

Vitality in Business & Economy (VIBE) Toolkit

Mayor-Led. Business-Focused.

What is VIBE?

Vitality in Business & Economy

Mayor-Led. Business-Focused.



- A practical, action-oriented resource for local governments
- Designed to help municipalities:
 - Streamline processes
 - Improve communication
 - Create a more welcoming environment for businesses
- Built for real implementation — not just theory

Why VIBE?

Two small business owners (one former and one current mayor) had two very different experiences opening their businesses.

One **challenging**, one **seamless**





They shared a realization...

Local government practices can either **enable** or **hinder** small businesses. This sparked a **commitment** to create more **business-friendly, predictable, and supportive** systems.

How was VIBE Created?



Co-created through **collaboration** and **feedback**:

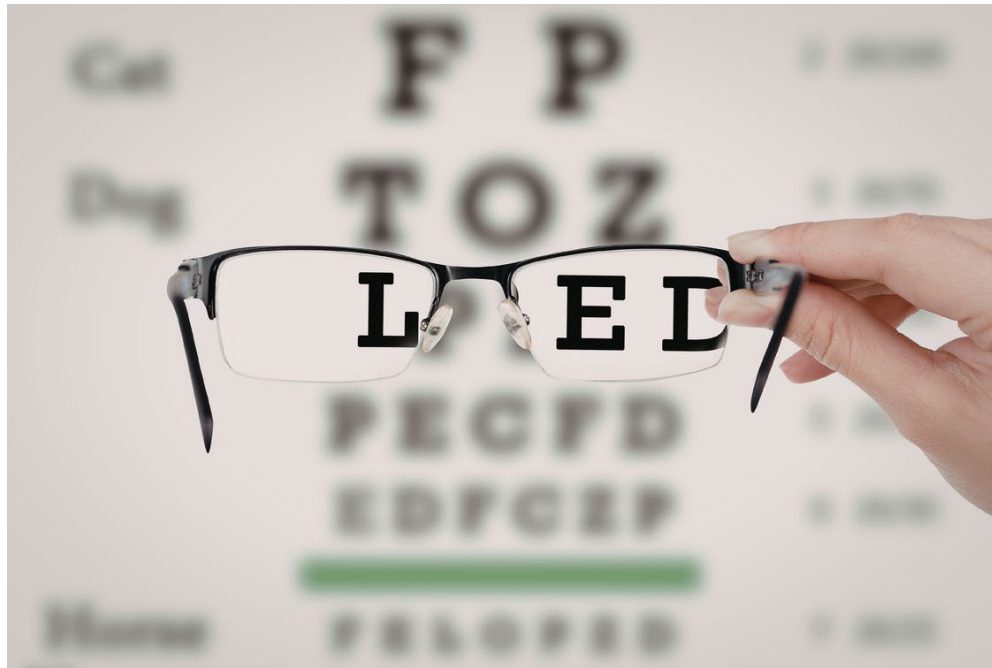
- Convened a VIBE Task Force of the Metro Mayors Caucus
- Surveyed planning and economic development staff across communities

Reasons Businesses Choose a Community:

