

A Blueprint for Modernizing Licensing & Permitting



In the recent past, the typical licensing and permitting process looked like this: a resident filled out a paper application, traveled to the local municipal building and waited in a long line to drop off the form before being routed to an entirely separate department to fill out another round of paperwork. In some jurisdictions, getting a business license or building permit was so cumbersome that a cottage industry of permit expeditors emerged to usher weary licensees through the process to increase their chances for approval.¹

The arrival of COVID-19 sped up a movement that was already underway: harnessing technology to streamline inefficient and complex government processes. Digital transformation now requires state and local governments to modernize every facet of how they do business. Licensing and permitting operations have long been overdue for an upgrade. Digitizing these processes can help resource and budget-strapped municipalities increase revenue and improve regulatory oversight without adding staff.

“The business community and the public want more efficiency, more open access and self-service. They can reduce the risk of business disruption and circumvent long wait times with more efficient systems,” says Bob Benstead, vice president of strategic planning at Infor, which provides cloud solutions for the public sector.

To deliver better service more efficiently, government agencies need a modern solution that improves employee workflows on the back end while providing citizens a more user-friendly front-end experience. An enterprise platform that streamlines community development and regulatory (CDR) processes can help state and local governments deliver a seamless licensing and permitting experience.

Transforming Community Development and Regulation

Departmental silos and paper-based processes within state and local governments often lead to inefficiencies and limited data sharing.

According to a 2019 Center for Digital Government survey, 28 percent of state and local governments rely on paper-based processes for permits and licensing, while 22 percent use digital processes and 50 percent use a combination of both.

Government agencies can transition away from these inefficient processes and drive modernization by leveraging the cloud. A cloud-based platform can take the complexity out of government processes, but one of the biggest advantages of the cloud is it makes systems extensible, which means government agencies can add software or modules to these platforms that extend their capabilities and align with their unique business needs.

Agencies can adopt this approach to streamline their CDR processes and drive more development activity. With an extensible platform, state and local governments can more easily tackle their CDR requirements, including licensing, regulatory and code enforcement, billing, mapping and mobile field automation. For example, this technology can provide capabilities that simplify the management of large, cross-departmental commercial development projects and use permits for community activities such as parades and farmers markets. It also can help agencies more quickly address code violations and schedule follow-up inspections and fine collections. Technology-enabled CDR processes also can optimize back-end operations by enabling employees to send invoices and process payments and allowing field workers to access CDR data when they are on site or at remote locations.

The city of Las Vegas realized many of these benefits when it relied on a regulatory platform to transform its CDR processes and break down silos across departments. The city had several goals, including positioning itself to better compete for development projects, meeting citizen demand for digital government, generating more revenue to improve quality of life for citizens, and transforming its regulatory agencies into a partner for driving business innovation and development.

By relying on an enterprise platform, the city achieved many of its goals. It can accept payments and permit applications online and send automatic reminders to residents, which accelerates review and approval processes. The platform also automated some tedious tasks by automatically lifting permit holds on property once a code enforcement fine is paid off and automatically triggering an environmental inspection for permit requests that involve properties over an acre.

The platform helps city officials deliver a better employee experience, but it also can do the same for citizens and transform how they interact with — and how they view — their local government.

Delivering a Better Citizen Experience

An enterprise platform can empower agencies to ensure business continuity and deliver a better citizen experience by providing a single interface through which residents can easily get answers to their questions. It can serve as the digital foundation for a customer-friendly portal that enables businesses and residents to handle all their permitting and licensing needs across devices, including web and mobile. This can streamline tasks such as permit and license requests, application renewals and payments, and enable agencies to consolidate data across departments so constituents can get updated information about the status of their application.²

Increased citizen self-service is another benefit of this technology-enabled approach. For example, with digitized licensing and permitting processes, a citizen who wants to start a business can go to the portal and type something like, “I want to open a grocery store in this specific neighborhood,” and then be taken through a series of questions that allows the system to deliver answers about what types of permits he or she needs.

“These kinds of systems enable state and local governments to be more community and business friendly, but it also forces government agencies to look at their operations and understand the workflow outside of their own domain, and potentially offer some streamlining,” Benstead says.

A self-service capability is a critical part of modernizing licensing and permitting because it removes friction for constituents and

employees who often process these transactions manually. An enterprise platform can introduce automation to employees’ workflows, especially when it comes to the plan review and approval process. Rather than relying on paper or onerous, manual tracking methods, employees can use a secure platform to view, annotate, stamp and archive plans. Reviewers can add their corrections and comments simultaneously and the system can then automatically track changes to plans, help employees avoid duplicate work and foster collaboration across departments.³ This approach helped Las Vegas move away from sequential reviews of permits and plans that required residents to wait for one review to be completed before the next review could begin, which added weeks to the process.

Digitizing plan reviews and approval also comes with another important benefit for departments involved in the planning and development process: compliance. With an enterprise solution, they can create an audit trail that increases visibility into the decision-making process and improves compliance with state and federal regulations.

From providing customer self-service to streamlining plan reviews and approvals, using an enterprise cloud platform creates a single source of truth for CDR data and processes. This also allows government agencies to extend their capabilities, which leads to more efficiencies that improve permit turnaround times, accelerates revenue collection, and ultimately makes government more responsive to citizen needs.

Conclusion

Licensing and permitting must transform to ensure business continuity and meet the modern needs of constituents. A flexible technology platform can equip government agencies with more capabilities that help them reduce costs, gain operational efficiencies and improve agility. With this technology, state and local governments can move their licensing and permitting processes from the analog era into the digital age and fulfill their promise of delivering a 21st-century citizen experience.

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Infor.

Endnotes:

1. How Boston Is Making Permitting and Licensing Easier, <https://www.govtech.com/dc/articles/How-Boston-Is-Making-Permitting-and-Licensing-Easier.html>
2. Infor Public Sector CDR, https://webassets.infor.com/resources/Brochures/Infor-Public-Sector-CDR.pdf?noRedirect=1&_ga=2.90103195.1076094975.1583156355-1769196154.1579809683
3. Infor Rhythm for Civics Streamlines Citizen Engagement, <https://www.infor.com/news/infor-rhythm-for-civics-streamlines-citizen-engagement>



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