



Case Study



City of Shoreline Permitting Processes

Issue:

In 2024 the City of Shoreline, a municipality of nearly 60,000 just north of Seattle, WA, committed to a comprehensive improvement of its processes for land use permitting. The City had made small refinements over previous years, but customers and staff still struggled. With the scale and amount of new development in the area increasing and WA bill SB5290 bringing legislative changes, Onit was engaged to examine the processes and provide recommendations.

Strategy:

The City had already convened an eager working group dubbed the Permit Process Improvement Team (PPIT). Onit recognized that key to this project would be harnessing and retaining the energy and enthusiasm the PPIT brought, and developing a strategy where the high level of complexity of the process did not overwhelm the team and their limited availability.

Onit's approach was participatory and interactive, shaping the PPIT into an active workgroup with a regular cadence of facilitated activities and a forward-looking plan of defined tasks. The Executive Sponsor was an active and engaged participant, and Onit leveraged his involvement to help create visibility for the project and the PPIT across the organization.

Solution:

Onit's deliverables included mapping the current state permitting process; researching best practices; defining an improvement plan; facilitating an improvement approach; and producing a report with recommendations for later phases.

Onit led the PPIT team in identifying internal and external stakeholder groups (24 in total), and conducting interviews about their experiences with the permitting process. Onit also designed a survey for recent permit applicants, which garnered 96 responses.

Based on interviews and reviews of documents, Onit developed a "strawman" map of the process current state, then convened the PPIT in a two-day onsite mapping workshop (a "Process Walk") to refine and improve it. Requiring 36 linear feet of plotter paper and 65 square feet of sticky notes, the physical representation of the process let PPIT members visualize the steps and validate the sequencing.

Hundreds of improvement ideas were collected from stakeholders during the discovery activities, with more coming from the PPIT during the Process Walk. Onit led the team in a prioritization activity, with each improvement assessed as low or high difficulty of implementation, and low or high level of impact on the agreed goals for improvement. This highlighted improvement opportunities that fell in the "Golden Quadrant" - relatively easy to implement and with high impact on the goals.

To collect best practices Onit interviewed eight other jurisdictions. These findings, the "Golden Quadrant" implementation plan, and other recommendations were compiled into a report for later City use.

Result:

Onit provided the City with a clear view of its existing permitting process, a strategy for improving it, and a roadmap for an ongoing project. PPIT team members learned the principles of process improvement, including how to assess, prioritize, and sequence potential changes.

Onit's approach also garnered community visibility for the project, resulting in kudos for Shoreline for responding to an oft-cited pain point.

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