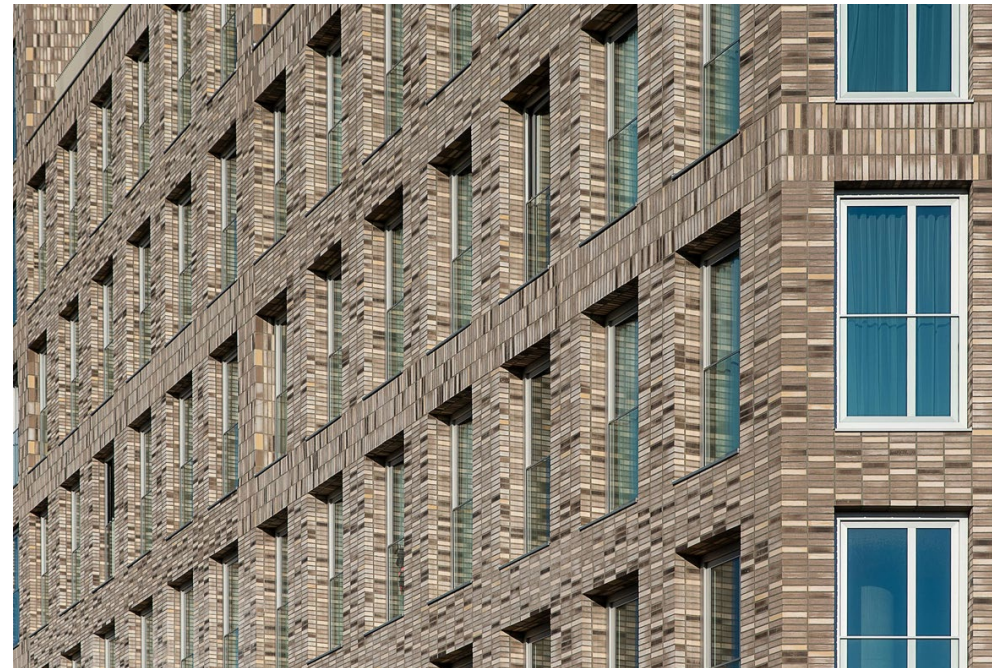
- Demographics
- Predictable Local Government
- Available Sites & Infrastructure
- Housing and Affordability
- Taxes & Costs
- Quality of Life
- Speed to Market
- Industry Clusters
- Workforce
- Regional Collaboration
- Community Attitude
- Incentives

The VIBE taskforce is helping business-friendly cities deliver policies and practices with:

Clarity



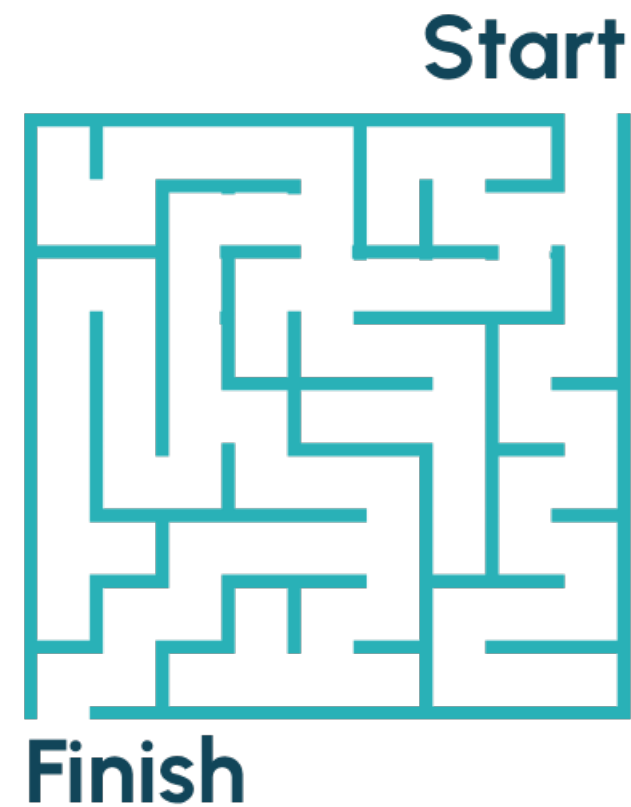
Consistency



Connectivity



What can local governments do to attract businesses?



Permitting timelines,
process length, and
uncertainty **are major
barriers** to business
confidence.

What are businesses asking for?



A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt and an apron, is hanging a white sign that says "Open" on a string in a shop window. The background is a blurred view of a city street.

**Ultimately, For
Businesses of all sizes...**

Time is Money

Delays impact more than just timelines—they affect:

- Lease agreements & tenant improvements
- Construction schedules & contractor availability
- Hiring & workforce onboarding
- Financing terms & carrying costs
- Investor confidence & site selection

In competitive regional markets, uncertainty **alone** can redirect investment to neighboring communities.



The Opportunity for Local Governments

Attract and
Retain
Investment

Strengthen Tax
Base Stability

Support Small
Business Growth

Improve Public-
Private
Relationships

Support Job
Growth

Reinforce Trust in
Local
Government

A background image showing two men in business suits shaking hands in an office. The man on the left is a white man with a beard, and the man on the right is a Black man with dreadlocks. They are both smiling. The image is faded to serve as a background for the text.

When local governments modernize their systems, they **send businesses a powerful message...**

"We are partners in your success!"

