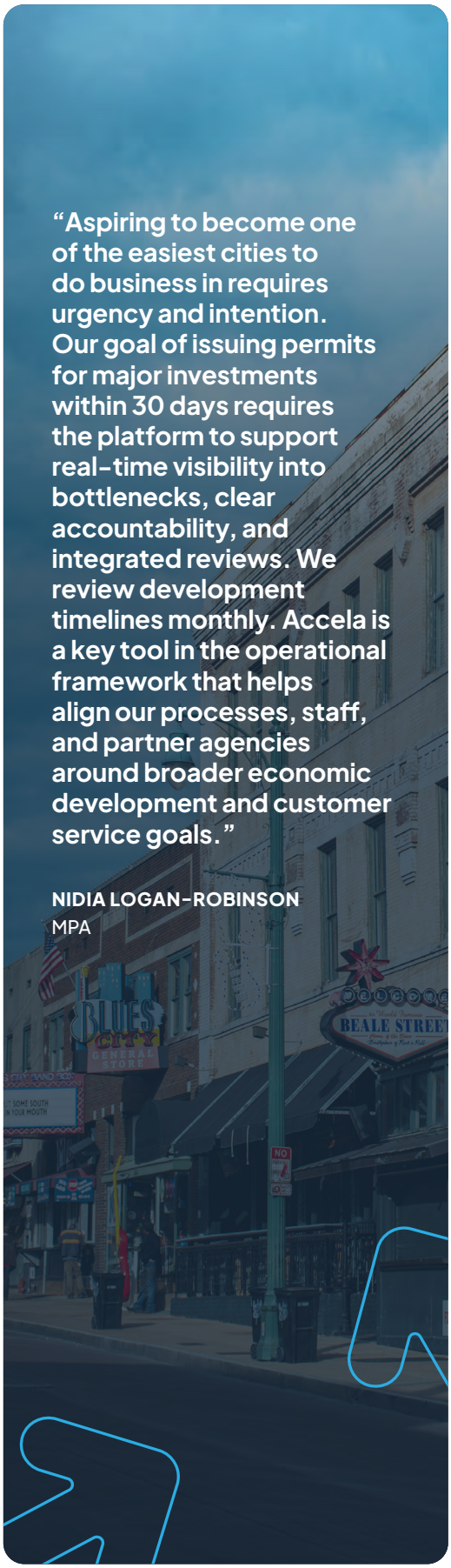
Shared customer experience. A unified front door improves service delivery for residents, businesses, and developers.

Memphis Fire is the proof point. After struggling with a custom-built system, the department joined the platform, adopted the Accela Civic Application™ for Fire Prevention, and improved its ISO rating from 3 to 1, while standing up Insights dashboards modeled on existing county frameworks.

For Public Works, the win was about closing a gap nobody else could see:

"By integrating the Public Works fats, oils, and grease (FOG) review into the Develop901 platform, the City streamlined a critical compliance process, improving coordination across agencies, reducing administrative delays, and helping new restaurants open faster while protecting public infrastructure and ensuring environmental compliance."

SCOTT MORGAN
Director of Public Works, City of Memphis



"Aspiring to become one of the easiest cities to do business in requires urgency and intention. Our goal of issuing permits for major investments within 30 days requires the platform to support real-time visibility into bottlenecks, clear accountability, and integrated reviews. We review development timelines monthly. Accela is a key tool in the operational framework that helps align our processes, staff, and partner agencies around broader economic development and customer service goals."

NIDIA LOGAN-ROBINSON
MPA

Accela as the Long-Term Partner

Develop901 wasn't a single implementation. It's a relationship that has compounded over time, from the initial Accela Civic Platform® implementation in 2017 and 2018, to the public portal launch in October 2020, to Memphis Fire onboarding, the addition of DigEplan for electronic plan review, the rollout of Insights dashboards across departments, and now the evaluation of zoning intelligence tools.

"Our relationship with Accela has evolved significantly over time, from implementation to optimization and then into innovation in service delivery, collaboration, and product integration."

NIDIA LOGAN-ROBINSON
MPA, Deputy Director, Memphis & Shelby County Division of Planning and Development

The Political Demand Engine

None of this happens in a vacuum. Develop901 operationalizes policy. It carries the Memphis 3.0 comprehensive plan and its five-year update, Mayor Paul Young's 30-day permit issuance target, the commitment to a streamlined development code, and county-level priorities. The platform is how those goals become measurable outcomes.

"Develop901 is proof that innovation in government doesn't always mean doing something entirely new—it means working better together. By bringing multiple agencies across the City of Memphis, Shelby County, and partner agencies onto a shared Accela platform, we've simplified the development process, increased transparency, and created a better experience for residents, businesses, and developers alike.

Smart growth depends on smart government. Every day we reduce unnecessary barriers to investment; we're strengthening Memphis' competitiveness and helping build a city where great ideas can become reality faster. We've streamlined our processes so that any major investment that is in line with our Comprehensive Plan and our code will have a building permit within 30 days. And it isn't a pipe dream - we are working on the adjustments and efficiencies needed to make this happen, so that we can send a clear signal to the rest of the world - Memphis is open for business."

MAYOR PAUL YOUNG
City of Memphis

The ambition behind it is stated plainly: make Memphis and Shelby County the easiest in the country to do business with.

What's Next

The roadmap is deliberately focused: evaluate zoning intelligence, integrate short-term rental tools, expand the partner agency pipeline, and continue refining governance over the next 18 months as more departments adopt the platform. The longer horizon is a one-stop experience for every regulatory requirement, a system supporting the region's biggest goals around economic development, housing production, infrastructure coordination, and long-term growth.



What This Means for Your Agency

The Develop901 story isn't really about software. It's about what becomes possible when one agency builds a structure solid enough that others want to move in rather than build their own. The technology is the foundation. The governance is the moat. And the clearest signal that the model works is the one Memphis and Shelby County are living now: agencies stopped having to be recruited and started asking to join.

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