



INNOVATION IN THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT

AN ONGOING COMMITMENT BETWEEN SAFEbuilT AND CLIENT PARTNER THE CITY OF CENTENNIAL, COLORADO

CITY OF CENTENNIAL

Centennial became an incorporated city in February 2001. The city was founded on the principles of being efficient, effective, responsive, accountable and innovative. The city currently contracts out public safety (sheriff), public works, mosquito control, legal, building department services, contractor licensing, bus bench and shelter administration, animal control, code enforcement, and sales and use tax administration and audit functions. In-house staff provides finance, accounting, human resources, communications, current and long range planning, and engineering. Some tasks in each of these in-house departments also outsource to handle fluctuations in workload and/or special one-time projects. More than eleven years after incorporation, the city remains committed to the foundation of innovative and efficient service delivery.

As a thriving community of over 100,000 residents in the Denver Metropolitan Area, the city recognizes that homes and neighborhoods are their greatest asset in distinguishing their community. A housing study conducted in 2011 determined that approximately 80% of Centennial's greatest asset, the housing stock, had reached an age of over 20 years. While relatively new by construction standards they are committed to ensuring that the housing stock maintains high standards and value as it ages. This commitment to its housing stock led to the formalization of the **Building Safety Innovation Program** within the building department.

BUILDING SAFETY INNOVATION PROGRAM

The **Building Safety Innovation Program (BSIP)** is a structured program whereby the City of Centennial's provider, SAFEbuilt, recommends business system improvements annually through the community development annual report process. Each year the building department reviews data collected through its customer surveys, meetings with construction associations, its workflows, software, hardware, and equipment to suggest a minimum of two improvements each year. These program improvements are not simply successful programs from other communities, but are instead unique innovations based on the needs of and feedback from within their community.

CULTURE OF INNOVATION

The single most important impact of the BSIP has been to create a culture of innovation within a department that is traditionally highly regulatory with static procedures. From the beginning, Centennial's expectation for efficiency and innovation for this department has been high. The department has grown and made improvements since its incorporation. However in 2006, a structure was developed around the BSIP and a roadmap for system improvements was generated with documentation of successes and future improvements in the Annual Report.

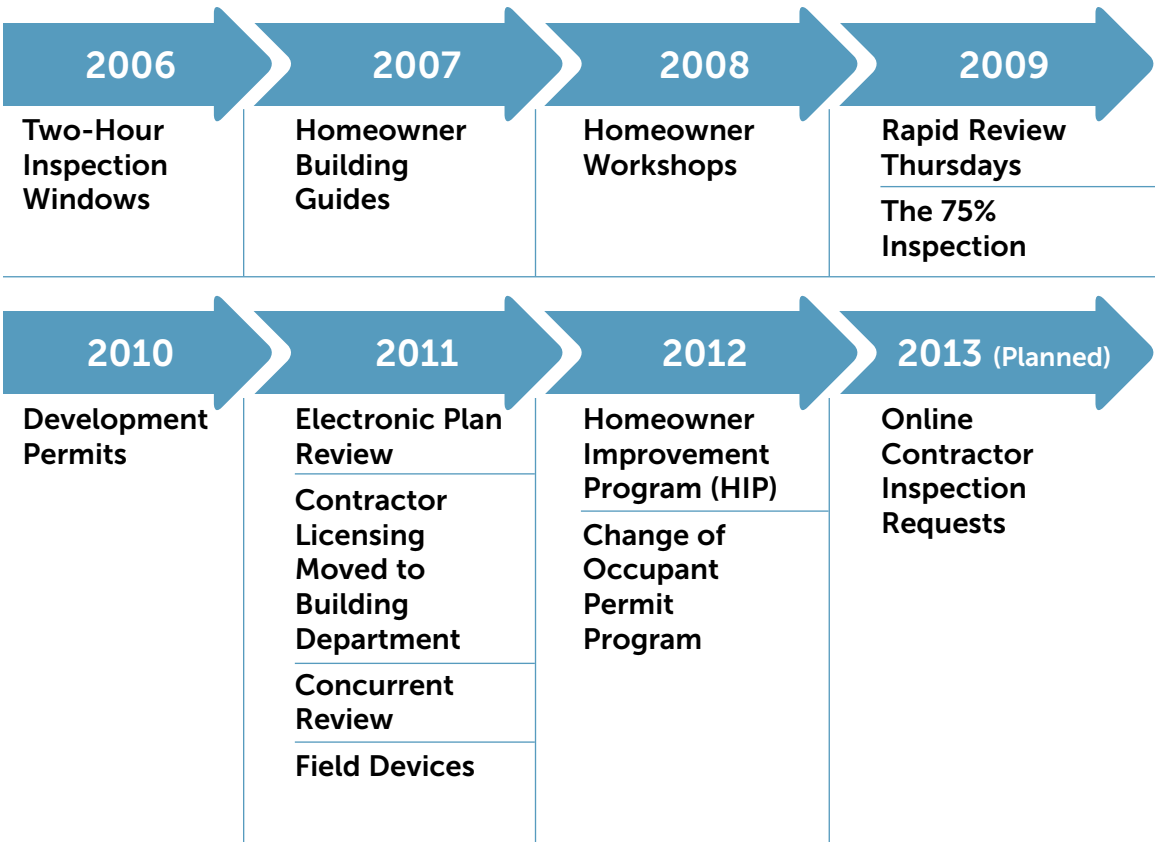
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MAKING A
DIFFERENCE
WHERE YOU
NEED US

