

# Lake County Municipal League 2016 Innovation Awards Packet

**About**

The LCML Municipal Innovation Awards program recognizes municipalities that developed strategic programs to solve municipal challenges and increase the effectiveness of local government. The awards program also facilitates an exchange of information and experiences to build capacity for municipalities and jointly celebrate successful programs that could benefit other communities. All nominations are cataloged for members. Awards are presented to the innovative municipalities during the LCML Annual Dinner on December 1, 2016. Selected programs will also be featured in the LCML Letter, website and other outlets.

# Eligibility

Any LCML member municipality. One program per municipality will be considered. Public‐private projects and joint or multi‐municipality projects are eligible. All projects or programs must be completed.

# Nominations must include

*Executive Summary*

Please provide an overview of the project and include the following: Description of the project;

Project objectives;

Project deliverables;

Project achievements;

# Nominations must include

*Full description*

Please provide a detailed description and address the following:

Purpose of the project; Stakeholders of the project; Collaborative efforts; Success metrics;

Barriers to success, entry or obstacles; Sustainability of the project;

Future plans or expansion of the project; Results and achievements;

Innovative components of the project; Ease of replication by other municipalities;

# Timeline

*November 4:*

Entry deadline

*November 7 – 18:*

Applications reviewed/innovators selected

*December 1:*

Annual Dinner – Awards presented/announced



# Lake County Municipal League 2016 Innovation Awards Nomination

*You may enter the information directly on this form. Please remember to save your work before sending.*

# Nominee information

Name: Pete Schubkegel

Title: Director of Building

Municipality: Village of Mundelein, Building Department

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# Executive summary

Please provide a summary of the project and include a description of the project, project objectives, project deliverables and project achievements.

On January 1, 2015, the Village of Mundelein’s Building Department implemented a goal of issuing minor building permits to applicants within five business days to address known areas of deficiency in the permitting process. These deficiencies, which are common permitting process burdens for numerous local government organizations, include: lengthy turn-over time, unnecessary redundancies in the process, and unnecessary application oversights. To meet this goal, a formal written policy was implemented by the Building Department Director for staff to do daily initial reviews of minor building permit applications. This initial review ensures that all necessary information was submitted properly and that any issues which may cause the application to be rejected are dealt with immediately through follow up phone calls. This helps to avoid situations where applicants wait many business days for their application to be reviewed, only to be rejected, and then potentially required to restart the entire process. This not only frustrates applicants, but reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of the permitting process. The purpose of this program is to place a greater emphasis on completing minor building permits, which make up most of the department’s permitting workload, and this is done with the following objectives in mind: (1) to provide better responsiveness to service users, (2) to promote good government practices, (3) to increase operational efficiency, and (4) to remove obstacles for service users that apply for permits through the Village. In turn, these results are compounded as more time is made available for staff to address major building permit process, a more involved application process. Effective implementation of this program delivers better service responsiveness to permit applicants and increases Building Department efficiency overall. Since the implementation of this program on January 1, 2015, the Building Department has met its goal 92% of the time. The average response time among all minor permits is 2.19 days.

# Full description

Please provide a detailed description and address the items listed.

## Purpose of the project:

The purpose of the expedited minor building permit program is to place a greater emphasis on completing minor building permits in a timely manner, which make up most of the department’s permitting workload, and this is done with the following objectives in mind: (1) to provide better responsiveness to service users, (2) to promote good government practices, (3) to increase operational efficiency, and (4) to remove obstacles for service users that apply for permits through the Village. Part of the Village of Mundelein's mission is to provide responsive governmental services to its residents and businesses. This program allows for significant increases in responsiveness through realistic and cost-effective measures. Additionally, by addressing minor building permits, which is the bulk of the department's workload, this creates more efficiency within the major building permit process as well. This is because more time and resources will then be available to complete that process more effectively. Redundancies and repeated steps in the permit process are largely removed as issues that may result in temporary rejection are discovered early, addressed, and corrected. By identifying areas for improvement within the minor building permit process, and strategically addressing this issues, the Village is applying good government practices and promoting it among its stakeholders and the larger public. Lastly, the Village seeks to remove obstacles for building permit applicants. This lowers attrition rates among those that perform permit-required building projects within the Village. To this end, those that are required to apply for a permit will be more likely to do so because the process is less burdensome to them and the continuation of their project. Ultimately, this promotes safer and better quality private structures within Mundelein.

