

FY 2013 CIC Final Report

Expansion Grant Southeast Fire Department Electronic Records and Permitting Collaborative - Electronic Building Permits

April 1, 2014

Participating Communities

Fairhaven, Fall River, Norton, Seekonk, Wareham, Westport



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Introductory Letter

April 1, 2014

Glen Shor, Secretary
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
Massachusetts State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133

Secretary Shor:

This is SRPEDD's second year of working with your agency and utilizing the Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) Grant to assist the communities in Southeastern Massachusetts.

The CIC Grant program is a great enabler for change as it helps communities pay for new solutions that might not have been implemented otherwise.

One of these new solutions is the ability to fill out, submit, pay, and follow up on any of the numerous permits and licenses issued by the municipality electronically online via the web. i.e. e-Permitting.

With e-Permitting, the permit application process is easier and more efficient for both the applicant and the permitting authority.

Long term, these types of improvements will help municipal departments be more sustainable.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Ross Perry
Director of Municipal Management, CPO

Executive Summary

With the use of CIC funds, the licensing departments (Building, Health, Selectmen, and Planning Board) in six participating communities will install an online electronic permitting solution from GeoTMS. Residents, business owners, and contractors will be able to submit applications, pay the required fee, and schedule inspections online 24/7.

The inconvenience of formerly required trips to the City / Town Hall, and the clerical work required of department staff will be greatly reduced. The reduced paperwork due to electronic (e-Permitting) will allow the participating departments to focus on more important tasks and duties such as large project review

The FY 13 CIC grant award funded the extension of e-permitting from the initial implementation of Fire Department permitting into other municipal departments, primarily the Building and Health Departments. All other licensing and permitting activities could be supported by this implementation under the grant. The initial FY 12 project used an RFP (Request For Proposal) process and subsequent negotiations to select the vendor, Des Lauriers Municipal Solutions and their GeoTMS software.

Once the permits are in digital (electronic) format, the potential to enhance operational efficiency is significant. Efficiencies created through the establishment of this program include:

- Applications for permits can be submitted without visiting the town hall;
- Faster turn around and more efficient permit processing;
- Inspection requests can be handled as part of the online permit process and inspection reports can be 'attached' to the electronic file for all departments and the applicant's review; and
- Numerous pre-configured as well as customized reports are available to help departments track their permitting activities.

The grant covered the startup cost and use of this software solution for six months. After the six month period the vendor is paid three percent of the collected license and permit fees. This covers unlimited number of desktop licenses, all licensing modules, and ongoing annual support. If the town decides to add this surcharge to their fee schedule, the solution is essentially self-funded by the users (license applicants) and will have no net cost impact on the City / Town.

E-Permitting replaces the time consuming clerical function associated with the permit process while maintaining the technical review and control that is crucial for municipalities and their fire departments.

Section 1: Partner Communities

Similar to last year, the list of communities changed from the grant application to the final implementation. It appears that the towns that withdrew after the grant application did not have complete support for the implementation of e-permitting in their principal permitting / licensing department(s).

The cities and towns that continued with the implementation are:

- Fairhaven
- Fall River
- Seekonk
- Norton
- Wareham
- Westport

SRPEDD served as the grant applicant, project manager, and fiduciary.

Section 2: Goals

SPREDD initiated this project with the high level goal of assisting communities in the development of municipal operating efficiencies and public access to the permitting / licensing process through electronic and online permitting.

The online permitting project in Southeastern Massachusetts began with the FY 12 CIC grant program which funded 11 Fire Departments' implementation of the electronic permitting application. After a competitive Request For Proposal process, the GeoTMS application from Des Lauriers Municipal Solutions Inc. was chosen for this project. The following year six of these communities wished to expand this electronic capability into additional departments including the Building, Health, Planning, and Selectmen (Licensing Board). Since compatibility with the application used for the Fire Department permitting solution was a key aspect of minimizing the cost to implement a town wide permitting solution, the GeoTMS application was selected for the second phase.

A second goal of this project was to minimize the start-up cost for each town and complete the project within the limits of the awarded CIC grant funds. At the time of this project, Des Lauriers Municipal Solutions Inc. was one of the few companies offering a complete set of licensing modules, for unlimited number of desktops, and ongoing annual support and maintenance without out an upfront purchase price. Since this project represented multiple communities, we negotiated a regional price that paid the vendor three percent of the license and permits fees processed via their software. The CIC grant covered all expenses for the city and towns for the first six months.

Online and electronic permitting and this program have the following benefits / goals:

- Fewer department staff interruptions by ‘walk-ins’ and phone calls, enabling staff to focus on more important tasks.
- Improved communication between departments regarding permitting issues and status.
- Easy generation of reports
- Reduced filling space and improved records management.
- Reduced cycle time to issue permits and licenses
- 24/7 access for residents and contractors to submit applications and check status.