Within this structure, it is expected that systems and surveys will be reviewed and that two improvements will be recommended to the Community Development Director each year. This process and recognition of improvements establishes the expectation for innovation and has generated a culture that has increased the number of recommendations and implemented improvements.

In addition to the impact on the culture of the organization, the programs generated have had numerous sustainable benefits within the community. These programs are overwhelmingly successful and have created a very positive image for the department and the city among homeowners, builders and local businesses. This is evidenced by the 8% response rate of 2805 applicant surveys sent out in 2012 and 88% positive rating from those surveys. Service enhancements and process improvements include:

INNOVATION MILESTONES



2006

Two-Hour Inspection Windows were implemented in 2006 as a customer service initiative. Permit holders have always made an inspection request for the next business day. Beginning in 2006, the building department

began calling permit holders on the day of the scheduled inspection with a two-hour window during which the inspection would occur. This allowed homeowners and contractors to make arrangements to be on site during the inspection without losing the entire day waiting.
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2007

Information on the requirements of a construction project has been available to contractors and homeowners. This material is usually specific to code or zoning issues. In 2007, SAFEbuilt generated **Homeowner Building Guides**. These user friendly guides are customized for Centennial homeowners and focused on typical homeowner projects.

2008

Homeowner Workshops were first held in 2008. This is a great way to connect with the citizens of the community as well as general contractors. These clinics focus on helping the homeowner understand the correct way to manage a construction project such as building a deck or finishing a basement.

Usually the workshops are hosted on either a Saturday morning or in the evening at the office, a homeowner's association, or at a local store. A light breakfast or light dinner is provided as well as the building guides about the topic of the workshop. SAFEbuilt staff members make a presentation that walks the homeowner through the project – from applying for the permits to completing the work.

2009

Rapid Review Thursdays established a day each week when customers with specific permit types (not requiring a detailed zoning review) such as signs, fences, and simple building permits are able to walk in and receive a review and permit. These permits are issued over the counter to projects that meet the design criteria while the customer waits.

"I really appreciate the City's implementation of an over-the-counter fence, sign and building permit review process. In a business where customer service and timeliness are key, having the option of an instant review one day per week is helpful in many ways." – Kenny Kling, Gordon Sign

The 75% Inspection is an addition to the city inspection process that is designed to help developers meet their scheduling goals when completing projects. At a point of substantial completion, a 75% Inspection is conducted by the building department, Southeast Metro Storm Water Association (SEMSWA), and fire district personnel with the contractor to evaluate the project's progress and identify any potential delays.

"The 75 Percent Inspection that the City is implementing is a great idea. I wish more municipalities would do something like it. Having all of the people present that need to approve the project was a great tool for us."

– Jake Lievens, Superintendent, JDK Construction LLC

2010

Development Permits were created to combine several related processes into one transaction for developers.

This provided more efficient service to the applicant and greater internal coordination. The development permit combined the payment of use tax, collection of project collateral, inspection fees, and registration of contractors. It also serves as the official "notice to proceed" for construction.

