

PINELLAS COUNTY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Pinellas County revolutionized its permitting process by transitioning from a paper-based process to the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room, cutting intake processing time and improving review accuracy and speed.



THE CHALLENGE

Before adopting the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room, Pinellas County faced several significant challenges. Statutory requirements for validating digital signatures introduced a new layer of complexity, necessitating robust and accurate methods to ensure authenticity and full compliance. The transition from a traditional paper-based process to an electronic review system required adjustments across multiple departments and workflows.

Additionally, incomplete applications were a common issue, leading to delays and inefficiencies in the permitting process. Statute-mandated review timelines posed another challenge, impacting the overall speed of permit reviews and approvals. The management of “combo” permits—which involved concurrent site development and trade permits—added further complexity to the process and extended review timelines.

Moreover, the siloed nature of review departments, with separate physical locations for Utilities, Public Works, and Fire districts, resulted in fragmented and inefficient processes, making coordination and communication more challenging.

OVERVIEW

Pinellas County, located on Florida’s West Coast, is the seventh most populous county in the state, with an approximate population of 961,000. The county consists of a diverse blend of 25 municipalities and 16 separate fire districts.

In October 2020, Pinellas County implemented the Accela Civic Platform to modernize and streamline its permitting processes. Their transition to electronic plan reviews began in December 2022 with the integration of the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room, seamlessly embedded within the Accela Civic Platform. This new system replaced the county’s long-standing paper-based process, which previously required each copy of a document to pass through up to 12 different disciplines for review and approval.

THE RESULTS

The ePermitHub team collaborated closely with Pinellas County to ensure a smooth transition for both customers and staff. The County team valued ePermitHub’s expertise in digital signatures and municipal processes, which significantly improved the overall experience for users. Together, the teams developed an optimized solution for the County and continue to refine processes through monthly Customer Success meetings and ePermitHub user group meetings.

The implementation of the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room greatly enhanced Pinellas County’s permitting operations by automating critical functions such as digital signature validation, versioning plans, stamping plans, concurrent reviews, customer communication, and auto-routing reviews. The County team was particularly pleased with the immediate and unexpected benefits of auto-routing, streamlined document requirements, and the flexibility of the comment library.

The application intake review process became significantly faster and more accurate, resulting in an immediate 50% reduction in intake processing time. The time required to deem an application complete was reduced by three days, while the time to return first reviews to customers improved by seven days, enhancing overall review efficiency.



THE SOLUTION

To address these challenges, Pinellas County implemented the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room. The county assembled a dedicated team of subject-matter experts to lead the project, investing significant time and effort in mastering the Digital Plan Room to ensure an optimized approach.

By leveraging their in-depth knowledge of the Accela Civic Platform and the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room, the team collaboratively developed a solution to enhance the customer experience, improve ease of use for reviewers, and reduce overall processing timelines.

Their ongoing commitment to refinement and optimization ensures that the solution remains dynamic and adaptable to evolving needs, reflecting the county's dedication to continuous improvement.

The county implemented the Digital Plan Room across multiple departments, including Building Services, Florida Building Code Reviews, Florida Fire Prevention Code Reviews, Development Review Services, Site Plans, Zoning, Environmental, and Right of Way, integrating various aspects of the permitting process into a unified system.

THE RESULTS

Review completeness also improved, reducing the number of review cycles needed:

- 73% of commercial first reviews and 91% of second reviews were completed and approved.
- 66% of residential first reviews and 86% of second reviews met all requirements.

Upon initial submittal, customers received clearer guidance on required documents and upfront notifications of additional requirements. The transition to the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room also eliminated the need for mailing, walking, or driving paper documents to external agencies. Additionally, it allowed the County to use a single master plan, eliminating the need for multiple copies for collation or stamping.

Key Statistics

Commercial Reviews

- Average Days to Complete First Review: Improved by 54.4% from 2022 to 2023, 51.6% from 2023 to 2024, and 77.8% from 2022 to 2024.
- Average Review Cycles to Issue Permit: Improved by 8.3% from 2022 to 2023, 17.6% from 2023 to 2024, and 24.4% from 2022 to 2024.

Residential Reviews

- Average Days to Complete First Review: Improved by 54.7% from 2022 to 2023, 52.4% from 2023 to 2024, and 78.4% from 2022 to 2024.



Development Review Services Specialist

Robert W. Heiss,

"The amount of efficiency and versatility of the Digital Plan Room exceeded my expectations. It is also an intuitive system to learn, even for those with little review experience before ePermitHub."



Development Review Services Specialist

Danielle Zamora

"I love doing zoning reviews in the plan room—it is much easier, and I don't have big plan sets laid out all over my desk!"





CONCLUSION

Pinellas County's transition to the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room has transformed its permitting processes, leading to substantial improvements in efficiency and accuracy. The shift from a paper-based system to a fully digital platform has significantly accelerated review times while enhancing the completeness and precision of reviews. By implementing streamlined procedures, the County has improved workflow efficiency, demonstrating the significant benefits of modernizing municipal services.

The County's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the ongoing efforts of its dedicated team of subject-matter experts. Their proactive approach to refining the system ensures that the solution remains dynamic and adaptable to evolving needs. This commitment not only addresses present challenges but also positions the County to seize future opportunities for further enhancement. Their dedication underscores Pinellas County's mission to deliver exceptional service, setting a high standard for excellence in municipal administration.

ABOUT EPERMITHUB & ACCELA

ePermitHub is a leading provider of digital permitting solutions, specializing in the Digital Plan Room (DPR), which integrates seamlessly with the Accela Civic Platform. By automating and streamlining plan review and approval processes, ePermitHub helps cities and agencies improve efficiency, enhance compliance, and reduce processing times. With a strong focus on innovation and customer success, ePermitHub empowers municipalities to modernize their permitting systems while delivering exceptional service to developers and builders.



Accela® is one of the leading providers of cloud-based software solutions, empowering local and state governments to drive efficiency and modernization. Accela offers both a configurable platform and out-of-the-box civic applications for core processes including, but not limited to, permitting, licensing, and code enforcement. Accela assists agencies in streamlining workflows, reducing manual tasks, and improving service delivery. With a commitment to end-to-end support, Accela is a trusted partner to over 600 agencies and jurisdictions worldwide.

THE SOLUTION

Beyond addressing their electronic plan review needs, Pinellas County also integrated key features of the ePermitHub Digital Plan Room to further enhance the permitting process:

- Requirements checklists were introduced to ensure that all necessary documents were submitted upfront, significantly reducing the occurrence of incomplete applications.
- Auto-routing capabilities were added to direct submissions to the appropriate reviewers and departments, streamlining the review process and minimizing manual errors.



Pinellas County Building and Development Review Services, Customer & Permitting Operations Manager

Leila Kheireddine

"As the permitting operations manager, our greatest frustration was receiving incomplete documents and going back and forth with customers, which delayed the process. ePermitHub streamlined our workflow, ensuring complete submissions for all permit types, including Building and Site Permits. I cannot imagine succeeding without the ongoing improvements and collaboration with ePermitHub."

