



DigEplan[™] Case study City of Rexburg

City of Rexburg Utilizes DigEplan Fully Integrated Electronic Plan Review for Cityworks PLL

Keen to move their permitting and plan review to an electronic process, the City of Rexburg considered a number of solutions however, what they found was 'a complete overbuild' for their electronic plan review requirements. DigEplan was chosen due to its attractive short implementation time and straight-forward, fully integrated plan review with Cityworks PLL.

With a population of 35,000, the City of Rexburg in Madison County, Idaho, had been using the Cityworks solution since 2012. "We wanted the ability to conduct electronic plan review integrated with our Cityworks system," said Bret Stoddard, Building Official, City of Rexburg.

Paper to ePlan review

The City of Rexburg used a paper-based system to review plans, yet they were well aware that it presented a number of challenges. "Our policies require three sets of plans to be submitted, but we had more than three people that needed to review the plans.

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"The logistics of passing around three sets of 24x36 size plans was cumbersome," explained Bret.

"We like to keep one set in our permit tech's hand, so then you just have two sets to pass around anywhere between six to eight people. We try to review plans in a timely fashion, but it was hard to do when reviewers can't get hold of the plans. Plans also got lost because somebody may have thrown them to the back of their desk, then all of a sudden it becomes a decorative piece, rather than something that's in the process."

"When you think about it, paper processes are really backwards. Professionals design these plans on a computer in a digital format, such as CAD, they are then printed. Often, we then scan them, so that we can work on them in a digital format. Converting from electronic, to paper, back to electronic - it isn't just that the process that takes time and money, but it's the loss of quality."
Faron Young, Asset Management System Administrator, City of Rexburg

“With scans you lose the quality needed to zoom into detail on the plans. Especially if our scanner had a fit that day and put stripes over it! DigEplan eliminates all of those extra manual steps, making the process very efficient,” added Bret.

Knowing electronic plan review would make a major difference to their efficiency, the City of Rexburg began the search for the right partner. “We looked seriously at a number of vendors in the market but the other software vendors we found were beyond what we really needed. It’s like buying a Cadillac when all you really need is a Geo Metro,” said Bret Stoddard.

“It’s a complete overkill for what we need. The cost was definitely reflected of that, being considerably higher, probably based on the intricacies of it, but we’re doing simple plan review. We need to make notes, make comments and be able to receive plans and get them back electronically. We don’t need anything more than that,” added Faron.

“Our Cityworks platform already provides us with a workflow, to create tasks and keep us organized, it comes with a document storage capability, as well as searchability. These other companies were building that functionality into their software, so it became redundant. And we had to pay for that redundancy. DigEplan was really attractive because it just kept it very simple and straight forward to do electronic plan review; mark-ups and communicate back and forth to our developers.”

Faron Young



For the City of Rexburg, DigEplan’s integration to existing systems that were already enhancing permitting was a huge benefit.

“ArcGIS has been an important component to our city for many years and we integrated GIS-centric platform, Cityworks PLL for permitting to expand our capabilities and simplify processes. Combining ArcGIS with Cityworks, for example, allows us to use a map-based search of property history for the complete development process, including zoning, platting, building, and infrastructure. It provides knowledge of any special conditions that exist with the property from the onset of any new project, such as conditional use permits, sunset clauses, or restrictive lot covenants.

“This guides the development process; without this easily accessible map layer, a great deal of research is required, and things could be overlooked. After knowing the benefits of ArcGIS and Cityworks PLL, managing a permitting process without it, would feel like tying your shoes with your hands tied behind your back...simply difficult.”

Implementation in Weeks

Having made the decision to introduce DigEplan, the City of Rexburg were keen to get the system installed quickly. "The simplicity of DigEplan was reflected considerably in the time it took to implement, which was estimated at around four weeks. This was a sixth of the time of other software, which were six months minimum.

"We were keen to get up and running so we could actually use what we had purchased. We managed it in record time, only lagging a couple of weeks, due to it coinciding with Covid-19. This was down to the commitment of the DigEplan team making it happen. I believe they went beyond just the typical implementation and were very accommodating, ensuring that it would work with the city's processes," said Bret Stoddard.



"The simplicity of implementing DigEplan alongside Cityworks is the number one reason I would recommend DigEplan and Cityworks. That, alongside their willingness for the software to work as part of our processes. It isn't just that you purchased the software, then go away and good luck; hopefully it works for you. DigEplan does the extra to make it work and are definitely open to suggestions, rather than having a closed-door approach."

"Doing plan reviews in DigEplan is easy. As with any new system, there was a learning-curve as staff got used to new processes, but the training from TruePoint Solutions helped us to get on our feet quickly," added Bret.

Digital Plan Efficiency

DigEplan enables collaboration and digital efficiency for the City of Rexburg. "We have users in a variety of departments, building, fire, public works, planning and zoning, that all need to review plans.

DigEplan speeds up this process, with multiple users able to access and mark-up simultaneously," explained Faron.

"DigEplan creates consistency, you have the ability to see others' comments and vice versa. Everyone is working from the same set of plans and it removes contradicting comments from people in the same process."

Faron Young

"It provides a very easy, consistent way to communicate plans, required revisions, or approvals back and forth between the design professional and the building department. Prior to DigEplan, we would create a report filled with comments, but sometimes these could be hard to translate, because they didn't have a visual graphical notation of the changes needed," said Faron.

"Now we can point an arrow, for example, to exactly what needs to be corrected. This helps with clarity, so comments are not open to interpretation. It also gives us one version of the plan, so that anyone on site – builder, contractors – are all working off the same exact plan set that was revised and approved.

"This is the biggest benefit. Before we did electronic plan review, we had people who would be out working from a set of outdated, first-edition plans that had no revisions," added Bret.

All permitting applications for the City of Rexburg are now required to be submitted electronically, which is favored by the architects and designers who were the driving force behind the change. "They get tired of buying ink and end up with plans the size of a small tree worth of paper, they definitely don't like having to submit those.

"It is beneficial for the architects and designers that are not located in our area to submit plans online, removing the need for them to ship cumbersome triangle tubes. Our local larger design firm said DigEplan was one of the easiest software that they've worked with, so we've had really good feedback," said Bret.

"Developers can easily upload plans through the Cityworks public portal, download our revision report or the approval report with those pages commented. It enables them to have the plans at their fingertips, wherever they have internet connection and makes for very nice two-way communication regarding the plans."
Bret Stoddard

"In the current scenario with Covid-19, DigEplan has given us the ability to do plan review remotely. Plans have not been physically dropped off, with the worry that they'll sit in a box for 24 hours or 36 hours. As it is all now digital, we can continue working whatever scenarios we face," added Bret.

Robust Audit Trail

The City of Rexburg is required to keep commercial plans indefinitely and residential plans for two years, so storage was challenging. "For a long time when we were collecting paper, there was a point where real estate was what was being purchased to try to manage storage. So, when it came to two years, we were pretty good about trying to get rid of residential plans for the sake of that.

"But with DigEplan it is definitely manageable to keep plans even longer than two years, providing a better benefit to the community. This creates an audit trail, so should you need to go back to any of the plans, it is easier to find them, and you can justify the decision that was made, because you can follow through the comment history," explained Bret.

"But you need a solid process for your audit trail to work. If staff put good information in that is accurate and searchable, you're going to get that information out."

For the City of Rexburg, DigEplan has slotted into their existing processes providing them with the consistency benefits of electronic plan review, and efficiencies delivered from integration into their Cityworks platform.

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