Steps to Success

Clarity Consistency Connectivity



Steps to Success

Step 1: Establish Clear Timeline Standards

Step 2: Move Toward Concurrent Review

Step 3: Pre-Application Meetings

Step 4: Online & Transparent Tracking

Step 5: Concierge or Business Navigator

Step 6: Staff Response Standards

Step 7: Small Business Fast Track

Step 8: Metrics & Accountability

Step 9: Utilize Existing Policies and Tools



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Step 1: Establish Clear Timeline Standards



Set Clear, Predictable Review Timelines

Municipalities should adopt and publish target timelines for:

- Tenant Finish Permits
- Sign Permits
- Site Plan Review
- Administrative Approvals
- Building Permits
- Certificates of Occupancy

Why it Matters:

Clear timelines build confidence, reduce uncertainty, and accelerate investment.

Example Standard:

- Initial Completeness Review: 5 business days
- First Review Comments: 15 business days
- Re-Review Cycle: 10 business days
- Approvals: 10 business days



Implementation Model

Provide a public-facing process that:

- Identifies each stage
- Names the responsible department
- Shows estimated timeframes
- Clarifies what resets the clock

Common frustration this solves:

Not knowing where we are in the process.

Suggested Structure:

- Regularly revise plans to reflect City goals and reduce ambiguity.
- Maintain enough staff and expertise for application workloads.
- Use online permitting for convenience and transparency.
- Enhance outreach via developer meetings, guides, and website updates.
- Provide ongoing training for the City Planning Commission.

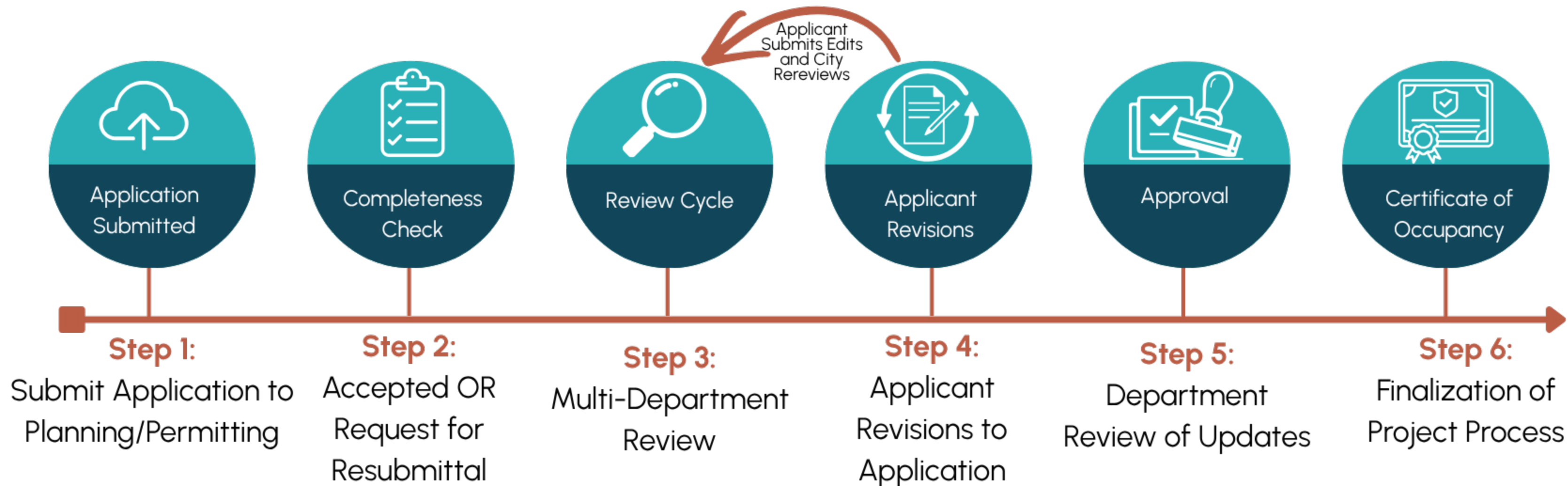
Why it Matters:

Reduces confusion and builds trust by showing businesses exactly where they are in the process.



