



Client Success story

Growing Ohio Town Streamlines Building Permitting and Inspection Process with SmartGov

Client

Perry Township, Franklin County, Ohio

Vitals

Town covering just over two square miles with:

- Population of more than 3,500
- More than 1,500 buildings with a handful of new developments in the works
- Two maintenance staff, including one zoning inspector and one zoning and permit administrator

Challenges

As Perry Township experiences growth, the local government needed a way to more effectively process, track and monitor building permits and zoning requests.

Results

Through the implementation of Brightly's SmartGov™ software solution, Perry Township has been able to:

- Streamline and improve the permitting process
- Digitize the permitting and zoning approval processes
- Achieve real-time visibility of all zoning and code compliance issues

Concerns

With a small staff and a fast-growing community, Perry Township was consistently challenged to keep up with zoning and building permit requests. The lean staff relied on pencil, paper, scanning and stamping documents to approve permits and maintain zoning and code compliance. That meant spending time searching through old documents when updates were needed, and it was easy for tasks to get lost or overlooked without a comprehensive digital solution.

Perry Township looked for a solution but was hesitant to digitize its zoning and building permit tasks. Over the past two years, the town implemented a few new digital solutions, including payroll and police reporting systems. With some of those implementations, “we struggled to get reliable assistance and support from the vendor’s staff,” says Luke LaBuhn, Public Information Officer and Records Clerk. “Other times, it was promised that the programs were working or that an issue was fixed when it was not. It was extremely frustrating for all of us here, and we’re still trying to fix blunders that occurred months ago.”

However, once Perry Township decided to work with Brightly to streamline its building and zoning systems, LaBuhn reports a completely different experience. “We never ran into those problems with SmartGov,” he says. “Everyone we worked with was attentive and responsive.”

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Luke LaBuhn

Public Information Officer and Records Clerk,
Perry Township

Our Approach

Franklin County, in which Perry Township is located, uses SmartGov to manage its building and zoning department. That connection made it easier for Perry Township to commit to using SmartGov too.

“Having the same system as the county could help us communicate with the county when we need to send them verification or zoning approval, or when they need to send us building reports for our jurisdiction,” LaBuhn says. “Also, SmartGov promised to provide a comprehensive system with potential for future expansion while not being overly difficult for users to learn, a large benefit to us as a small jurisdiction without many tech-savvy users.”

The Brightly team implemented the SmartGov solution to streamline Perry Township’s building and zoning processing and management capabilities. Brightly provided a project manager to serve as a guide throughout the implementation process, making sure Perry Township staffers knew exactly what to expect at each step. A Brightly consultant was also available to answer questions and develop solutions to specific problems.

For example, Perry Township wanted to be able to calculate payments for dumpster and contractor fees with multiple variables to reduce the number of required permits. While this wasn’t a built-in capability of the software, a Brightly consultant figured out a way to make it happen, LaBuhn says, minimizing the number of permits residents must apply for and inspectors need to review.

Finally, Brightly provided an implementation expert to illustrate the capabilities of SmartGov and explain how to use them. “As not all of us here are tech savvy, our implementation expert did a fantastic job without inundating us with technical jargon,” LaBuhn says. “It’s been smooth sailing, which is very much a welcome change.”

The Results

Perry Township now uses SmartGov to manage zoning and code compliance, including processing and issuing zoning permits, and documenting and processing code compliance investigations and inspections. While the two zoning employees use the tool most, two other city employees are cross trained to use it in their absence.

Now that Perry Township has settled into using SmartGov for building and zoning tasks, it has experienced a number of benefits, including:

- **Ease of use.** SmartGov's modular User To Do List "is a godsend," LaBuhn says. This list shows the zoning inspector or any user exactly what needs to be done on any given day and makes it easy to quickly access the permit or case without having to navigate multiple menus.
- **Real-time visibility and insights.** Case status updates and the ability to modify workflow steps let users know exactly where a permit or case is in the process. "In our old program, we had to dig for this knowledge," LaBuhn says. The ease-of-use tracking tasks helped to significantly shrink the backlog of permits in need of final inspection and cases are no longer falling through the cracks.
- **Versatile reporting.** "Our previous program did not allow us to create robust reports with a variety of parameters," LaBuhn says. "Not only does SmartGov have plenty of useful reports preloaded, but the ad-hoc reporting feature lets us create unique reports catered toward sharing with other agencies, such as the County."
- **Improved workflows.** Perry Township can now turn around permit requests days faster than in the past. The town also has been able to seamlessly integrate other digitization into its building and zoning processes by using SmartGov. For example, applicants can now apply for permits online and pay online. On the back end, staff can send information and update each other digitally, "without needing to print out a piece of paper to stick on someone's desk," LaBuhn says.
- **Future scalability.** Over the long term, Perry Township plans to continue using SmartGov to streamline and shorten the amount of time needed for the more complicated permits and cases it has yet to implement, such as variances, conditional uses, detachments, annexations and development plans. The goal is to use the solution to continue modernizing and digitizing the jurisdiction's many complex processes.

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