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2011

Electronic Plan Review was implemented in 2011 after the department acquired larger monitors and upgraded computer equipment to facilitate the efficient review of large scale digital plans. The city now accepts electronic submittals such as development applications and site civil construction documents. The transition from paper to electronic submittals for many reviews has substantially reduced paper consumption, resulting in cost savings to applicants and a positive impact on the environment. From April to December 2011, approximately 500 pounds of paper were saved by the acceptance of paperless submittals.

In 2011, the city also reorganized to **combine the contractor licensing function within the building department**. This one-stop shop for contractors eliminated the need for contractors to visit both the building and revenue departments. It also improved enforcement of the licensing requirement within the city.

A **Concurrent Review** of plans by all community development divisions was another improvement in 2011. In reviewing the workflow of permit applications, it was determined that the process to issue a permit was slowed due to each department conducting reviews after a successful review by the previous department. The process was revised to have the reviews conducted concurrently by the building and planning divisions. This resulted in a faster turnaround time for permit reviews that saved applicants several weeks.

Field Devices were deployed in 2011. The devices allowed for efficiencies in mapping and routing inspections. They also enabled inspectors to operate faster by having all permit information available in the field. This allows inspectors to spend more time in field with customers, improving service levels and satisfaction ratings. Resources such as building guides, codes and other materials are loaded on the devices and can quickly be emailed to contractors, homeowners or other interested parties as they are discussed on site.

Inspections can be emailed on site to the contractor or developer upon resulting, freeing up time for permit technicians who also have immediate visibility into the inspection in the case a customer calls. This improvement also reduced the carbon footprint of the department through more efficient routing of inspections less printing.

2012

Homeowner Improvement Program (HIP) is the coordination of three distinct activities so that the overall benefits to homeowners are greater than what could be achieved separately. This collaboration allows each part to function on its own and eliminates duplication of efforts. The *Building Division, Better Business Bureau* and *Shop Local* program comprise the entire HIP program. Participation in HIP is voluntary and provides a 20% discount on building permit fees with a valuation of \$15,000 or more.

The HIP combines elements of community outreach, public-private collaboration, and quality assurance. The program brought a variety of stakeholders together, including SAFEbuilt Inc., the city's building service provider, and a committee comprised of citizens, homeowners, businesses, local suppliers and the local Chamber of Commerce. These stakeholders developed innovative ways to support local business and provide homeowners with greater educational tools for making decisions on their home projects. One of these tools, the HIP Photo Gallery (<http://www.centennialcolorado.com/index.aspx?NID=886>) allows homeowners to review completed projects by type, neighborhood or contractor so that the homeowner can make more informed choices before they begin their project.

Change of Occupant Permit Program was implemented to support businesses moving into existing space that are compliant with zoning and use requirements that are not altering the space. Many times a previous tenant may make changes without going through the proper permit process that result in a noncompliant space for future tenants.

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2012 *continued*

A business moving into such a space may not realize improvements are needed to meet code until just prior to opening, and after a significant investment. The building department receives the business license application and reviews the file to evaluate the proposed use to the existing space. A site inspection is made with the license applicant and the department proactively identifies any concerns that may require modifications and additional costs. The result is that the business license applicant understands any needed improvements prior to investing time and money into opening the business and occupying the space.

2013 (Planned)

Online Contractor Inspection Requests are planned in 2013 upon the successful installation of this product to the city's software.

WHO BENEFITS FROM BUILDING DEPARTMENT INNOVATION?

Innovation is not only beneficial, but it is part of the philosophy that the City of Centennial was founded on. Being efficient, effective, responsive and accountable through innovative ways benefits property owners, city residents or taxpayers and contractors. A culture of innovation and continuous improvement also creates a positive external and internal image for the city.

The cost of innovation strategies as implemented by the City of Centennial have primarily been time and effort. Minimal short-term costs have usually result in long-run savings.



ABOUT SAFEbuilt

Since 1992, SAFEbuilt has offered customized full-service building department programs and supplemental services in short- and long-term engagements exclusively to public agencies. More than 120 communities throughout the country rely on us for our expertise, best practices, innovation and commitment to customer service. They count on us to understand their unique needs and ensure their built environments are constructed with quality and safety at the forefront.

For more information on SAFEbuilt, visit www.safebuilt.com or call 877-230-5019.