



Osceola County, Florida

With a 22% annual increase in permits since 1978, the county needed to expedite safe construction in every possible way. ProjectDox® gives them online plan review and more.

Background

For many years Central Florida's Osceola County, covering just over fifteen hundred square miles, was home to ranchers and citrus growers. But that was before the Interstate 4 corridor boom that began in the 1970s and has continued unabated ever since. Today, while there are still plenty of ranches and orange groves in the county, Osceola's proximity to Orlando (which is just north of the county line in Orange County) has changed it from quiet farmland into a rapidly expanding business, entertainment and recreational center. Kissimmee, one of the county's two incorporated municipalities, is located in north Osceola County and serves as a major gateway to Orlando. As such, the county's construction industry has been expanding rapidly to house and service new residents, businesses and tourists.



Growth Brings Challenges

Not surprisingly, the Orlando phenomenon has placed an increased burden on county and city building departments. County records show that building permit applications and issuances went from 31 annually in 1978, when the Osceola County Building Office was created, to 7,428 per year in 2006 – an increase of 22% year over year. Building department staffs struggled to keep pace, and county officials recognized that streamlining permit approval and other processes were essential to meet present and future demand.

The county implemented a permitting system and Growth Management Software beginning in 1996, and has been steadily building a best-in-class information management environment. However, none of the software systems deployed earlier dealt effectively with the construction plan-check process.

"We've been able to process a permit itself hands-free for a while now, but we were still dealing with rolls of paper when it came to the construction drawings," said Osceola County's Document Management Supervisor, Tim Anger. "Submitting plans online and tying the permit information to them is something we'd been looking at, but creating a solution meant joining together a number of separate technologies and taking our chances."

It was also clear to county management that the challenge was not just a technical one, but a process and people issue as well.

"We wanted to take paper out of the equation as much as possible, but we also knew that this would be a significant transition for us internally and externally on the civilian side too," Anger says. "Our solution would have to account for county personnel of multiple skill levels and present a consistent user-experience to everyone involved in the process."

The County had plans to utilize a combination of CD ROM and a leading vendor's CAD software technology, but when attending their permitting software user conference, discovered ProjectDox® from Avolve Software. The County Development plan review team was notified, and after a thorough web demonstration, submitted a questionnaire that focused on the specific challenges needing to be addressed.

ProjectDox: Technology With Purpose

As a solution, ProjectDox addressed all the challenges the County put forward. But it also went beyond their expectations and inspired new and creative thinking at Osceola County.

continued

"We were impressed by the features and functionality, specifically the submission of drawings via

It's time to go paperless.

the internet, e-forms and annotation tools. What we also really liked was the ability to customize the software for our needs. We found that within our department we had many different interpretations of our permitting and plan review process, and working with Avolve we were able to refine that process. It forced us all to be on the same page”, says Jeff Wood, a Senior Analyst with the County’s IT department.



According to Wood and Anger, the Osceola County Building Office wanted to focus on the resubmission and revision process, for this was where problems seemed to surface frequently, especially when builders and architects wanted status reports.

“Before ProjectDox, contractors had to make special status requests, and multiple departments had to weigh in, which was difficult to coordinate efficiently. It frustrated everyone at times. Now the contractors are part of the process, and have visibility into their projects. And we’re looking at providing ProjectDox services to the Engineering, Zoning and Planning Departments because their challenges are similar.”

Regarding the reaction of county employees to ePlan technology, at first there was mixed response – some were excited, some didn’t grasp what the technology would enable them to do. Jeff Wood explains.

“At first the Plan Review Staff was enthusiastic for online plan review, but were unsure of how it could be accomplished. They quickly realized that ProjectDox would be easier and more effective than they initially thought. In the beginning stages of the implementation process to us ProjectDox was seen as a plan review tool that provided a way for our customers to upload plans.”

“After a closer look we came to the conclusion that ProjectDox could be used as an interdepartmental solution for the entire permitting process. The more exploring we did in ProjectDox the more we realized there were many opportunities throughout the whole Growth Management Division to use features of the product. We really had to prioritize our wants and needs because ProjectDox has so many capabilities and customizable options.”

Osceola County implemented a two-phase rollout program. On July 31st, 2007, after training selected contractors, they beta-tested the ProjectDox system. Over the next 6 weeks they initiated ProjectDox projects with the permitting system as well as handled the paper plans as before in parallel. They anticipated issues with ProjectDox, but were amazed that there were none. On September 24th, 2007 the County officially went “live” with ProjectDox and have experienced great success in using the product. Both staff and customers seem to have caught on quickly and find ProjectDox to be indispensable to the permitting process. Initially, only selected contractors were given access to ProjectDox review, but since going live, homeowners are also using the system.

The Future

Wood and Anger believe they have just begun to take advantage of the management and collaboration capabilities in ProjectDox. There are plans to introduce the technology to other County departments, as well as to implement a digital archiving and access/distribution system featuring ProjectDox. When asked about maintaining standards and consistency, Wood says:

“I am not sure if we need any programs to guarantee standards and consistency – the way the workflow, eforms, and tasks have been set up there is limited opportunities for mistakes and failures. Actually, by using ProjectDox we are able to keep better track of all our projects, whereas in the past there were times when things would fall through the cracks. There are no cracks in ProjectDox that we have experienced.”

Jurisdictions from all over the United States have contacted Osceola County for information regarding ePlan submission and review, and they are happy to provide as much information as they have. There is a certain pride and gratification that the Osceola County Building Office has knowing that they are leading the way with ePlan technology. Hearing from all the other jurisdictions has only validated their decision to go with ProjectDox.

ProjectDox can be integrated with multiple government software and e-permitting products. Talk to your Avolve Software sales representative for details.



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