BlackBerry Customer Success Story

TOWN OF
QUALICUM BEACH

Building Inspection Department Improves Record Keeping and Inspection Processes with Help from BlackBerry Smartphone

The Town of Qualicum Beach (Qualicum Beach) is located on Vancouver Island in British Columbia (BC), a province on the west coast of Canada.The town's 70 employees serve a population of approximately 8,500 people. Qualicum Beach's Building Inspection Department is responsible for ensuring that buildings and their systems conform to relevant bylaws and provincial building codes. The Inspection Department issues approximately 50-100 permits a year, and performs approximately 400 residential and commercial building inspections in that time.

Industry: Municipal Government

Region: North America

Company Size:
Small Organization – 70 employees

Email Platform:
Microsoft® Exchange

Solution:
- BuildingReporter by Noratek Solutions Inc.
- BlackBerry® smartphone

THE CHALLENGE

In Qualicum Beach, a building permit is required for most new construction or renovations, such as remodeling a deck or installing a swimming pool. In the past, a building inspector would visit the site, evaluate the construction and fill out a report and checklist on carbon paper. One copy would go to the property owner, while the other was returned to the office for data-entry and eventually filed.

Since inspections can take place over several days, the reports would be filed in a variety of places. "Our detailed paper reports had a tendency to be misfiled or not filed," said Mark Eshpeter, Building Inspector for the Town of Qualicum Beach. "And when we needed to pull a record, we could be searching for several hours as they weren't all filed together."

Consistency was another problem created by the inefficient system, with some inspection reports being filled out with less information than others. Inconsistency could become a liability issue if a home owner demonstrates that an inspector failed to show due diligence and consistency when filling out the report. This lack of consistency could result in the town being liable for damages.

THE SOLUTION

Qualicum Beach's inspection team turned to a mobile BlackBerry solution from Noratek Solutions Inc. (Noratek) to help simplify its processes and streamline its tracking protocols. Noratek is a third-party software developer that has developed BuildingReporter, a mobile application designed to automate paper checklists and track building inspection processes, from preliminary inspection through to occupancy. The town was already using a BlackBerry solution for enhanced messaging and communications, so the BuildingReporter application on the BlackBerry smartphone was a natural fit.

When a permit application arrives at Qualicum Beach's Building Inspection Department, Eshpeter logs onto Noratek's hosted web portal, where he can enter the contact details, location and any additional notes regarding the permit. During the day, he can retrieve any of the details previously entered using the BuildingReporter app on his BlackBerry smartphone.

The BuildingReporter app is designed to guide him through each inspection, making sure that all requirements have been reviewed and checked. The application has built-in logic that helps to ensure the inspection does not continue if a step is skipped and also flags missed entry fields in red. This step ensures that problems aren't missed even when an inspection is being completed months later.

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KEY BENEFITS

- Reduces errors and omissions
- Increases productivity and efficiency
- More reliable way of documenting due diligence
- Provides better customer service

If Eshpeter spots a problem, he can use the camera on the BlackBerry smartphone to take a picture, which is then attached to the permit file. The app is designed so that each inspection is stamped with the time, day and location using the GPS and timekeeping features of the BlackBerry smartphone.

After an inspection is complete, Eshpeter can save or submit the report to automatically sync the information with the town's online portal. He can also send a copy by email to the owner and any other interested party, including the builder or the architect. Eshpeter can also print the report from a printer in his vehicle using the Bluetooth® feature on the BlackBerry smartphone.

QUALICUM BEACH'S BENEFITS

"The inspection process has been streamlined and standardized by our BlackBerry solution, cutting down the time it takes to do inspections approximately by a third," said Eshpeter. "BuildingReporter in conjunction with the BlackBerry solution makes it easy to access information about each inspection whether I'm at a job, on the road or in the office using the web portal."

Eshpeter's ability to track the progress of a job helps him prevent missed inspections or overlooked items during an inspection. It's also easier to search for details about each permit after completion. Before the BlackBerry solution, a single property could have had many different permits over time, meaning that the paper records for a single owner could be stored in several different files. "We used to spend hours looking through all the filing cabinets, but now we simply search the address or permit number and retrieve all the records attached to that building," said Eshpeter.

On the customer service side, the BuildingReporter app and the BlackBerry smartphone have made it easier to communicate with the right people at each property. "Numbers, emails and addresses are all stored in the application, so I don't need to enter them separately into my contacts," said Eshpeter. "When a builder calls with a question, I can pull up the information and email it to him or her on the spot."

Qualicum Beach now has a better way to track inspections, which can provide valuable documentation should a legal issue arise. "In the past, if there were no comments on record, then it was difficult to verify that the inspector reviewed that particular item and it would be left up to the court to decide whether the inspection was accurate and complete," said Eshpeter. "Now, with the itemized forms, dated and time stamped, and the digital photos in record, I can produce proof that we conducted a thorough inspection."

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