Case Study: Modernizing a Fast-Growing County's Permitting System

On a typical Monday morning in early 2023, staff at a fast-growing Texas county opened their permitting software to find the same overwhelming sight they had grown accustomed to, an ever-expanding queue of projects, many buried under outdated statuses, scattered requirements, and unclear points of contact. The county, processing between 4,000 and 6,000 permit applications a year, was growing faster than its tools, its processes, and its people could keep up with. Constituents were frustrated, elected officials demanded answers, and staff were doing everything in their power to stay afloat.

Reviewers jumped between spreadsheets, emails, legacy application forms, and an outdated version of their permitting software, trying to piece together what needed to happen next. No one could easily see where a project was in the process or how long it had been there. Managers lacked visibility into performance, applicants lacked clarity, and everyone felt the strain.

A County in Need of Clarity

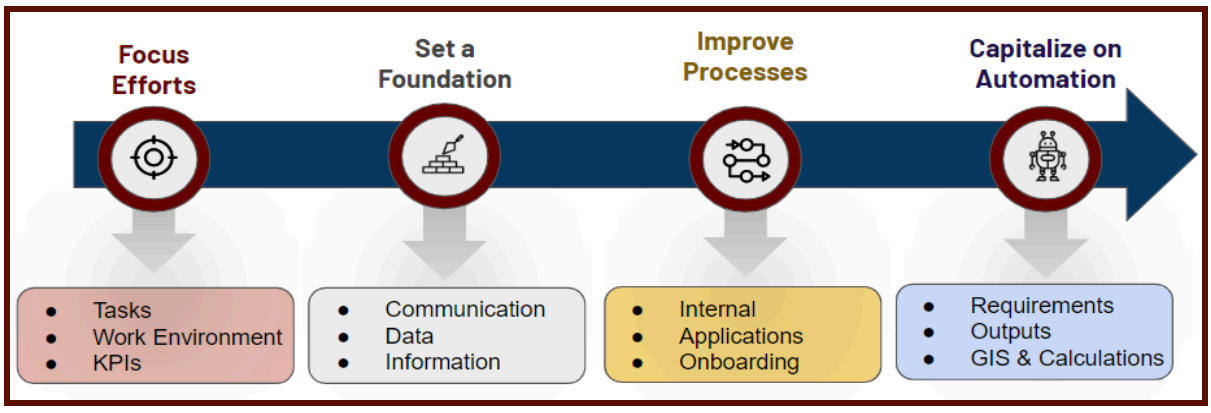
For six years, the county had experienced how Front Line Advisory Group (FLAG) successfully managed multiple capital improvement programs, and in 2023, county leadership hoped they could bring the same discipline, structure, and clarity to their permitting operation. Their ask was bold but simple: "Help us cut our review and approval timelines, be able to see where a permit request is in the process, and find out how long it takes to issue a permit."

FLAG quickly saw what the county already knew, they were not short on effort or commitment. They were short on systems, structure, data, and visibility. They had the tools they needed, permitting software, their website, and highly skilled people. However, their technology was outdated and the tools were not working together. The first step was not to add technology or people, it was to create order.

Phase 1: Focus Efforts

The first discovery was startling. The county had more than 12,000 open projects and applications in the permitting software, many of which had been inactive for years. This meant the staff was sorting through noise. The staff was behind because they were buried, not because of poor staff performance.

Working with leadership across each of the teams, FLAG initiated a deep clean, archiving thousands of inactive projects, refining long-neglected modules in the permitting software, consolidating duplicative variables, and simplifying the staff's workspace within the permitting software. By removing the clutter,



staff could finally see where the real work was waiting.

As part of the cleanup effort, FLAG also helped the county turn what had once been a massive one-time cleanup into a sustainable, systematized practice by establishing automated monitoring of project activity. In accordance with their county code, the automation would automatically void any projects that remained dormant for more than one year. This ensured that the permitting system would never again accumulate thousands of inactive or abandoned records. What had once required a major manual effort became a quiet, reliable safeguard that preserves operational clarity day after day.

Phase 2: Build a Strong Foundation

With clarity restored, FLAG shifted to building the foundation the county had been missing, with a focus on communication, data, and actionable information. Communication had broken down across every dimension: applicant to staff, staff to applicant, and internal conversations between review teams. Everyone was doing their best, but the variety of communication channels and lack of standardization stood in their way.

