



Clark County Single Family Housing Permits

Using Lean to improve permit processes

Clark County is trying to cut the time it takes to issue a single family housing permit from 23 days to 11 days.

Building activity is on the rise, and Marty Snell, Director of Clark County Community Development, said the County can handle more permits by working faster.

"We're starting to see our permits pick up and we don't have the wherewithal to hire more staff. We need to build capacity in the process we have," Snell said.

Clark County recently participated in the Local Government Performance Center's Lean Academy, which helps governments use process improvement techniques to improve how they accomplish key tasks.

During an intense five-day review in January, called a kaizen, the permitting team analyzed its process in great detail and focused on removing delays and handoffs.

Analyzing applications immediately on arrival

Three out of four applications to build a new house in Clark County arrive incomplete. During the review, technicians and planners would find critical information missing and need to request more detail from the builder. This could happen multiple times and more than a week after the submittal.

The process needed a better filter, said Jim Muir, the Clark County Building Official. "The biggest thing we needed to do was review submittals up front before they get into the system. We were surprised at how many implications an incomplete submittal has. It starts and stops so many different things we do," Muir said.

A team now checks to determine if all the new permits are complete within a day after the application was submitted. If more information is needed, someone contacts the applicant so all issues can be resolved.

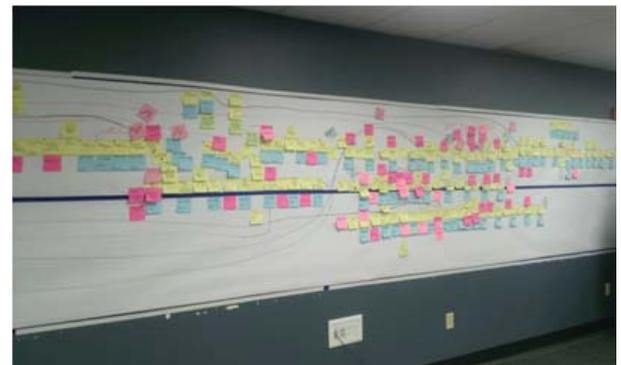
Removing the handoffs from one reviewer to another can save days in the review process, said Chuck Crider, the Permitting Services Manager. "The problems come from all the handoffs. If you have everyone look at it at once, you can solve problems quickly," he said.

Issuing permits in half the time

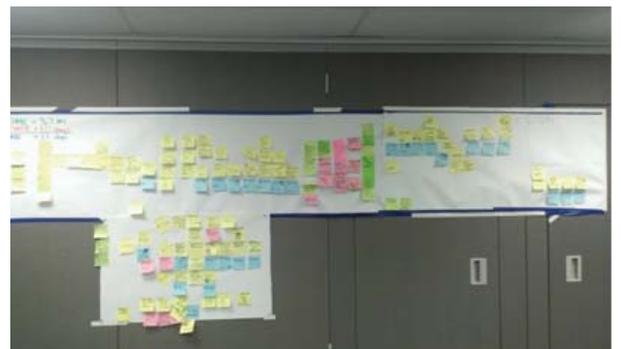
Processing Time

Time before - 23 days

New goal - 11 days



Clark County building officials mapped out their current process, above, to help make improvements. The new process, below, identifies problems up early so any challenges can be addressed.



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The most complex elements of the permits were most likely to require more work by the developer. By reviewing the plot plans and stormwater requirements early, the County could identify the applications that needed the most help and advance the others into the approval stage faster.

Outsider perspectives helped

Carlos Venegas, a Lean expert who has led permitting analyses in other counties, facilitated the process for Clark County. County staff said having an expert in Lean processes on hand helped provide an independent voice when the team encountered challenges.

Crider, the permitting services manager, started working for the County on the first day of the kaizen event and was excited to see the staff welcome the opportunity to change their processes.

"It was amazing for me to see where we were and where we want to be. For any organization, it changes the entire culture of what you can do for customer service," Crider said.

"Doing nothing is unacceptable. ... We need to build capacity in the process we have,"

Marty Snell, Director of Clark County Community Development



A group of Clark County employees brainstormed ways to improve the permitting process in January.

Resources for more information

Clark County Planning & Community Development: www.clark.wa.gov/development/index.asp

Kitsap County's Lean Process: Learn more about Kitsap County's experiences from videos on the Department of Community Development's website: www.kitsapgov.com/dcd/permit_process_kaizen.htm

King County's Lean Toolkit: www.kingcounty.gov/employees/Lean/Toolkit.aspx

Washington's Government Management and Accountability Performance Lean page: www.accountability.wa.gov/leadership/lean/default.asp

State Auditor's Office Local Government Performance Center: www.sao.wa.gov/PerformanceCenter