

Connecticut on-line building permits

Towns will soon be able to improve efficiency and service, reduce costs, and save businesses and residents time, money, and fuel through a regional on-line building permit portal funded in part by Connecticut's Office of Policy Management (OPM) regional service sharing grant.

Obtaining building permits is important to ensure that construction is safe, appropriate, and undertaken in an environmentally responsible manner. However, the process of obtaining permits can be time-consuming, confusing, and difficult. Sometimes, residents and even some professionals avoid obtaining permits because they are concerned about the time and effort involved. The process of getting a permit, like that of obtaining a driver's license, is one where people come in direct contact with their government and it shapes their perceptions – its efficiency, effectiveness, and value. When people have a good experience they realize the value that towns provide through the assurance that work was done well and according to the law. However, a poor experience leads to complaints about bureaucracy, wasted money and wasted time.

Currently, to obtain even the simplest permit from a town in Connecticut applicants need to drive to city hall, fill out forms, and submit them. When the permit application is received, a clerk needs to manually verify that the contractor has the appropriate license and insurance, and then manually enter all of the information into a computer system or use a paper filing system to track the permit through the approval process.

The new system will automate many elements of the permitting process. Simple permits will be obtainable over the internet, and the process of verifying contractor licenses and ensuring that no taxes are owed where the construction is taking place will be automated. A similar effort in Washington State yielded the following results: ***Contractors will save over \$400,000 in direct labor costs in one year using the system ... utilization for online permits was 49 percent and some agencies have exceeded 60 percent utilization. The total number of over-the-counter permits issued has also gone up as much as 20 percent. Permit counter lines are shorter, freeing staff to spend more time with customers that need assistance with more complex projects.***

On-line permitting will yield direct environmental benefits – getting cars off the road and **reducing fuel usage** as contractors can skip the drive to city hall for obtaining simple permits. It will provide a highly visible example of how a regional approach can lead to **improved services** and **greater efficiency**. It will **enhance economic development** by making construction, remodeling, and other development projects easier and less costly. It will encourage residents and business owners to get required permits. Finally it will help hard working municipal staff work more efficiently in a time of tightening budgets and reduced staffing.

The OPM grant will cover establishment regional internet portal and implementation in the pilot towns. These towns will use their own budgeted funds for some enhanced elements, such as internal work flow tracking.

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