

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.


PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Isle of Wight County
Program Title: Central Permitting and Development Service Process Improvements
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Anne F. Seward
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

**Program Name: Central Permitting and Development Service Process Improvements
Isle of Wight County, Virginia**

Program Category: 4) Customer Service

**Program Criteria: 3) Provide A Model that Other Local Governments May Learn From
or Implement in Their Own Localities**

4) Innovative Approach or Customization of a Program

In the fall of 2013, newly appointed County Administrator, Anne Seward, began meeting with community stakeholders to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of Isle of Wight County. As part of these discussions, various stakeholders expressed concerns about customer service issues in obtaining site plan approvals and permits from the County. Whether real or perceived, this was something that needed to be addressed. A pro-business and customer friendly environment would be critical to promoting commercial, industrial, and residential growth now and in the future. Several development projects were on the verge of moving forward in the County, which has been struggling to recover from the economic recession and the loss of 1,100 jobs due to the closure of International Paper in October 2009.

In early 2014, the County Administrator along with department heads from the departments of Economic Development, Planning and Zoning, Inspections, and General Services, including the engineering, stormwater, and public utilities divisions formed a work group to identify key issues and implement strategies to improve customer service and the permitting process. A number of problems were identified. The departments responsible for site plan review, approval, and permitting tended to operate in silos. Communication of plan review comments between departments and customers was not well coordinated leading to confusion among staff and customers. Standard Operating Procedures and performance standards/review timeframes did

not exist. The reviewing departments also were located in different buildings and in a separate location in the case of stormwater and engineering staff. The departments' lack of physical proximity to each other resulted in customers often being bounced around between multiple locations to obtain comments, signatures, permits, and general information about the status of their applications.

The work group reached out to other communities to identify best practices and developed strategies to create a more unified and cohesive development review and permitting process. A comprehensive strategy was developed encompassing the following components: 1) Creation of a Central Permitting Office, 2) Streamlined Review Process, 3) Commitment to Review Timeframes and Standard Operating Procedures, 5) Improved Coordination and Communication Among Staff and with Customers, and 6) Utilization of Technology.

Central Permitting Office

Critical to the overall improvement plan was the creation of a Central Permitting Office to include the co-location of key staff involved in the plan review and permitting process. Extensive renovations to the first floor of the County's Old Administration Building adjacent to the Department of Inspections would be necessary as the County could not afford to build a new standalone facility. The Old Administration Building already housed the Department of Planning and Zoning and Department of Inspections. The plan would also require the relocation of the Department of Economic Development and the office of the Chief of Emergency Services and EMS Billing staff. A customer service counter would be constructed directly across from the Department of Inspections. The County Engineer and Stormwater Engineer would also relocate from the Department of General Services complex about a quarter mile away from the County Government Complex to office space in close proximity to the Central Permitting Office. The

Director of Planning and Zoning also would move her office to Central Permitting to provide management oversight of Central Permitting staff along with the Director of Inspections whose office was already located adjacent to Central Permitting.

The Department of General Services' Building Maintenance Division worked with the Community Development Team to develop the renovation plan and convert the lobby of the Old Administration Building into the Central Permitting Office throughout the summer and fall of 2014. The Building Maintenance Division, with the assistance of Department of Information Technology staff, completed the renovation work in-house at a cost of \$21,000. The ability to perform the work in-house saved considerable time and money. If the work had been contracted out, the County would have likely paid over \$50,000 for the renovations and had to have gone through a competitive procurement process resulting in lost time. Additionally, as part of the FY 2014-2015 Operating Budget, two permit technician positions (one vacant and one filled) from the Department of Planning and Zoning and Department of Inspections were reassigned to the Central Permitting Office. The permit technicians were hired and underwent training in Virginia basic erosion and sediment control and plan review, Virginia association of certified zoning officials, and Virginia building code academy permit technician courses.

Streamlined Review Process

A new streamlined review process was developed to include zoning, site development, stormwater, public utilities, construction documents, and building construction. The work group considered the process from inception to permit with the following goals in mind: 1) develop a process that includes all customers to include those who know what they want to do and those that do not, 2) consider the value of the applicants time, 3) demonstrate that the County is working for

the customer and not against them, 4) ensure that all actions support project success, and 5) strive to make the process easy, not difficult, for customers.

Pre-application and land development meetings were implemented to help open lines of communication with property owners, developers, their consultants, and County staff. Pre-application meetings are hosted by the Department of Economic Development and attended by key staff from the following departments and agencies: Planning and Zoning, Inspections, Stormwater, Public Utilities, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and other outside agencies such as the Health Department as necessary. The pre-application meetings are designed to open lines of communication between staff and the owner/developer by identifying requirements and any issues prior to the submission of a site plan with an ultimate goal of saving prospective applicants time and money. Land Development meetings are hosted by the Department of Planning and Zoning and are attended by the reviewing departments and, if necessary, outside agencies. The goal of the Land Development meetings are to present plan review comments from all reviewing agencies and explore alternatives in an effort to expedite the review process, provide a comprehensive set of review comments to the applicant, and save the applicant time and money.

Commitment to Review Timeframes and Standard Operating Procedures

The work group reviewed statutory requirements and committed to review times of 10 days for single family projects and 30 days for commercial projects. Standard Operating Procedures were also developed to provide the permit technicians and reviewing departments with clear guidelines and step by step procedures to follow in processing applications for site plan review and permits to include the most complex of projects to routine plan reviews and permits.

