Olympia, WA Utilizes SmartGov™ to Move Permitting Online & Improve Data Integrity

**CLIENT**
City of Olympia, WA

**GEOGRAPHY**
Olympia, WA

**POPULATION**
53,000

**CHALLENGES**
The city previously struggled with archaic systems that weren’t user-friendly, causing data integrity and workflows to be compromised.

**RESULTS**
The majority of permit applications are now processed through a convenient online portal, and because operations can be handled online, the city hasn’t slowed down during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order.
In the midst of a shelter-in-place order due to COVID-19, the city of Olympia, Washington’s Business Operations team is still up and running thanks to their community planning and development operations being readily available digitally. But they weren’t always able to function that way, even pre-pandemic.

Before making the switch to SmartGov™, the team used an outdated system they were ready to move on from. It wasn’t user-friendly, and as a result, was used inconsistently or improperly, leaving them with data gaps. “Our information in our previous system wasn’t consistent, so we didn’t get a good data baseline. We didn’t capture that we saved a certain number of hours or calls,” says Chuck Dower, the city’s Business Operations Specialist.

He knew the next step was to move operations online and engage with citizens through a digital portal, and after an RFP process, the team moved forward with SmartGov, Dude Solutions’ community development solution. “SmartGov was one of the few that passed our IT requirements and one of the few that was truly a SaaS-hosted solution,” says Business Applications Analyst, Jessica Locke. For her role, the improvement in data capturing since using the system has been essential. “The biggest change or benefit has been the data integrity – making sure all our users are using the same system in the same way. And the auditing capabilities inside SmartGov are great for me from a support perspective. I can see who’s doing what and where something was maybe missed. It’s just a lot easier to use and customize than most systems I’ve had experience with.”

Improved data integrity is also a benefit to using SmartGov for Chuck. “Now we have a system that we can verify repeatable data in. People are entering the data. We’re using the heck out of reports in our daily operations to help us understand what our data is.”

In addition to collecting better data, the system has also allowed the team to move all of their operations online and engage with applicants through a digital portal, saving permit technicians valuable time they would have previously spent doing data entry, as well as giving them a place to house all necessary documents.

“Having the digital environment and having that information all in one accessible place that you can use remotely on mobile devices and in the office is needed. And now that we’re all in our homes working (due to COVID-19), that digital environment was our goal before, and we’re really seeing the benefits of that now,” says Chuck.

“We typically have about 5,300 to 5,500 permits per year, and out of that, about 87% are applied for on the portal. For people who don’t have computers, we have a kiosk set up in our lobby where our front counter staff can walk these people through the process, so it still gets submitted digitally,” he adds.
And SmartGov isn’t just streamlining their operations for the team – it’s also more convenient for citizens. Since including a satisfaction survey at the end of online applications last October, Chuck says 90-95% of applicants report being happy about the ease of use with the online portal.

When asked about how partnering with Dude Solutions is helping Olympia’s Business Operations team provide better service to their citizens, Chuck included that the support has been helpful.

“I believe everyone on the support team recognizes my number when I call. They’re all friendly, professional, responsive. They really help me be self-sufficient. They’ve helped me with reports when I’ve gotten stuck. They’re a good place for me to bounce stuff off of,” he says.

“For me, it’s how collaborative it is, that you guys value our opinion on things, because we do use the system extensively, so I appreciate that,” Jessica adds.

With the nationwide interruptions COVID-19 has caused for many business operations, Chuck says that the digital operations SmartGov allows has enabled them to still serve their community without much setback.

“I don’t believe there is any perfect software, but we are functioning in all aspects of work in a digital environment. Workflow processes are very configurable to our operations. We are able to function fully during this COVID-19 shelter-in-place. Applicants can submit applications. They can see statuses online. They can request inspections, pay fees, issue their own permits when ready. Staff can review plans, return for revisions, and stamp plans when ready, and all documents can be retrieved from within SmartGov.”