ProjectDox Case study
Salt Lake City, UT

The economic recession slowed construction and business development in Salt Lake City, Utah, as it did in much of the United States. City officials could, however reluctantly, accept that.

What they couldn't accept was the possibility that they were making matters worse for themselves, their taxpayers, and the developers and investors who were considering projects in their city—and that they might be losing major businesses to other locales.

In an economic climate that called for cities to be their most hospitable to developers and their business clients weighing where to locate a shopping mall, a manufacturing facility, or a car dealership, Salt Lake City's approach left something to be desired.

When it came time for reviews and revisions of plans for permit approval, no common technology platform existed for effective communication between the city and the development teams.

There was no way to separate the economic effects of this process from the broader effects of the recession, but certainly no one in city hall thought that the permit process was helping to attract developers and new businesses.

"We knew we had to make it quicker and easier for customers to get through our process and get on with construction on their projects."
Orion Goff, Director of Building Services for Salt Lake City.

ProjectDox ePlan system provides the answer

For the city's solution to meet developers' needs for an expedited approval process, the solution had to provide the same support for design/construction plans and other project information documents.

Goff and his colleagues wanted to be able to receive documents from developers electronically, review those documents with expedited workflow, collaborate with colleagues during reviews, and share comments with developers to get to an approvable plan more quickly.

Meeting these criteria would also mean meeting the city's goals for reducing the use of paper and minimizing the "carbon footprint" (i.e., the environmental impact) of the permit process.

Salt Lake City adopted ProjectDox® as their solution for a highly secure, online site for engineering plans/drawings and document sharing.

The site provides change notification, threaded discussions, change history tracking, and markup collaboration for electronic design and construction plan submission. Avolve worked with the city and the permitting software provider to create a seamless integration and automated workflow process.

Eliminates steps, complexity for building plan submissions

The city's goal for its new solution was to make it easier for developers and other customers to "get through" the process. By that measure, Salt Lake City has succeeded—and economic growth is the ultimate benefit.

One way that the city made it easier for developers to get through its permit process was by eliminating steps and complexity with which they had to deal before. For example, developers no longer need to make trips to the city's offices to deliver stacks, and sometimes a vanload, of plan review documents.

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Instead, delivering documents now is a simple online upload from the architect/engineer to the city. That makes the process faster, simpler, less expensive, and more convenient for the entire development team.

"The fact that we save our customers the time and trouble of multiple trips to our office is a huge benefit for them," says Nole Walkingshaw, Planning Program Supervisor for Salt Lake City.

"The contractors or developers can sit in their offices, and upload their documents to us with a few clicks on the computer. And they have one place to go when they want to review their submissions and our comments and reports on them. It's revolutionary for a city to conduct its permit process this way. We have customers telling us all the time, 'Are you sure I don't need to bring something down to your office?'"

Goff recalls the example of an architect a continent away, in Washington, D.C., who was working on a high-profile development project in Salt Lake City. It was late in December, and the architect had to submit plans before January 1, when changes to building codes would go into effect.

"The architect was in a rush to get the plans in," says Goff. "She would have had to book and take a last-minute holiday flight to Salt Lake City, lugging half a dozen very large sets of plans—except that we had this online solution.

The architect sat in her office and seamlessly submitted the electronic files over the Internet through her computer. It couldn't have been simpler, and she couldn't have been happier. She was even able to pay for the application online with her credit card. To me, it's absolutely amazing that we have been able, with the help of our partners, to provide this capability as quickly as we have."

Reduces time for approvals by up to 50 percent, saving days and weeks

Beyond the ease and simplicity of the new permit process for developers is the very significant increase in the process's speed.

While the length of the permit process is still dependent on the size and complexity of the project being proposed, it's now common to see the time for that process reduced by up to 50 percent because of the Avolve and Microsoft solution.

The time needed for the second review—which can be a very time-consuming part of the process because it includes close scrutiny of a developer's proposed revisions—has now been reduced by as much as 70 percent. These reductions can shorten the permit process by days and even weeks.

The time savings accrue in a variety of ways, starting with eliminating the time needed to transport physical plans. There's also the time savings that come when city reviewers can instantly spot an outstanding requirement—for example, a new set of drawings to satisfy an engineer's concern—and direct the developer to address it.

The steps in the process have been drastically reduced and some completely eliminated due to the automation provided in the software solution.

The second review process sees substantial time savings because it formerly consumed major amounts of time as physical plans had to be shared among several reviewers, and as plans could sit for days or more in a reviewer's office before the reviewer could review them.

Now, reviewers receive instant notifications telling them when plans are available for review. The online availability of digital plans eliminates the need to wait for physical plans to be routed among offices.

In addition to these timesavers, the online process is more accurate, which also expedites work for reviewers. The increased accuracy comes from the certainty that all reviewers are looking at the same plans at the same time.

Previously, the city had no easy way to confirm that the physical plans submitted to each department were identical. Similarly, reviewers gain accuracy and speed from the overlay tool in ProjectDox, with which they can immediately discern any unintended or unwanted discrepancies between document versions.

> **"What we're getting with the ProjectDox solution isn't just the latest and greatest technology," says Kent Overly, Technology Consultant for Salt Lake City. "It's the latest and greatest technology applied directly to the business pains we felt as a city government trying to provide the best possible service to our customers."**

Attracts and retains jobs

Salt Lake City set out to make the permit process easier for its customers so it could attract and retain the businesses that are fueling the city's economic recovery. The plan seems to be working.

For example, a global manufacturer of heavy equipment that has operations in Salt Lake City needed to expand those operations, and it needed to confirm government approval quickly to meet its internal schedules.

Fearing that Salt Lake City couldn't move fast enough to accommodate their needs, the company's executives planned to take all their Salt Lake City operations, including 200 jobs, to another state. City officials responded quickly when they heard the news, demonstrating the new permit solution and guaranteeing a timely response.

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The 200 jobs were saved—and many more were created by the company's expansion.

"Businesses tend to locate in jurisdictions where they have the better experience, and they tend to attract other businesses that also want that better experience," says Lisa Shaffer, Development Review Administrator for Salt Lake City.

"Getting projects approved quickly helps to deliver that better experience. Software from Microsoft and Avolve enable us to partner seamlessly with private industry in the development review process. Businesses want to go where government is their enabler, not their impediment. We want to be seen as an enabler, and ProjectDox is helping us to do that."

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