WHAT TO EXPECT: Development Review Timeline

Clear Steps + Defined Timelines = Confidence, Speed, and Better Outcomes



Suggested Timeframe

Completeness Review:
5 Business Days
(rests if incomplete)

Comments Issued:
15 Business Days

Re-Review Cycle:
10 Business Days
(for each review)

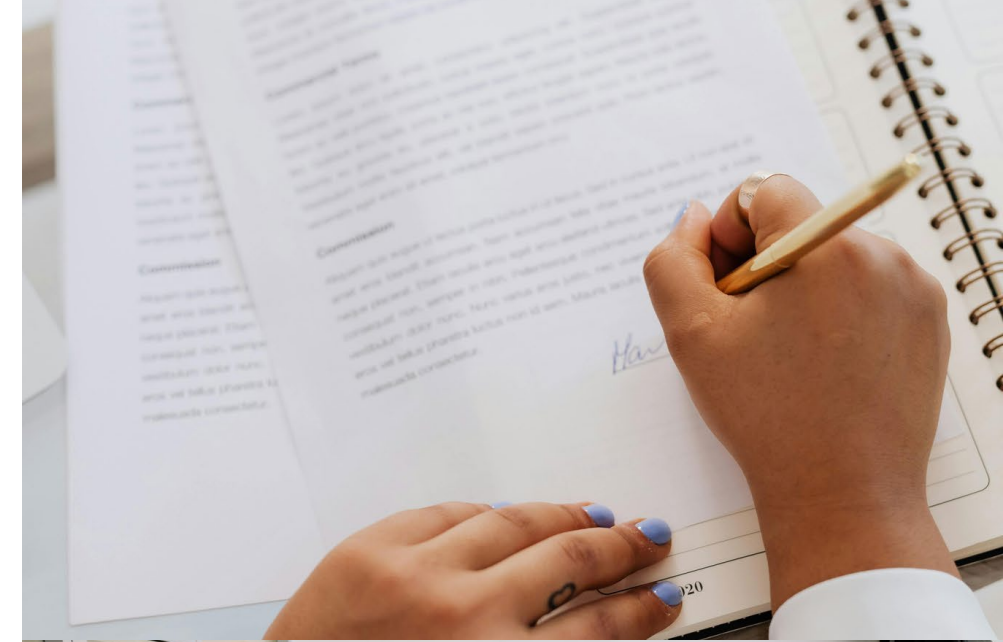
Approvals:
10 Business Days

Examples

- [What You Should Expect](#) – City of Thornton
- [Permit Application Guide](#) – City of Boulder
- Comprehensive Internal Process – City of Lone Tree



Step 2: Move Toward Concurrent Review



The Problem: Sequential Review

What We're Hearing:

- Conflicts between codes & departments
- Lack of coordination across departments and special districts
- Sequential review creates unnecessary delays

Linear Process:

- Each step waits on the previous one
- Delays compound over time



2 FROM DELAYS TO DELIVERY: Sequential to Concurrent Review



Key Components:

- All departments review at the same time.
- Single review cycle
- Consolidated comments issued together

Implementation Model

Hold weekly cross-department review meetings for:

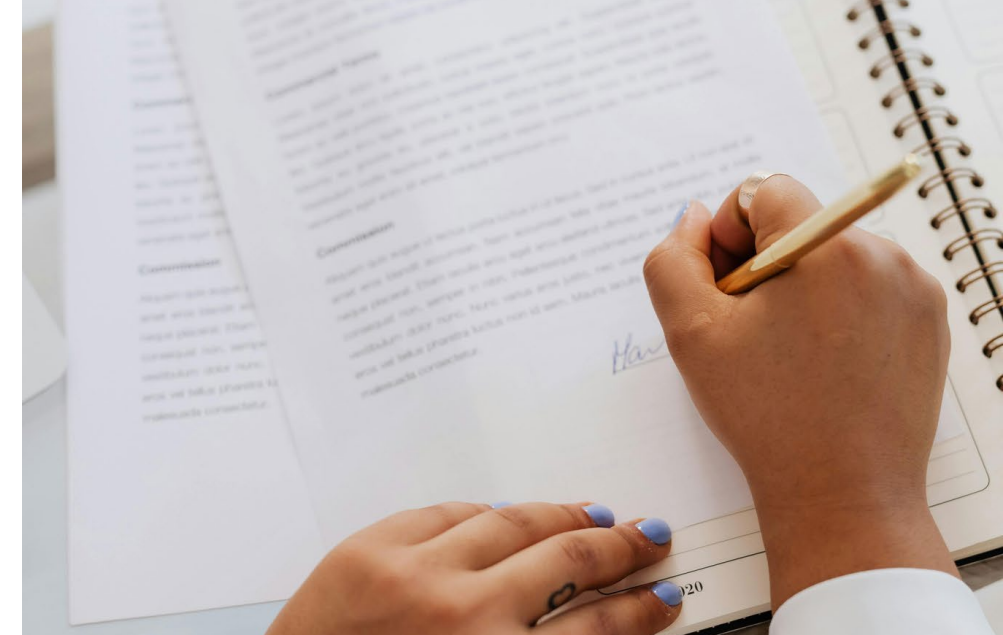
- Major site plans
- New commercial builds
- Complex tenant improvements
- Assign one staff member as a **Project Lead** responsible for internal coordination.