Section 3: Implementation Plan

The implementation of this GeoTMS online permitting solution covered the following steps:

- Signed contract between the Town and Des Lauriers Municipal Solutions Inc. (DLMS)
- Contact additional communities to see if they wanted to participate in the grant funded project after two towns withdrew.
- Uploaded the Assessors’ data base into DLMS server. (This information is used to automatically fill out portions of the permit / license.
 - For the municipalities that had implemented the online permitting for their Fire Departments, this step was already completed.
- Department personnel attend training at DLMS’s office in Franklin.
- Town provides desktop computer and server. Although only minimal bandwidth is required to support this application, the municipal network infrastructure may need upgrades.
- GeoTMS software is loaded on department desktop computer and municipal server.
- Department staff becomes familiar and comfortable using the application.
- Go-live date selected based upon system readiness.
- The city/town web site is updated to indicate “click here for permit”
- The new online permitting solution is announced via press releases, posted notices, and web page updates.
- Prior to the six month fee payment covered by the grant ends, the department must decide if it will absorb the 3% payment to the vendor or raise their fee schedule 3+%. One town, whose fees had not changed in several years used this opportunity to check their fee structure versus other towns and adjusted their fees accordingly.

Section 4: Budget

The grant award was 28% less than the grant application amount. Accordingly, we negotiated a lower cost from the vendor and reduced some of the items to be funded by the grant.

The new budget used for this project was:

GeoTMS						
6 month equivalent of % convenience fee	Database uploading and integration of data	Training	System install	Depart. Computers	SRPEDD Project management	Total
\$ 44,059.00	\$ 3,000	\$ 21,000.00	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,850.00	\$ 3,091.00	\$ 75,000.00

The above budget reflects the following changes:

- Negotiation of a lower fee to the Des Lauriers Municipal Solutions;
- Elimination of the funds for a department server;
- Reduction of the funds available for a departmental desktop computer; and
- Reduction of SRPEDD’s project management fees.

Section 5: Challenges

The main challenge was department personnel reluctance to try new processes. For example, one building department had \$200 worth of pre-printed carbon paper permit forms that they were reluctant to throw out as part of the new paperless electronic process. These concerns were addressed by someone in the municipal government authorizing the change. In many cases the vendor training and their excellent support staff explained how the new process covered some of the tasks that had historically been done manually.

Other challenges included;

- The municipal IT infrastructure. In a couple cases it took several months for a new server to be available. In another community some network upgrades were required. Although as mentioned earlier, the GeoTMS application requires very low bandwidth and can run on standard servers and low end desktop computer. In one case when a department was reluctant to make the change to this application, we found this ‘resistance’ to be because the sole computer in this department was still running the Windows 95 operating system;
- Concerns about paying 3% of the collected permit / license fees to the vendor after the grant coverage ended;
- Setting up the online payment process;
- Updating the department web page to indicate the new permitting process; and
- Resistance To Change. This is more entrenched in many municipal departments than initially realized. RTC will surface many issues; that can eventually be addressed once they are identified.

Section 6: Outcomes

By the time of the writing of this report, four of the six towns completed the installation and are using the software. Two of the four enabled the online web based permit application and submittal process. Statistics to date indicate 4,506 permits have been processed electronically and are now in digital format. This indicates the achievement of the goals to make record keeping more efficient, report generation easier, and communication between departments more expedient.

The 444 permits submitted electronically via the web is lower than expected but is largely due to this feature not being implemented until the last month or so. However, it shows the goal of easier 24/7 access to the permit and licensing process by applicants (residents, contractor, and business owners) has been achieved.

Permits Entered via GeoTMS		
	8/1/13 to 3/25/14	
Period	Online	Total
Fairhaven	25	1054
Fall River	0	1386
Norton	0	0
Seekonk	419	676
Wareham	0	1390
Westport	0	0
Total	444	4506

As examples of the outcomes of this project, a copy of the Fairhaven press release announcing the new online permitting solution and screen shots of the building department web pages are attached in the [Reference](#) section of this document.

PROJECT GOAL	MEASURE	CURRENT PERIOD	PRIOR PERIOD	TREND	TARGET	STATUS	COMMENTS	
To improve municipal efficiencies and public access to the permitting process by expanding the multi-town fire department electronic permitting solution into building and health departments.	# of electronic permits offered in each community's building and health departments	November December January 1729	August September October 637	Increasing	50%		The implementation has been slower than expected due required infrastructure improvements	
	# of permits filed by users in each community	783	0	Increasing	20%		45% of the towns required more time to test new system and amend their fee structures to reflect the use charges	
	# of identifiable operational efficiencies achieved through this program.	N/A	N/A	Stable			Seekonk, Wareham, and Fairhaven have recently finished implementing the desktop version. Currently, they are implementing the online version. This stage will generate the most efficiency after they progress up the learning curve.	
STATUS LEGEND	OFF TARGET:		CLOSE TO TARGET		ON TARGET:		NOT APPLICABLE:	

Section 7: Solutions

Most of the solutions to the Challenges mentioned in section 5 were addressed by department staffs with support from the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, and periodic project management follow up.

