Client Success story

Franklin County, Ohio Success Story

Client

Franklin County, Ohio

Vitals

- Over 1.3 million people live in Franklin County, OH
- The county issues residential building permits for the unincorporated areas and zoning permits for 10 of the 17 surrounding townships

Challenges

Franklin County's on-premises permitting system required citizens to apply in person (or by mail) and pay only with check or money order. The county also spent extra time fixing errors and missing data. With existing software no longer an option, the county took the opportunity to reimagine their entire permitting process.

Results

- Created a self-service customer portal for managing the permit process and online payment.
- 2X increase in the number of permits, while improving efficiency and citizen satisfaction.
- Continued issuing permits while county employees worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

Over 1.3 million residents live in Franklin County, which includes the state capital, Columbus. Over 100,000 of these residents reside in the unincorporated areas (i.e. townships) and villages. The county is responsible for building permits for the unincorporated areas of the county as well as zoning permits for 10 of the 17 townships. When the software company that Franklin County used for residential permits went out of business, they took the opportunity to improve processes for both employees and citizens.

Previously, the permitting data was stored on a physical server underneath an employee's desk. The county knew they wanted to move from an on-premises solution to cloud-based software to improve backup and recovery, security and data access. With the previous software, staff often entered inaccurate or incomplete information, which was time-consuming for staff to track down and fix. Residents were also required to drive to downtown Columbus to apply for permits in person or mail the paperwork and payment, which was time-consuming for the customer..

Saving time with a customer portal

Instead of simply buying new software, Franklin County took the opportunity to reimagine their permitting process. After researching many options, county leaders decided to use Brightly SmartGov, formerly Dude Solutions, to create a customer portal that allows citizens to submit their permits online. The entire process – even uploading drawings and paying for the permit – is completed online without the citizen stepping foot in the office. Over the past four years, the number of permits has more than doubled, going from 1,831 in 2018 to 4,091 in 2021.

"We can now serve the community by providing a necessary service to residents in a way that is effective and truly a service," says Jonathan Lee, GIS manager for Franklin County Economic Development and Planning.

County employees review the permits and issue approved plans to the residents using the portal. Instead of manually hunting down missing information, the staff now regularly use 11 different automated reports to track permitting activity and ensure the quality of the data. During the pandemic, staff was able to work from home and complete the entire permitting process remotely, which would not have been possible with the previous software.

Jonathan Lee
GIS Manager, Franklin County Economic Development and Planning

With the previous system, citizens had to pay by check or money order. Lee says that as people stopped carrying their checkbook regularly, it became an inconvenience for residents and staff. Citizens who didn't have their checkbook would have to get a money order, causing further frustration. With SmartGov 's ability to pay online, citizens are embracing the new the process.

Lee says that the permitting process will be an advantage with the upcoming new Intel chip manufacturing plant coming to the area, bringing an increase in new residents – and permit requests – to the county.

"We know our system can now handle the increase in contractors and permits," says Lee. "The mobile app makes it more efficient for inspectors to conduct inspections, which will be important with an expected increase in inspections."

Moving into the Future with SmartGov

Over the past four years, Lee says, his team has been impressed with Brightly's responsive support. His team uses the Admin feature to make tweaks to the system without having to submit requests each time.

As Franklin County considers moving into commercial permitting, Lee says that they have the foundation to roll the process into SmartGov by using the model for residential permits. Because of the success Franklin County has had with SmartGov, at least one other township in the county is now using the software for permitting.

He encourages other municipalities that are looking for new software to be open to change.

"Consider a solution that keeps things simple for both customers and staff – Brightly has proved this to us with SmartGov," says Lee.

Learn more at brightlysoftware.com

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