Consider establishing an agreement with special districts for reviews.
Name when special districts/ outside reviews are needed in the process.



Examples

- [Planning Review Process](#) – Routt County
- Weekly Internal Development Review Meetings between Community Development and Public Works – City of Lone Tree
- Monthly Internal Development Review Meetings with Economic Development – City of Lone Tree



Step 3: Pre-Application Meetings



Offer Optional (or Required) Pre-Application Conferences

Purpose:

- Identify issues early
- Clarify submittal requirements
- Reduce formal review cycles
- Build a shared understanding between staff and applicant

Why it Matters:

For small businesses, this may be the difference between moving forward or walking away.

Suggested Structure:

- 30-minute virtual or in-person meeting
- Planning + Building + Fire Departments present (and/or other necessary departments, including special districts)
- Written summary emailed within 48 hours



Examples

- Pre-Submittal Meetings – City of Lone Tree
 - All key stakeholders and impacted teams are meet to discuss the project.



Step 4: Online & Transparent Tracking



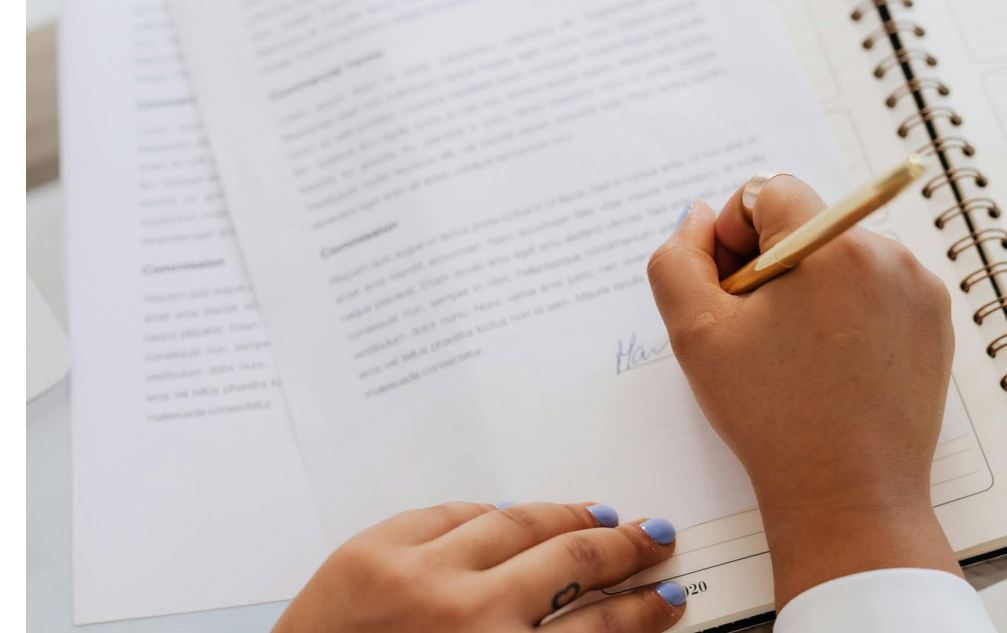
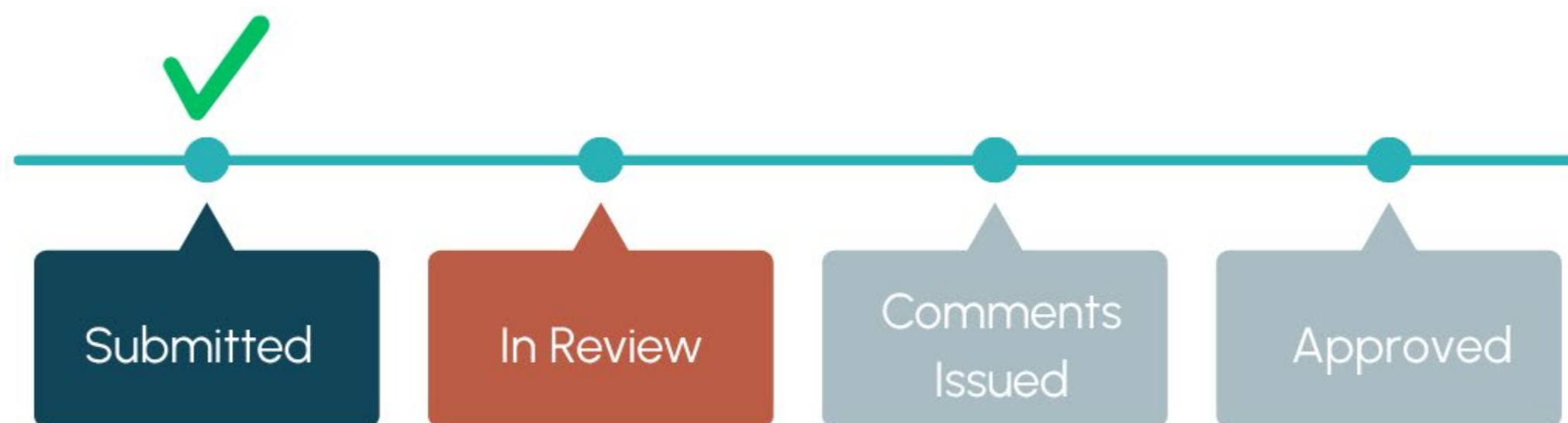
Develop Digital Permit Tracking