Comments we have received include:

“Since we made the online permits available, we have already seen a decrease in phone calls and counter traffic. Residents are getting the information they need electronically.”

-Building Department Administrative Assistant

“Due to budget constraints we had to reduce town hall hours and may close some departments one day per week. Enabling permits to be submitted and progress checked electronically via the web will help the town and residents cope with the reduced office hours.”

-Town Administrator.

Contact Information

Ross Perry
Director of Municipal Management, CPO
SRPEDD
88 Broadway
Taunton, MA 02780
Monday – Thursday; 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM
508-824-1367 Ext 214

References

Attachment 1: Press release from Fairhaven announcing the new permitting process

Attachment 2: Screen shots from Fairhaven web page showing online availability of permits.

[Link to GeoTMS web site for product details.](#)

ATTACHMENT 1

APPLY FOR PERMITS ONLINE WITH E-PERMITTING

FAIRHAVEN, MA -- The Town of Fairhaven is pleased to announce that both residents and contractors now have the convenience of accessing the Town Hall Building Department online 24/7. With a special thanks to the Executive Secretary, Board of Selectmen, Town Officials and GeoTMS Software, residents and contractors doing work in Fairhaven will be able to submit a number of building permit applications online, at their convenience.

No longer will residents and contractors have to commute to-and-from the Town Hall to submit routine applications. Now, residents and contractors alike will be able to obtain services online without needing to leave their homes or jobsites.

This new approach will not only offer better service to residents and contractors, but it will also allow them to check on the status of their applications online and will allow the Town of Fairhaven to operate even more efficiently.

Homeowners and licensed contractors can go on the Town's website and click "Departments", then "Building Department" to access the Town Hall's online portal. From here, they will be able to submit an array of Building permit applications. Additionally, applicants will be able to attach documents to their applications.

TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN, MASSACHUSETTS

Residents | Businesses | Visitors

Home - Building Department - Building Department

Building Department

Printer-Friendly Version

Contact: Wayne Fostin
Building Commissioner, Ext. 116
Lisa Moniz
Administrative Assistant, Ext. 117

Address: Town Hall
40 Center Street
Fairhaven, MA 02719

Phone: 508-979-4023, Ext. 7

Fax: 508-979-4079

Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30

Building Department Links:

Downloadable Forms	MA Dept. of Public Safety	Permits and Applications
Zoning Bylaws	Maps	Apply for a Permit Online
Search for a Permit	Online Permit User Guide	

Staff Directory

Name	Title	Phone
Wayne Fostin	Building Commissioner	508-979-4019
Lisa Moniz	Administrative Asst.	508-979-4019
Norman Lussier	Plumbing Inspector	508-509-5537 7-8:00 am
Henry Daigle	Gas Inspector	508-951-1732
John Cottrell	Chief Wire Inspector	508-568-0105 (cell)

The public will also be able to pay for their applications online, or they may still choose to mail a check or deliver a check to the Town Hall in person.

Applicants will enjoy the ability to fill-out multiple Building applications at once, including Board of Appeals applications, saving them even more time. The Town of Fairhaven and GeoTMS are proud to offer this new service to residents, contractors and local businesses, starting with the Building Department and plan to roll out similar capability in other departments soon.

Please call the Building Department with any questions: (508) 979-4019 ext. 7.

ATTACHMENT 2

Fairhaven e-Permits

1/6/14

TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN, MASSACHUSETTS

Residents **Businesses** **Visitors**

On Our Site

- About Fairhaven
- Departments
- Boards & Committees
- Online Bill-Pay
- Downloadable Forms
- Minutes & Agendas
- Calendars
- Library
- Schools
- Police Department
- Fire Department
- Directions
- Send Us Comments

Snow Parking Ban

FOOD DRIVE
ALL OF OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

Drop Off Non-Perishable Food Items Here!

News & Events

- 1.2.14 January 3 Trash and Recycling Pick-up Delayed
- 1.2.14 Meeting Cancellations - January 2
- 12.27.13 Fairhaven Christmas Tree Pick-up Jan. 14-17
- 12.18.13 **New! Apply for Building and ZBA Permits Online**

Fairhaven's Home indicating Building and ZBA permits can be obtained online. (As seen on 1/6/14)

New! Apply for Building and ZBA Permits Online

[Printer-Friendly Version](#)

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Schools

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Web page explaining the new online permitting process