

Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program
Executive Summary for Challenge Award

Overview:

The Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program was created by the Nevada County Community Development Agency (CDA) to transform the long, rigorous land-use project review process into an over-the-counter same-day service for processing eligible land-use permits. What once may have taken several weeks from application to permit issuance may now be completed in a single appointment.

Challenge:

Have you ever had to obtain a building permit? Depending on the specific project it can be overwhelming and very time consuming for the customer as well as the departments processing the application. Coordination is needed among several internal departments as well as many outside agencies including fire districts, water agencies, school districts, sewer districts, etc. At times it may take a month for a project's first review to be completed by all agencies. Additional funding is not available to expedite this process or to provide more staffing and/or new technology. Providing a quick and efficient permitting process for our customers using our limited resources is very challenging and at times can seem impossible.

Businesses and homeowners want to complete projects but are sometimes intimidated by the overall permitting process and expect a stressful and frustrating experience. They are worried about getting lost in a sea of paperwork and red tape, and not being able to obtain their permits quickly. The result is that projects are either not embarked upon, are abandoned, or worse, are completed without permits. The Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program has encouraged both businesses and homeowners to undertake their projects, and to do so with the reassurance that the process will be quick and smooth.

Innovative Solution:

The Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program simplifies the permitting process by allowing applicants to schedule a single appointment for the coordinated review and approval of their project by multiple agencies. This is offered for no additional charge. Some of the projects that are eligible for this program include commercial tenant improvements, residential remodels, additions, and garages. The applicants can meet with various departments and agencies at the same time to review the project plans, review minimum requirements, and answer questions. The goal of the Program is to complete the plan review and permit issuance in a single day rather than after several weeks and multiple visits to the office, allowing homeowners and contractors to start projects quickly.

Originality:

This program is unique amongst California Counties because it simplifies the building permit process and improves customer service by expediting project reviews on a regularly scheduled basis. The program

streamlines complex processes while providing quality, consistent, and timely services to citizens. Often counties are unable to meet the scheduling demands of the public, offering review periods of up to six weeks and sometimes encouraging their constituents to utilize a third party firm for plan review. At a time when counties are overworked and understaffed, the Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program provides an expedited service which allows the public to work directly with staff in achieving approved plans and permit issuance. Since the implementation of the program several other neighboring counties and cities have implemented similar programs and are experiencing similar positive results.

Cost Effectiveness:

Adding to the uniqueness of the Program is the advantage of having no impact on operating or capital costs for its development and implementation. Existing technology and staff are utilized to operate this program. The Program actually helps save time and money for both the County and its customers. Working with the applicant directly during the review eliminates the back and forth of corrections letters and communications to clarify requirements. This ultimately reduces the amount of staff time needed to complete the process and decreases the amount of money spent by customers on plan review fees.

Results:

The Program allows for completion of plan review and permit issuance within a single day rather than multiple weeks or months, allowing homeowners and contractors to start projects quickly. Feedback from the community has been overwhelmingly positive and the Agency has experienced an incredible improvement in customer attitude pertaining to the permit process. The main results and successes of the Over-the-Counter Plan Review Program include:

- Improved relationships with the community and agency partners
- Increased permitting activity by 10%
- Reduced project plan review costs by up to 60% for certain projects
- Reduction in staff time needed by up to 60% for certain projects
- Decreased timeframes from plan creation to project completion allowing businesses to open sooner and improve the local economy
- Decrease in plan review workload to allow additional staff time to improve other programs

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