Features may include:

- Online application submission
- Real-time status updates
- Automated notifications
- Public tracking dashboard (optional)

Why it Matters:

Even a basic system reduces anxiety and phone calls which saves time and money for all involved parties.



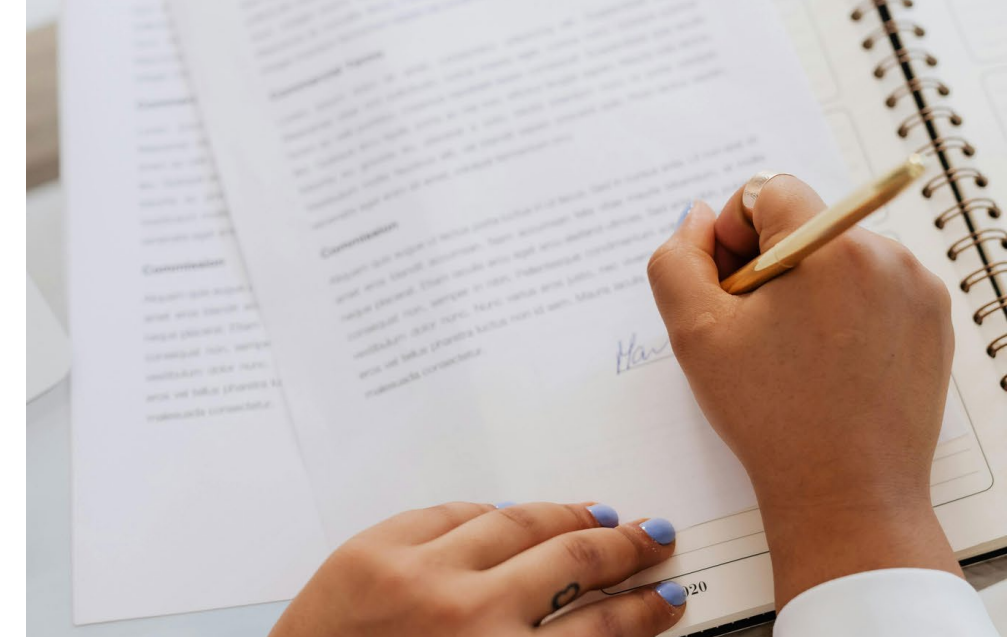
Implementation Model

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Example

- [Online Permitting System](#) – City of Lone Tree
- [Online Permitting Portal](#) – City of Golden



Step 5: Concierge or Business Navigator



Assign a Business Navigator

This can be:

- Economic development staff
- Planning staff liaison
- Dedicated business services coordinator

Role:

- Walk applicants through process
- Coordinate internally
- Flag potential roadblocks early
- Ensure timely responses

Note: For smaller municipalities, this role may be part-time or shared.