*Stakeholders of the project:*

External stakeholders of the program are minor building permit applicants, including contractors and homeowners that live or operate in the Village of Mundelein. For example, homeowners doing minor remodeling or building a deck, fence, shed, pool, or an accessory structure will apply for a minor building permit and directly benefit from this project. Also, the Mundelein community as a whole benefits directly from the increased responsiveness set forth by this program through the economic development benefits acquired. They also benefit from more efficient governmental services in general. Internal stakeholders include the Village Board, which benefits from the promotion of good government practices. Village staff from all departments are also internal stakeholders as they directly benefit from greater efficiencies within the Building Department during collaboration on various projects and everyday communication efforts. For example, collaboration between departments directly benefits staff in terms of communication and ultimately a better understanding of what tasks need to be addressed and how. Building Department staff always benefit from this program due to the fact that they are more efficient and productive, and communication is increased due to daily status updates

## Collaborative efforts:

To ensure program effectiveness, the Village's Building Department collaborates with the Customer Service Division, Fire Department, Engineering Department, Community Development, and IT Division. The Customer Service Division is the initial contact for all applicants as they assist in receiving the application. It is imperative that Customer Service staff work directly with inspectors to ensure applicants sufficiently understand the application process, thus avoid common mistakes on applications. Building Department staff and the Customer Service Division also work together to identify missing information, along with other issues that may result in a rejection of the minor building permit application. To build upon the increase in efficiency of the minor building permit process, and to apply it to the major building permit process, the Building Department collaborates with the Fire Department for commercial projects, the Engineering Department for new building projects, and Community Development for building projects related to zoning for the major permit process. Efficiencies gained as a result of this program with regards to the minor building permit application process allow for more time and resources to be spent on the major building permit application process, thus increasing efficiency in that process as well. Lastly, the Building Department works closely with the Village's IT Division to assess performance of the program.

*Success metrics:*

Since the implementation of this program on January 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016, the Building Department has issued 3,149 small building permits, and 2,907 have been completed within the five-day goal. In other words, the department has met this goal 92 percent of the time. While peak times vary, the building department process on average approximately 150 minor building permits month, completing an average of 138 of them within five business days. The average response time from Customer Service staff receiving of the application to Building Department approval of the minor building permit is 2.19 days among all permits, including those within the five business day goal or beyond. Throughout the peak summer months, when the number of minor building permits greatly increase and workload demands rise, the Building Department has been able to maintain a 90 percent success rate or higher. While hard measures for the following information are not yet available, staff has indicated a noticeable reduction in the time required to process major building permits. Building Department staff believe efficiencies created in the minor building permit process as a part of this program have significantly contributed to more timely completion of major building permits due to more available staff, time, and resources to complete those permits. Additionally, staff also reports a significant reduction in phone call inquiries from applicants demanding status updates regarding their building permits.

*Barriers to success, entry or obstacles:*

Some obstacles to implementing the five-day minor building permit program are: (1) being an understaffed organization, (2) shifts in workload demand, (3) potential overtime costs, and (4) uninformed applicants. Departments which are understaffed may find dedicating the initial investment of additional staff time to perform an initial review challenging. The Mundelein Building Department is made up of one director, one administrative assistant, four inspectors, and one code enforcement officer. This department processes, on average, 150 minor building permits a month. Additionally, workload increases at different times of the year due to seasonal building or a change in the economic environment are particularly challenging. Keeping up with the added pressures during these peak times may present barriers to success, but is manageable with proper staffing. This may also be exasperated by financial burden if considerable overtime costs become necessary. Again, this barrier can be avoided through proper staffing levels. This program also requires all team members to contribute, leading to potential setbacks if one is on vacation or on sick leave. If those responsible for the program do not receive buy-in from staff and other departments for collaboration, they will likely face significant challenges. Lastly, it is imperative that collaboration takes place between Building Department and Customer Service staff to identify missing information from applicants that do not sufficiently understand the permitting process. Inspectors and customer service clerks must work together to better inform applicants of the process or an increased burden will be placed on staff from both departments, thus threatening the success of the program.

