Beyond the Norm: A Two-Month Implementation to Launch OpenGov in Kenersville, NC

Kernersville, North Carolina is a town of 25,000 residents and a booming commercial base. Located in the center of "The Triad"—the third largest metropolitan area in the state—the Town is a popular location for business and industrial parks, contributing a vast amount of work to Kernersville's Community Development Department. For many years, their permitting system was paper-based, and then later incorporated a non-permitting-specific software that was adapted from another department as a temporary workaround. Overall, Community Development staff felt a lack of core functionality, organization, and ease working in their software.

"Even with the initial switch from paper to a software workaround, a lot of our staff had trouble simply using the system and there was no way to conduct inspections in the field or provide access to the public," says Mike Horney, Kernersville's Development Services Manager.

Due to the level of economic development, it was increasingly important to the Town that permitting and inspections operations function as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Community Development Director Jeff Hatling recognized that Kernersville needed to bring their technology into the 21st century and tasked Horney with finding new software. This focus led to their move to OpenGov Citizen Services, a transition that ultimately took just two months to implement.

How did they implement a new software so quickly? First, they had a clear vision for the requirements they needed. The Department wanted a solution to connect with Esri's ArcGIS so Horney began his search by comparing Esri business partners.

"There were five different companies that partnered with Esri and I reached out to all of them for demos," Horney recounts. "When I inquired about OpenGov Citizen Services, it was simply a conversation around 'what do you need?' and 'here's what we can do.' OpenGov was outstanding to work with from day one."

At that point, Kernersville took the project to RFP and received seven submissions—a mix of different sized companies and price points. Horney says that OpenGov Citizen Services was by far the best and the most cost-effective. Compared to an industry standard of many months or years, Kernersville launched online permitting with the Building and Inspections Department in November 2018, just two months after beginning work with the implementation team.

> "We have a permit tech that's been working here for 27 years. She would have been the first one to complain if the new system wasn't cutting it—and she loves it. Nobody wants to go back to the old way. Nobody."

Mike Horney
Development Services Manager
Kernersville, NC

Strong initial requirements helped Kernersville speed up their search and implementation process, and the ability to customize their platform features enabled them to continue improving, independent of their vendor. Horney found that the biggest benefit to using the product is the way the software allows staff to customize their own workflows.

"Sometimes you're held captive by whatever a software will or won't do," says Horney. "The best thing about OpenGov is that you dictate how you're going to use it because it's so easy to make changes on the backend."

Now with Code Enforcement and Fire on the platform as well, the whole Community Development Department (spanning 15+ employees) is using OpenGov Citizen Services to improve efficiency and streamline departmental operations. Thanks to centralized operations and increased accessibility, Kernersville has since seen their average permit processing time decrease from two months to two weeks.

Key Results for Kernersville, NC

Walk-ins	Calls	permitting processing time	Team Time - Savings	Team Confidence
↓ 80%	↓ 50%	↓ 75%	↑ ~7 Hrs/Day	↑ Priceless

Lastly, for anyone who might be considering a similar upgrade, Horney recommends that you strongly consider Software as a Service (SaaS). He notes that cloud-based software is typically cheaper and easier. Though ultimately, Horney advocates that what's most important is that you get the permitting system that works for you: **"Be wary of the big, expensive systems that can't be tailored. A lot of the time super 'fancy' solutions are more than you actually want to deal with or need to pay for."**

For Kernersville, Horney says that the experience with OpenGov has been "10 out of 10," and they're excited by how this move has propelled their growth path, across internal operations and Town-wide development.

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