

CITY OF GALLATIN

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CODES/PLANNING DEPARTMENT

KATHERINE SCHOCH, AICP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
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January 19, 2012

Ms. Brandi Allen
ballen@transformgov.org

RE: City of Gallatin Award Application

Dear Ms. Allen:

The City of Gallatin is pleased to submit to you our application for consideration of the award for innovation in local government.

Our contact information is as follows:

Mr. Tony Allers, CBO, MCP, Director
City of Gallatin, Tennessee
Codes/Planning Department
132 West Main Street, Room 201
Gallatin, TN 37066

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Email: tony.allers@gallatin-tn.gov

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the Codes/Planning Department.

Sincerely,

Katherine Schoch, AICP
Assistant Director

**City of Gallatin, Tennessee Codes/Planning Department:
Innovations in Local Government Communications
Award Nomination**

For years the City of Gallatin had a reputation for being slow, especially when it came to issuing building permits. Unsatisfied with that reputation, the Codes/Planning Department made a conscious decision to change their ways and improve the public's perception of the department.

This past year the Codes/Planning Department has strived to improve communications with the building and development community by providing higher quality and more efficient customer service. Due to the downturn in the economy, the City of Gallatin has had to utilize new technology to become more efficient while continuing to provide excellent customer service with fewer employees.

Recently, the Codes/Planning Department held public meetings with representatives of the building and development community to get feedback on how the City could best assist them during this time of economic uncertainty. Customers expressed the need to improve the timeframe for the issuance of building permits and the need to expedite building plan review so project may begin and end on schedule. The main concerns discussed during those meetings focused on the amount of time it took for the City to issue building permits. The development community wanted the City to issue permits within 24 hours, not a week as was the standard for many years. In order to meet this demand, the City would need to move away from old paper permits and old-fashioned paper files and focus on digital information that could be gathered easily and distributed faster.

Many changes and improvements to the City's policies and procedures were made as a result of those public meetings. As a direct response to needs expressed by contractors at public meetings, the department decided to purchase and implement a new software program to allow the Codes/Planning Department, Fire Department, and the Engineering Division to operate under one computer system.

The VIP (Violations, Inspections, and Permits) program has helped city staff better track commercial and residential building permits, certificates of occupancy, temporary use permits, and site plan submittals. The department also maintains all the City's subdivision, utility, and site sureties as well as all contractor bonds through the VIP system. Most importantly, the VIP program allows builders the freedom to apply and pay for all permits on-line through the City of Gallatin's website, (www.gallatinonthemove.com), a suggestion that came directly from the building community in Gallatin. A copy of the City of Gallatin homepage including the VIP icon has been included with this application as Attachment 1.

The ability to apply and pay for permits on-line eliminates numerous trips to City Hall thus providing a direct savings on fuel costs and employee time. The program allows

applicants to schedule inspections, review inspection reports, and plan review comments on-line at their convenience. Inspection results are now emailed to customers, speeding up the final approval process and substantially decreasing wait time. Permits may be emailed directly back to applicants. The implementation of this technology has led to greater efficiency and a reduction in paper costs for the City as well as its customers. The Codes/Planning Department understands that tax-payers deserve the most efficient and best quality service for their money.

Through the use of the VIP program, the department has improved the processing time on all permits, most of which may be issued on the spot, surpassing builder expectations. VIP has helped to reduce occasional redundancy and duplication of efforts, which only slows down the construction process. Staff has found that the overall communication has improved with the building community, developers, and other City staff in the short time that VIP has been installed. The program allows building inspectors and planners to review each other's comments on all projects on-line anytime from anywhere. Not all inspectors work in the same building, so the use of the VIP program has greatly improved interdepartmental communication. This ability to access information off-site is essential since inspectors are typically out of the office most of the day. Inspectors are able to stay out in the field longer now without the need to return to the office in order to submit paper inspection reports. Since all inspection comments may be entered into the VIP program with the use of a laptop computer or iPad, inspectors have now eliminated extra trips back to the office, which saves time and money.

The department is now more business friendly and proactive rather than reactive. With the VIP program, permits may be issued faster allowing more projects to be completed quicker. The Gallatin Economic Development Agency also appreciates the improved turn-around time on permits since the implementation of the VIP program. Gallatin is now considered business and builder friendly and the improved efficiency is used as a helpful tool when recruiting new business. Prospective companies like the idea that the building permit process has been streamlined and will not prolong a construction project.

One of the most unique applications of the VIP program is the ability for anonymous code complaints and zoning violations to be submitted confidentially through the VIP icon on the City of Gallatin's homepage. With this added feature, the City is able to bring properties into compliance faster and address property maintenance issues expeditiously. Members of the community are encouraged to report violations more freely, which helps the department clean and beautify the City, making it more attractive for potential businesses and residents.

Other communities in middle Tennessee have also noticed the department's improvements and use of technology. Staff members often receive phone calls from codes and planning directors in other municipalities who want information on the VIP program. In this way, Gallatin is an innovator among the surrounding communities. Builders in other communities are mentioning how easy it is to obtain permits in Gallatin now and now other cities are feeling pressure from local builders to offer the same VIP

program to their customers. Neighboring communities want to follow Gallatin's lead and move toward digital information.

The department received local recognition for the implementation of the VIP program and advancements in communication from the Greater Nashville Regional Council this past September. A copy of the Communications Award is included with the application as Attachment 2.

The VIP program has been beneficial to both City staff and our customers by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our department. Members of the Codes/Planning Department have a common goal of seeking outstanding customer service and open channels of communication with hopes that people will want to continue building in Gallatin.

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Hourly Info | 15 Days

 **Cloudy**
58°F

RealFeel®: 52°F
Winds: SW at 12 mph

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Welcome to the City of Gallatin



Mayor Jo Ann Graves

Mayor Jo Ann Graves 2011 State of the City Address
THE BIG PICTURE

When the City of Gallatin was born some 200 years ago, it had a much different look than it does today. Based on the recent Census, Gallatin is now a community of more than 30,000 residents. Gallatin grew faster than the State of Tennessee as a whole - and faster than the entire United States. Gallatin is in a very desirable location - close proximity to Nashville, good schools, good roads, an abundance of water, and a low tax rate - 99¢. (click [here](#) to watch the 2011 State of the City Address)

Current Events/News



Council Meetings

[Agendas Posted Each Friday afternoon](#)

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City of Gallatin Violation, Inspection, and Permit Portal



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EXCELLENCE

Presented to

Gallatin

The Greater Nashville Regional Council

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AWARD

for excellence in

COMMUNICATION

Presented this 29th day of September 2011 by

Tom With

President

John H. Edwards

Executive Director