

ALLIANCE FOR INNOVATION CASE STUDY PROPOSAL

COVER SHEET INFORMATION

TITLE:

An Integrated Development & Building Processing System: A One-Two Punch

JURISDICTION:

City of Corpus Christi
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PROJECT LEADER:

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SYNOPSIS

Background

In 2002, the City Council of the City of Corpus Christi and executive leadership were plagued with issues related to development in the City of Corpus Christi. With growth at an average rate of 3% as opposed to other jurisdictions in the state whose growth rate was in the 10% range, the issue centered on making development more customer friendly. A “One-Stop Shop” was created and the City began creating a business plan for the newly created department. The department would be composed of Building Permitting and Inspections, Planning, and some aspects of Engineering. The building boom that was occurring throughout the nation was hitting home in Corpus Christi and the need for the One-Stop Shop became a high political priority. In early 2003, over a weekend move, the department staff moved offices to a building one (1) mile from city hall. Offices opened for business the following Monday. The department move was a highly publicized event that was held to high expectations, however, the department quickly became the “Stop Shop”, and developers and the public complained of inefficient policies and practices, poorly trained staff, inconsistent regulations, and inconsistent enforcement of adopted ordinance and regulations.

A stakeholder group was created called the Development Services Advisory Group (DSAG). DSAG was composed of several high level developers who had high stakes in the success of the department. The City however, needed to maintain a level of control over development occurring within the city. Plagued by sprawl, inadequate or aging infrastructure with no real plan for replacement, the City was stuck in the position of promoting development where costly infrastructure did not exist, regulations which burdened the City with a great deal of the cost of the infrastructure, as well as promoting that very development with the newly created “One-Stop Shop”; Couple that with very isolated department heads who had very little interaction with the customer or the Development Service Department, and the climate was ripe for unrest.

In 2003, the City teamed with consulting firm Horizon Centre, who specialized in development process improvement. Mr. George Arimes, the firm’s president created several stakeholder groups including DSAG members, staff, business, and homeowner’s associations.

Several central themes were raised by all stakeholder groups. They included the need for clear and consistent regulations, ownership and empowerment, as well as a need for a different approach by the City with customers. A service-oriented approach was created whereby the customer’s central goal of compiling comprehensive information or achieving an approval for their “project” was central in the mind of staff. The customer did not need to understand every possible scenario their project may face, the customer intended to find all approvals that were necessary for their project, costs, and an overall timeline for approval. While this concept may seem elementary, the intrinsic aspect that was missing for the Development Services staff was one of understanding that meeting the customer’s need was a collaborative, departmental effort, instead of separate and disparate divisional interactions with customers. The service-oriented approach was desperately requested by customers, however, the staff, faced some challenges in making this approach a reality. First, in the face of record development activity in the city, the City undertook several high profile projects which placed enormous pressure on staff and available capacity. During 2003 to 2005, the City undertook the creation of a Unified Development Code, in essence rewriting the

City's platting and zoning ordinances into one comprehensive document; it took on the infrastructure financing issue with big developers leading the charge against impact fees; it undertook the adoption of the 2003 IBC Building Codes; as well as the hiring and replacement of two (2) department heads to lead the Development Services Department. In the past one-two years, the City has faced, along with most other communities in the country, a significant drop in development activity and the associated revenue from fees. The latest challenge is maintaining staffing levels and qualified staff given recent budgetary reductions and funding difficulties.

Our Approach: An Integrated Development & Building Processing System

Regardless of the constraints and challenges that have confronted the City while improving services, a plan was created and the staff have continued to follow through with it. The service approach "mantra" in the City's Development Services Center is to not only do more with less, but do it in as efficient a manner as possible to save employee time and result in a satisfied customer in the end. As a result, the major objectives of our new integrated processing system that we intend to share are:

1. Accept that the development and building process is a "system". The system includes several components that lead to successful service delivery, including efficient and predictable business processes, a partnership approach to people interactions, comprehensive regulatory framework, role-based technology, physical space to allow for an integrated customer flow, and the organizational structure and management to support decision-making, promote accountability and measure performance.
2. The system should be integrated and seamless to the customer. The customer should not have to understand the organization to get their needed service.
3. The system should be service-based, not department-based, in order to reduce redundant effort and provide more comprehensive results for the customer.
4. A philosophy of "the customer sits in one chair" should be adopted to minimize customer runaround or movement. Staff comes to the customer instead of the customer finding staff. The City's view is "co-location" in a One-Stop Center is not "integration. This philosophy is a central improvement theme.
5. A project-oriented approach should be established to process the customer's immediate objective for development or building.
6. In all cases, interactions with the customer should be facilitated by a point-of-contact or project manager to improve communication, coordination, predictability and timeliness.