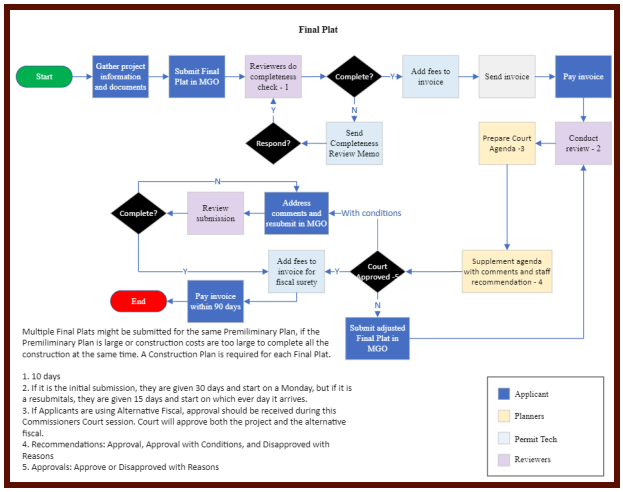
To improve communication, FLAG implemented a division-wide communication standard, redesigned their public website around the customer and their permitting processes, and activated the permitting software's updated customer portal and communication features. Then to turn that communication data into actionable information, FLAG deployed dynamic forms for email intake that allowed for public communication to be captured and analyzed in bulk, and developed reports to capture communication and file upload activities within the permitting software. Suddenly, everyone was working from the same playbook, the number of applicant phone calls dropped, and the quality of applications rose.

Next came the data. FLAG deployed detailed project and task statuses, task status counters, and date-stamped activity tracking. These allowed the county to finally understand how long reviews took, where delays occurred, and how often items bounced back and forth. For the first time, managers could see performance at a glance through dynamic dashboards and a variety of detailed reports at their fingertips.



Phase 3: Redesign the Processes

With real performance data in hand, FLAG mapped, step by step, every major internal review process,identifying bottlenecks, redundancies, and unclear responsibilities. From these maps, FLAG rebuilt structured workflows that covered 80% of common scenarios, reducing manual entry while maintaining flexibility. The county's applications were also redesigned using a comprehensive matrix, ensuring that each application collected the exact documents and information needed to support the staff's future reviews most effectively.



Phase 4: Automate What Matters

With clean data, improved processes, and clear communication in place, the automation could finally do what it was meant to. FLAG configured the permitting software to automate invoicing, permit issuance, payment verification, GIS lookups, and advanced fee calculations.

These automations saved time and gave staff more capacity and bandwidth to focus on training, complex reviews, customer service, and processes they had been forced to neglect. Additionally, the automation reduced human error, improved the quality of their work, cut down on miscommunication, and eliminated the need for excessive rework.

Results: A County Transformed in One Year

By the end of 2023, the county's development review system looked nothing like it had a year before. Work queues that once felt endless were now manageable. Review times that had stretched unpredictably were accelerating at a pace staff had never experienced. Leadership, once accustomed to bracing themselves for criticism at Commissioners Court, found themselves walking in with confidence, excited to share measurable improvements, instead of fielding questions about frustrated constituents. A Division Manager shared how she received a call from a constituent praising how easy it was to find what she needed on the website and submit an application, and an elected official summed it up simply, "Calls from the public about permitting-related issues to our office have all but stopped."

The data told a powerful story. The number of reviews each team could complete within a given week rose dramatically, as much as 45% to 54% on some teams, resulting in nearly $40,000 in annual savings. Most teams saw the number of review rounds per application drop by 133% to 300%, a shift that directly improved applicant experience and reduced rework. One team did see this figure rise, but even that became a meaningful discovery. The increase signaled a need for communication training and revealed gaps in the county's publicly available guidance, an insight that empowered leadership to make targeted improvements instead of guessing at root causes.

Work queue sizes shrank across nearly every team. Some teams saw their work queues drop by as much as 245%, revealing both improved efficiency and patterns of operational risk. When one high-performing team's queue unexpectedly spiked while all others dropped, FLAG's analysis discovered that the team's only reviewer had been out with COVID during a surge of applications. With no backup, the queue ballooned until they returned. That insight led leadership to authorize a Third Party Review contract to provide surge capacity and protect operations from single-point staffing failures.

Automated invoice generation, permit issuance, and payment verification produced nearly $100,000 in direct savings, nearly 2,500 labor hours returned that was reinvested into training, customer service, and desired process improvement initiatives.

However, the numbers were only part of the transformation. The county experienced a cultural shift as significant as the operational gains. Staff who once felt overwhelmed and reactive were now energized, proud of their progress, and actively identifying new ways to improve. Leadership, equipped with clear performance data, could speak with confidence to elected officials, so much so that the metrics helped secure the division's first fee increase in more than 10 years, revenue that will directly support better resourcing and long-term sustainability. Across the organization, leadership repeatedly acknowledged FLAG's impact, with their executive stating, "We could not have done this without FLAG, or achieved these results nearly as quickly."

Written by Craig Starcher on December 1, 2025

Take the Next Step

The pressures facing fast-growing communities are not slowing down. Every month spent navigating outdated processes or underutilized tools compounds backlogs, increases staff fatigue, and erodes public trust. FLAG has proven that meaningful transformation does not always mean there is a need for new software or additional staff, it requires the right strategy, the right configuration, and a partner who knows how to turn complexity into clarity. If your jurisdiction is ready to eliminate bottlenecks, modernize workflows, and finally harness the full power of your permitting platform, contact FLAG to schedule an assessment and take the first step toward a permitting system designed for the demands of tomorrow.

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