



## LD-17

## Cost-effective electronic permitting

In the late 1990s, whenever citizens of Sunnyvale, California (132,000), needed a permit, they had to come into city hall. The city had developed a one-stop permit center that processed permits quickly, but because traffic in the region is very heavy and many contractors are located 20–30 miles from the city office, obtaining a permit often required a half day—or even more. The city therefore decided to develop an Internet-based permitting system that would allow contractors and homeowners to apply for permits from anywhere, at any time.

### Implementation notes

**Leadership/staffing** The city developed the new system in-house. Mountain View, a neighboring city, invested in the project in exchange for the right to use the software once it was developed. A major software corporation donated technical support. The system is supported by a team of city employees from the community development, public works, public safety, finance, and information technology departments.

**Timeline** Sunnyvale began exploring ways to develop a proprietary online permit system in 1998. The original e-permit program was implemented in October 1999. In 2001, E-OneStop was launched, providing an expanded set of services.

**Budget/funding** Sunnyvale contributed \$100,000 to the project, as did the corporation. Mountain View provided an additional \$50,000.

**Program description** After Sunnyvale staff members developed the e-permit system, customers could obtain minor building permits online, without ever visiting city hall. The system initially accepted applications for 10 different types of permits, including furnace replacements, electrical service upgrades, residential sewer- and water-line replacements, and residential tub- and shower-enclosure replacements.

Sunnyvale continued to develop related online services and packaged them together in 2001 as the E-OneStop, a

Ali Fatapour  
Chief Building Official

City of Sunnyvale  
P.O. Box 3707  
Sunnyvale, CA 94088

408/730-7432

Fax: 408/730-7715

E-mail:

afatapour@ci.sunnyvale.ca.us

Web site:

ecityhall.sunnyvale.ca.gov/cd



virtual version of the city's one-stop permit center. Today, customers can apply for 17 permits for such projects as air conditioning, portable or above-ground spas, and kitchen remodeling. The system shows customers what will be required before starting the project (including zoning and safety requirements) and serves as a checklist that can be used to prepare for inspection.

In addition, customers can also schedule building inspections online; an online calendar shows available dates and times. They can view the status of building plans that have been submitted for review and, when the plan check is completed, see comments from all reviewing departments and divisions. Histories of all building permits and planning projects for a given property are also available online, as is zoning information. E-OneStop's interactive components verify information entered by customers and then automatically transfer the data to the in-house permit-tracking systems. All data received by customers are current.

**Results** With E-OneStop, Sunnyvale is meeting its goal of providing increased convenience for customers while saving staff time. The city estimates that each E-OneStop transaction saves customers 1.5 to 2 hours of travel and in-office time as well as an unquantifiable amount of stress. The system also reduces staff workload by an average of 15 minutes per transaction, and the city has been able to reduce its counter staff by one full-time staff member. A private company is now selling the software on behalf of the city to other jurisdictions, and the National League of Cities recently awarded the program a James C. Howland Award for Municipal Enrichment.