Improving the system has been difficult due to entrenched "silo-based" culture of both staff and the customer. This case study will highlight the innovative design characteristics of our integrated system design approach. However, we intend to go further by discussing the change management "learning" relating to challenges and obstacles that were met along the way, including things like:

1. Mechanisms for gaining buy-in and ongoing support for significant system change elements
2. Constant need for reinforcement of sponsorship and management support to keep everyone motivated to continue to strive for results

3. Combating “turf” issues and general reluctance to do things a new way
4. Maintaining elected official and customer support for the vision given the ever-changing political environment
5. Dealing with funding shortfalls and the tendency to accept “status quo” even with the unyielding pressure to improve customer service.

PRESENTATION COMPONENTS

1. Innovation/Creativity

- Question:** *a) How did the program/project/service, etc. improve the organization?
b) Were new technologies used? If yes, what methods and/or applications did you implement?
c) Was a private consultant used? If yes, describe their involvement; and identify the consultant and/or firm, including contact information.*

Response:

- a) The new integrated and seamless development and building processing system improvement program strived to reoriented customer responses from a service area perspective versus by respective staffing expertise or disciplines. This enabled our customers to receive more comprehensive and tailored information and support based upon their specific needs. The approach stressed a culture for more collaboration and “options thinking” and centered on helping the customer succeed. The customer “sit in one chair” philosophy resulted in less duplication of effort by staff and a more service-friendly approach to business.
- b) Before new technologies were reviewed, current technologies were reviewed for their utilization potential, i.e., were they being used to their current capacity? After a several month review with a team composed of MIS, Development Services, and Finance, it was determined that many of the current technologies in place could serve the needs of the department with some minor revamping. In addition, new technologies were reviewed based on how well they would work with the existing technologies already in place. However, most importantly, it was determined which technologies should serve the new service-oriented staff roles and the job they are expected to do in the integrated process. This approach ensured that the technology tools supported the business processes versus “fitting” the process to the capabilities of the technology (current or new tools).

A new electronic plan review program was purchased to allow customers to submit building plans via an internet connection at any time of the day that would seamlessly integrate with our current permit processing system. The new system would also reduce staff time and create efficient processes for tracking plans and revisions. The program has the ability to be expanded into subdivision and infrastructure plans as well.

- c) Facilitation and expertise was provided by Horizon Centre, Inc. (HCI), an outside consultant. The consulting firm performed a system assessment, facilitated the creation of a service-based development processing system, and has assisted in the transition implementation to the new system. George Arimes, HCI’s president, has authored an American Planning Association, Planner’s Training Service course/guide for managers on how to effectively create and management development review processing improvements.

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2. Citizen Outcomes

Question: *a) What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled? b) Did the initiative improve access to your government? If yes, how? c) Has the health of the community improved as a result? If yes, how?*

Response:

a) During the system assessment and improvement planning stage, a set of Customer Desired Outcomes (expectations for successful service delivery) were drafted by staff and then discussed, refined and adopted by the Development Services Advisory Group (DSAG). The outcomes were used as a basis for confirming operation design priorities, a focus for training, measuring performance, and other key strategies for improvement. The outcomes have been used throughout the piloting and implementation of the system improvements as the “litmus” for success.

b) The Development Services Advisory Group (DSAG) includes a cross-section of customers and meets on a regular basis. The key objectives for this group is to assist with prioritizing implementation ideas, monitoring ongoing satisfaction with services, making recommendation for service level changes and fees, and be a conduit to the development community.

The City has also performed an online customer survey process to recent customers for the major process types (Land Use Changes, Subdivision Process, and Building Permits) to gauge satisfaction with a variety of processing components, staff attitude and customer service culture, and other subjective area of service.

c) The customer outreach effort has helped crystallized service issues; key improvement needs; and has generally improved communication between the City and customers. A key “health” element has been the goal to instill trust between parties and working towards a partnership approach to delivering and improving services. Work continues in this difficult area of change management.

3. Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

Question: *a) What practical applications could you share if selected? b) How applicable is the project/program/service to other local governments? c) What results/outcomes will you be able to share? Please include any performance measures if applicable*

Response:

- a) The City can definitely share experiences in creating a development center and what key or critical assessments should be made prior to undergoing such a transition. In addition, some lessons learned on the review of current business processes and future process improvements, desired outcomes, and the operational designing process can be very beneficial to other cities seeking to encourage development in their jurisdiction through a revamping to their approach to development activities.
- b) There is significant similarity of activities and service needs for every city or county involved with complex regulatory processing and approval of development-related activities. Basically, all local government has to deal with this topic area.
- c) Performance measures to share include the reduction in staff review time in the plan review process, tracking information received in the department, sharing of information with all staff across division lines, incoming phone calls and other metrics, as well as staff surveys documenting the overall morale of staff and customer surveys documenting the improvement in dealing with the City in development related activities.

4. Case Study Presentation

Question: Briefly describe what your case study presentation might include.

Response:

It is anticipated that this case study presentation will include a PowerPoint presentation, a panel discussion, and associated handouts of the presentation slides and selected backup materials to expand on key study areas.