Island County Shoreline Exemption Permit

Using Lean to improve permit processes

Island County is trying to issue its shoreline exemption permits in half the time the process used to take.

The County recently participated in the Local Government Performance Center's Lean Academy, which helps governments use process improvement techniques to improve how they accomplish key tasks.

The improvement team analyzed its processes and developed new ways to complete and coordinate tasks.

During an intense five-day review last December, the department of Planning & Community Development eliminated delays, slicing the permit completion time from 90 days to 45 days.

Customer feedback informed decisions

The County invited local builders who submit the permits to talk about what could be improved. Builders described finding out about incomplete applications two weeks after they submitted applications. The staff focused on helping customers ensure their applications are finished on day one.

"It's not always fun hearing everybody's opinion, but it was very helpful getting opinions on what could be improved," said Tamra Patterson, a building inspector and plans examiner who participated in the review. "Cutting back on the incomplete applications and getting rid of the redundancies were the big helpers."

The staff streamlined the application and created a new front-desk schedule so more employees are able to accept applications. "We've already had people making appointments with complete applications and that alone cuts down a lot of time," Patterson said.
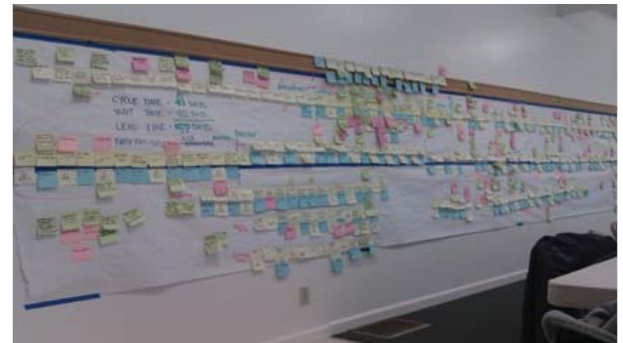
Issuing permits in half the time

Processing Time
Completion
Time before - 90 days
New goal - 45 days

Intake
Time before - 162 minutes
New goal - 91 minutes

Island County's shoreline exemption permit process before the Lean review, above, took twice as long as its new process.

Island County employees brainstormed ways to improve their processes.

Improving workflow

The staff also concentrated on improving their internal workflow so that a planner is assigned the permit within a day, the teams hold daily stand-up meetings to discuss the status of permits and what's coming.

"The turnaround is already a lot faster," said Virginia Shaddy, a planning tech in the Coupeville office. "As soon as (applications) are turned in, the planner looks at them the same day, if not the next day. We're not wasting a whole week for the planners to review a file, so that's a big change."

New protocols focus on uniformity

Employees were also asked to make changes in their daily schedules and tasks, follow uniform protocols for using the permit-tracking software, and meet each afternoon to discuss progress. The changes are designed to ensure everyone is on the same page, said William Simpson, a long-term planner who joined the County last fall.

The County staff said not all changes will show immediate results because they are still working through permits that were started under the earlier processes.

Builders appreciated the County's engagement

Jon Roberts, President of Cascade Custom Homes, said during the review last December that he was "completely encouraged by what I hear," and understood that the changes would take time.

"If you can continue and embrace and make sure it keeps going, it will be great," said Wayne Crider, Executive Officer of the Skagit/Island Counties Builder Association.

> *"I strongly believe that local governments must embrace this kind of business model to survive,"*
>
> Helen Price Johnson, Island County Commissioner

Resources for more information

Island County Planning & Community Development: www.islandcounty.net/planning/

Kitsap County's Lean Process: Learn more about Kitsap County's experiences from videos on the Department of Community Development's website: www.kitsapgov.com/dcd/permit_process_kaizen.htm

Environmental Protection Agency Lean Government webpage: www.epa.gov/lean/government/index.htm

King County's Lean Toolkit: www.kingcounty.gov/employees/Lean/Toolkit.aspx

Washington's Government Management and Accountability Performance Lean page: www.accountability.wa.gov/leadership/lean/default.asp

State Auditor's Office Local Government Performance Center: www.sao.wa.gov/PerformanceCenter