



# Washington State Auditor's Office

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## Local Government Performance Center Kittitas County single family residential building permit application

### Background

Washington state law requires that counties accept and process local building permit applications. In Kittitas County, the Community Development Services (CDS) department manages this process.

The CDS gives applicants a packet which contains information about the application and the documents staff will need in order to review and process the building permit application.

The CDS also conducts a Critical Areas Review to determine if building plans are legal under existing codes and identify safety and risk factors for the site. This information also helps the owners estimate cost and communicate with their vendors and contractors.

### The problems

The building permit application packet contains an overwhelming amount of information written in technical language which is difficult for the lay person to understand. As a result, applicants didn't read the packet and couldn't understand what they were supposed to do. Also, the packet lists required documents but didn't identify them clearly by title or number.

The Critical Areas Review, necessary for the building plans examiner to complete the application review, is conducted after the applicant has submitted documents and paid the fees. The site assessment often identifies issues that temporarily or permanently stop the building plan. This information often comes as a surprise and is frustrating for both the applicant and the plans examiner because problems were not identified earlier in the process.



Lindsey Ozbolt, Planner II

***"I walked away from there [the Kaizen event] with a greater understanding of the process, an amazing process to work with in my department. And we built connections between departments that we didn't have before."***

Kelly Bacon,  
Engineering Tech

***"I would absolutely recommend the Lean process to other agencies and hopefully we can have the Lean process occur again here."***

Mike Flory,  
Building Official

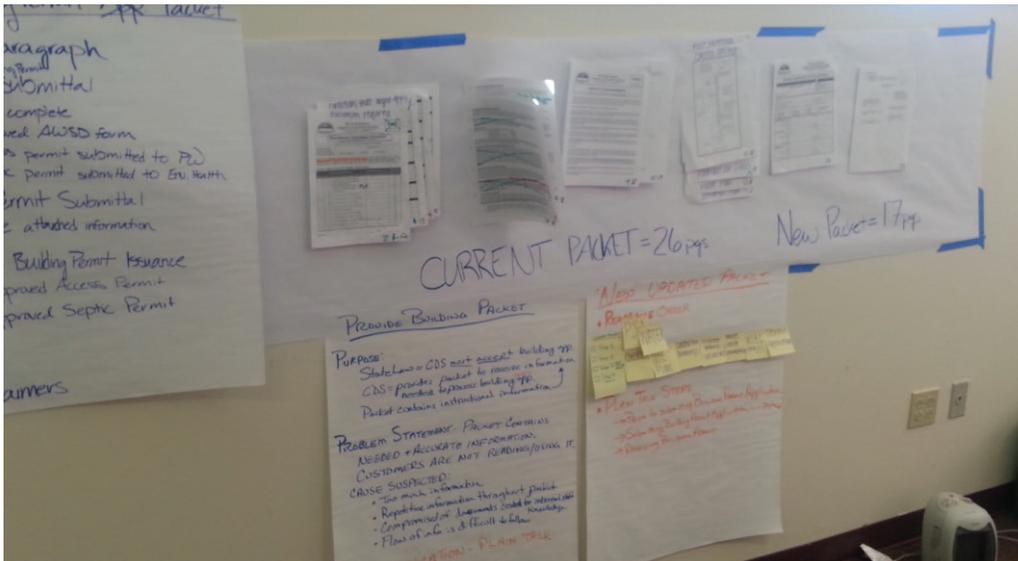
## Action

Kittitas County reached out to the Washington State Auditor's Office and requested training through the Local Government Performance Center's Lean Academy to help them improve the building permit application process. Nine CDS members formed a work group which participated in a four-day Lean Kaizen event.

## Goals

During the Lean Kaizen event, the Kittitas County CDS developed two goals:

- Create an easy-to-understand application packet that answers frequently asked questions about the permit process and requirements
- Identify critical issues before customers submit a building permit application and pay deposits in order to reduce the likelihood of delayed or refused permitting



## Results

After identifying the issues in the current building permit application process, Lean Academy participants implemented the following solutions:

- The team created a checklist with user-friendly steps stating requirements, suggestions and deadlines
- The Critical Areas Review was recast as a Preliminary Site Analysis; staff must complete it before processing a building application
- The application package was reduced from 26 to 17 pages. It was rewritten in consistent, easy to understand language, and information and requirements are presented in a logical order
- Application processing time was halved from about seven weeks to four or less
- The team and IT department developed a tool to track the progress of all applications
- Office space has been rearranged to optimize work flow, with a large, visible planning calendar for tracking tasks and goals

Learn more about Lean Academy online at [www.sao.wa.gov/performancecenter](http://www.sao.wa.gov/performancecenter)



***“Not only does it [the Lean academy] help improve processes with your agency, but you really gain a broader respect for your coworkers.”***

*Lindsey Ozbolt,  
Planner II*

***“If you are committed to the Lean process, it is going to result in something that is very beneficial.”***

*Robert “Doc” Hansen,  
Planning Official*

## How the Lean Academy Works

Three days of preliminary training for sponsors and team provide a feel for Lean techniques and prepare for the work ahead. A five-day process improvement event for the team on location:

- Identifying problems and challenges
- Mapping out the whole process
- Identifying root causes
- Brainstorming and testing solutions
- Identifying other issues that need to be fixed over time.