

A photograph of the Chesterfield County Courthouse, a large, classical-style building with a prominent portico supported by white columns and a central dome. The building is set against a clear blue sky with some trees in the background.

## DigEplan<sup>™</sup> Case study Chesterfield County, VA

**Chesterfield County, VA is a thriving county in eastern Virginia with more than 300,000 citizens. Chesterfield's former plan review process made for tedious work and delays in communication with customers. A change was needed, they sought an electronic plan review system that would bring efficiencies to the county's departments while improving the experience for everyday citizen applicants.**

**Relying on paper plan review and an inefficient digital submission system, Chesterfield needed a new solution.**

Prior to onboarding DigEplan, Chesterfield County faced a host of challenges with their plan review process. Due to a convoluted and rarely used digital submission process, 95% of plans were submitted on paper.

This posed storage issues, created challenges with visibility, and slowed down the approval process. "The room we used to store paper was so full we couldn't fit another plan in there," said Kemper Elder, Chief of Residential Plan Review, Chesterfield County.

Chesterfield's digital process wasn't much better. The county initially rolled out online submission to a select number of large developers but faced

challenges with adoption due to a complicated process.

Plans were submitted in PDF via email, then manually reviewed, marked up in a construction software solution, and sent back through email. However, this led to inefficiencies and delays.

"It was very tedious," said Kemper, noting that Chesterfield plan reviewers were forced to create files on their individual computers to review and store approved plans. "It took up a lot of space on our individual computers."

The patchwork system for online submission was so cumbersome that the county actually preferred paper submission. "The digital review process we had in place wasn't efficient, so it didn't motivate us to encourage wider adoption of the system," Kemper said.

## DigEplan and Accela's seamless integration make it a winning pair

With formerly disjointed and inefficient plan review workflows and systems, Chesterfield was looking to streamline the process to make it as seamless as possible. The county reviewed a few other ePlan review solutions but ultimately went with DigEplan thanks to its tight integration with Accela.

**“The ability to open DigEplan directly through Accela, make markups, and save plans seamlessly has really contributed to a more efficient workflow,” Kemper said.**

Since prior revisions and corrections were requested via email, Kemper especially liked the reporting functionality of DigEplan, which makes it easy to communicate and request revisions. “I can markup revisions on the plans and then run a report on that plan as revisions, which allows the customer to go in and see all the markups on that set of plans,” Kemper said.

## DigEplan cuts review time in half for Chesterfield County

Since adopting DigEplan, Chesterfield has realized a host of benefits from improved digital submission rates to reduced review time, increased customer satisfaction, and more.

Thanks to DigEplan's intuitive UX and efficient workflows, the county has significantly increased the percentage of electronic plan submissions.

From an initial 5% of plans being submitted electronically, the county now processes over 90% of plans through DigEplan.

**“Something that may have taken 7-10 days is now closer to 3-5 days since adopting DigEplan.”**

***Kemper Elder, Chief of Residential Plan Review, Chesterfield County***

The widespread adoption of digital submissions has enabled Chesterfield to cut their review time in half, from 7-10 days to 3-5. “It's really sped up the process,” said Kemper. He attributes the reduction in review time to the overall efficiencies DigEplan confers, which allows the plan review team to

communicate more easily with other departments, provide near-instant feedback, and for customers to receive corrections more promptly.

## Improved visibility and communication thanks to DigEplan

Chesterfield has experienced extensive improvement in communication since adopting DigEplan, both internally and externally. Real-time updates, automated emails notifying corrections required, and the ability to track the status of plan reviews online reduce the need for customers to inquire about the progress manually.

**“Customers get real-time updates of their permit as it goes through the plan review process and notifications about the changes they need to make to get it approved, which I think is exactly the kind of service you want as a customer,”**

***Kemper Elder, Chief of Residential Plan Review, Chesterfield County***

Since customers can check the status of their applications independently, Kemper's team is able to focus more of their time on plan review, further reducing review times.

“Instead of us having to answer phone calls looking for updates, we're able to continue to review plans because the customer is able to see that on their end,” Kemper said.

As for the applicants, despite concerns about potential resistance, even non-professional users have found DigEplan to be user-friendly. The system's straightforward submission process and the availability of training and tutorials contributed to positive feedback from both large builders and individual homeowners.

The implementation of DigEplan not only addressed the existing challenges but also brought about a cultural shift in the way plan reviews were conducted, moving from a manual and paper-intensive process to a streamlined, digital, and collaborative approach. As for Kemper, he said he'd eagerly recommend DigEplan to other jurisdictions. **“I couldn't imagine not using DigEplan at this point,” he added.**