Examples

- [Small Business Support Programs](#) – City of Thornton
- Inspectors Walk Job Sites with Supers/ Property Owners to Provide Feedback – City of Lone Tree



Step 6: Staff Response Standards



Establish Reasonable Timeframes

This shifts culture toward customer service without compromising regulatory standards.

Recommendation:

- Adopt internal service standards such as:
- Return calls within 1 business day
- Email response within 2 business days
- Formal comment letters within published review period



Examples

- [SOP Response Times](#) – City of Lone Tree
- [Average Plan Review Times](#) – City & County of Denver



Step 7: Small Business Fast Track



Create a Small Business Fast Track

This acknowledges that not all permits require the same level of scrutiny.

Consider creating a fast-track pathway for:

- Tenant improvements under a certain valuation
- Restaurants under defined square footage
- Low-impact uses
- Desired type of business (non-chain, non-drive through, fine dining, etc.)
- Same type of business in same location



Implementation Model

Starts with the simple philosophy: Businesses are making a huge investment in the community. The goal is to facilitate expeditious and predictable processes. **Local government can assist them by:**

- Being proactive, collaborative and responsive
- Providing clear and consistent guidance
- Offering administrative and streamlined processes when applicable

Example

- [Jack's Restaurant](#) – City of Lone Tree



Step 8: Metrics & Accountability



Administrative Approvals

Ways in which to improve the timelines for specific/desired projects:

City Council / Planning Commission Approvals

Comprehensive Plan

Zoning changes

Major developments

Policy decisions

Community vision

Administrative Review

Code-compliant housing

ADUs and infill projects

Tenant improvements

Minor site modifications

Business occupancy changes

Building permits

Sign permits



Improve Tracking

Cities cannot improve what they do not measure.

Track:

- Average permit review time
- Number of review cycles
- Percentage meeting published timeline
- Business satisfaction survey results
- Publish an annual "Permitting Performance Snapshot."

Transparency builds trust.

Examples:

- [Building Activity Report](#); [Building Permit Statistics](#) – City of Aurora



Self-Assessment Checklist: Is Our Permitting Process Business-Friendly?

Rate 1-5:

- We publish review timelines
- We meet at our published timelines
- We conduct concurrent reviews
- We offer pre-application meetings
- We have online tracking capability
- We assign project leads for complex cases
- We track performance metrics
- Businesses can easily understand our process

Score

32–40 = Leading

24–31 = Strong but improving

16–23 = Needs structural changes

Below 16 = High friction environment

Step 9: Utilize Existing Policies and Tools



Finance Tools for Economic Development

Financial Incentives:

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- Urban Renewal Authorities (URA)
- Business Personal Property Tax rebates (where applicable)
- Sales tax rebates
- Performance-based incentives
- Fee reductions or waivers
- Public infrastructure participation

Examples:



Business Retention Tools

Programs:

- Annual business visits
- CEO roundtables
- Business surveys
- Expansion assistance
- Workforce support
- Problem-solving with local employers

Retaining an existing employer is often more cost-effective than recruiting a new one

Examples:



Beyond Traditional Incentives

Many municipalities also use:

- Small business façade improvement grants
- Revolving loan funds
- Business incubators and accelerators
- Innovation districts
- Opportunity Zones
- Brownfield redevelopment assistance
- Downtown development authorities
- Adaptive reuse incentives

Examples:



A photograph of the Edgewise Water Public Market. The market features a large, red, neon-style sign that reads "EDGEE WATER PUBLIC MARKET" in all caps. Below the sign, there are several market stalls with awnings. People are seen walking through the market, and some are standing near the stalls. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

The Impact: Together, we can create more **predictable systems** for businesses, it creates a more **sustainable economy** across Colorado.

Next Steps

- Survey the business community directly
- Engage private sector partners and stakeholders
- Refine toolkit based on real-world feedback and application
- Gather more examples from communities
- Re-review survey results for additional examples

Questions