Improved Coordination and Communication Among Staff and with Customers

Having a formal structure has helped to improve expectations and communications by and between staff and customers. Additionally, the permit technicians are now tracking review progress and notifying customers of project status via the self-service feature of the County's MUNIS Enterprise System.

Utilization of Technology

Technology has been standardized across the reviewing departments allowing for electronic document submittal/review and the elimination of paper. Customers can now do business with the County without leaving their home or office. Applications are submitted to the Central Permitting Office via planreview@iwus.net. The permit technician receives an email notification that an application is pending and then reviews applications for completeness, enters data into the MUNIS system, attaches documents to the project and distributes the application to the reviewing departments. Departments are notified electronically that they have a plan review pending. The departments review and approve the project or enter review comments in the MUNIS system. When all documents are approved, the permit technician notifies the applicant and requests payment of the permit fees at www.paybill.com/isleofwightcounty/permitspayment/card/default.asp. The permit technician receives a notification when the fees are paid and forwards the approved documents to the applicant.

Project Completion

In October 2014, Isle of Wight County held a grand opening to celebrate the newly established Central Permitting Office and signify that Isle of Wight County is open for business. The grand opening was attended by over 100 stakeholders and provided an opportunity for customers to get acclimated with the new Central Permitting Office, staff, and new customer

service features. Since opening in October 2014, all indications are the Central Permitting Office has been well received. A customer service survey has been introduced to obtain feedback from customers and has thus far garnered positive results. The County Administrator and the work group continue to meet monthly, develop standard operating procedures, and evaluate how to make it easier to do business in Isle of Wight County.

How Did the Program Fulfill the Awards Criteria?

The program will serve as a model for other counties to follow in improving their development review processes and customer service to citizens, business owners, property owners, consulting engineers, and developers. The leadership, cross-departmental collaboration, and utilization of in-house resources and talents used by Isle of Wight County may be particularly helpful to smaller counties with fewer staffing and financial resources who are seeking to improve their plan review and permitting customer service functions. The County also utilized the One-Stop Shop approach to streamline permitting which has been done in other communities, but customized it to our own unique challenges, leveraging in-house resources, talent, and technology, to address the need for central permitting in Isle of Wight County.

Central Permitting and Development Service Process Improvements Isle of Wight County, Virginia

Program Category: 4) Customer Service

**Program Criteria: 3) Provide A Model that Other Local Governments May Learn From
or Implement in Their Own Localities**

In the late fall 2013/early 2014, Isle of Wight County embarked on a project to improve customer service relevant to site plan review/approval and permitting. The County's newly appointed County Administrator, Anne Seward, learned through meetings with various community stakeholders that Isle of Wight had developed a reputation as not being business friendly and having a cumbersome development review and permitting process. A pro-business and customer friendly environment would be critical to promoting commercial and residential growth now and in the future as the County sought to recover from the financial challenges associated with the economic recession and the 2009 closure of one of its largest employers, International Paper.

A work group of community development departments came together to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to improve the site plan review/approval and permitting process. The overall strategy included the creation of a central permitting office, a streamlined review process, commitment to review timeframes and standard operating procedures, improved coordination and communication among staff and customers, and utilization of technology. The County opened its Central Permitting Office in October 2014 and has implemented all of the major components of the strategy. Initial feedback has been positive and the community development departments continue to work together to enhance the customer service experience of business owners, citizens, consulting engineers, developers, and land owners doing business in the County.

Central Permitting and Development Service Process Improvements Isle of Wight County, Virginia

Isle of Wight County, located in the Western Tidewater area of Hampton Roads, implemented a comprehensive strategy in 2014 to improve its site plan review/approval and permitting process. This effort resulted in the creation of a new Central Permitting Office designed to provide customers with a one-stop shop to submit plans and request permit approvals from the County, as well as improved collaboration, processes, procedures, and use of technology to improve the customer service experience of business owners, citizens, consulting engineers, developers, and land owners seeking plan approvals and permits from the County. The project was implemented to address customer service concerns voiced by the development community and create a business friendly atmosphere that will foster commercial, industrial, and residential growth now and in the future to address the County's significant financial challenges caused by the economic recession and the 2009 closure of International Paper which resulted in a loss of 1,100 jobs and 6% of the County's total revenue.

In late fall 2013, the County's newly appointed County Administrator, Anne Seward, and a work group comprised of department heads and staff from community development departments (Economic Development, General Services, Planning and Zoning) began developing and implementing strategies to improve the site plan review/approval and permitting process. This included the creation of a central permitting office, a streamlined review process, commitment to review timeframes and standard operating procedures, improved coordination and communication among staff and customers, and utilization of technology. The County opened its Central Permitting Office in October 2014 and has implemented all of the major components of the strategy. Initial feedback has been positive and the community development departments continue

to work together to enhance the customer service experience of business owners, citizens, consulting engineers, developers, and land owners doing business in the County.

The project required the renovation of an existing County building to bring key staff involved in the site plan review and permitting process under one roof. The renovation work was completed in-house saving thousands of dollars. The County hopes that the new Central Permitting Office and site plan review/approval and customer service features (online customer self-service) will save those seeking build, renovate, or develop properties in the County time and money and signal that Isle of Wight is open for business.



Community
Development

BUILDING INSPECTIONS
ENGINEERING
PLANNING AND ZONING
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT





ISLE OF WIGHT
COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CENTRAL PERMITTING & ZONING



dots, Global Reach