*Sustainability of the project:*

Once the program is set into place, it generally operates naturally as part of everyday policies and procedures if proper staffing levels are maintained. Staff performs this initial review within a day or so of a receiving the application from Customer Service staff. This may vary depending on workload. Designated staff make time to perform initial reviews once in the morning, and then again in the afternoon. Morning department meetings are conducted to make sure problems meeting the five day goal are identified. During initial reviews, older applications are given priority. While increases in workload can become a threat to success due to overtime costs and other burdens, the program is generally not costly to implement. It is simply focusing existing staff and resources on the particular process of completing minor building permits in a more proactive and timely manner through the implementation of one additional step of an initial review. While this additional step does initially take time away from other tasks and projects, it ultimately pays back this time by removing redundancies an allowing for a faster, more productive, and more efficient, minor building permit process. A specific redundancy removed is reprocessing applicants that are later on denied after waiting multiple business days. The initial review helps to avoid this unnecessary redundancy by identifying any potential rejection issues earlier in the process and coupling that with immediate follow-up phone calls to applicants to fix the problem right away. This completely removes “redo” applications only further clogging up the permitting process.

*Future plans or expansion of the project:*

Eventually, the Building Department would like to expand the expedited minor building permit program to all permitting processes within the Village. Minor building permits are defined as those projects not requiring a review by other Departments outside of the Village Hall. Decks, sheds, driveways, garages, swimming pools, patios, walkways, window/door replacement, air-conditioning, and any other permit which does not need to be routed to another Department are considered to be minor permits. Major building permits are many times commercial in nature (business building infrastructure changes), may involve developers and new construction (new homes), or have zoning issues. Major permits require outside Departments to review applications. While not every permit application process, such as major building permits, can have a five business day standard, the fundamental idea of reducing redundancies and making processes more efficient through an initial review and emphasis on timely completion can be applied to most other permit processing.

*Results and achievements:*

Since the implementation of this program, 2,907 out of 3,149 minor building permits have been completed within the five-day goal, a success rate of 92 percent. Approximately 138 out of 150 are completed within the five-day goal on average each month. Average response time from Customer Service staff receiving the application to Building Department approval of the minor building permit is 2.19 days. This response time includes permits which are processed within the 5-day goal, as well as those processed beyond five days. This 2.19 day figure well below the five-day standard set forth by the program, which illustrates the compound effects achieved. Through peak summer months, when the number of minor building permits greatly increase, and workload demands rise, the Building Department has been able to maintain a 90 percent success rate or higher. Efficiencies gained within the minor building permit process have also impacted Building Department efficiencies overall as more time and resources are available for major building permits, for example. Lastly, staff has reported a significant reduction in inquiry phone calls from applicants requesting status information regarding their minor building permit.

*Innovative components of the project:*

One of the major innovative components of the project, called the "permit triage," is the focus placed by Building Department staff on a review of received minor building permit applications. This ensures necessary information is available and issues that may result in a rejection which can be avoided. The “permit triage” is performed by designating time for various Building Department staff to review recently received minor permit applications twice a day, once in the morning, and again in the afternoon. Additionally, daily meetings are held each morning to review the current workload, provide status updates, and to identify permit applications nearing the five-day limit. This not only expedites the minor building permit process and increases its efficiency, but it also increases Building Department efficiency in other areas due to additional time and resources being made available as a result. For example, major building permits can be processed early and with more resources available. Additionally, collaborative efforts between the Building Department and the Customer Service Division are also innovative as they work together in new ways to ensure applications meet a necessary standard earlier in the process. Building Department staff do not work in competition with other Village Departments, but see them as themselves as members of the same team, on the same mission. Priorities and goals for one departments are shared by other departments as well.

*Ease of replication by other municipalities:*

Other Municipalities can replicate the Village of Mundelein's expedited minor building permit process relatively easily if they have the available staff, and a willingness to collaborate with multiple departments to reduce permit processing time. Buy-in from staff members and other relevant departments is also necessary. Essentially, other municipalities can implement this program by focusing available staff efforts on an initial review of all minor building permit applications early in the process. This includes daily status update meetings where problems are identified and permit applications nearing the five-day deadline are identified. It also includes set daily initial review times such as once in the morning, and once again in the afternoon. Where information is lacking or improper, available staff will need to be proactive in contacting applicants as part of the initial review early on to ensure the application is not rejected and approved in a timely manner. The program is relatively cost-effective in that, barring potential overtime costs, it is more about redirecting existing efforts and focusing them in a particular area rather than requiring additional funding for more resources or technology. While short-staffed departments may be met with challenges implementing this program, it can be tailored to meet the capabilities and needs of the individual community. If five day turn-around is too lofty of a goal, perhaps seven days would be more appropriate for that community. The point is, results can be gained from this program, even if implemented in a smaller capacity. With strong leadership, buy-in from staff, and a willingness for collaboration among essential departments, most other municipalities can implement this program fairly easily. The program is logical, realistic, and easily understood.

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### Direct nominations and inquiries to:



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