

# PERMITS TO PROGRESS

**How Clearwater Is Embracing the Innovation Track to  
Create Easier Paths for Permitting: From Idea to Impact**



# CONTEXT & CHALLENGE



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL • BAY TO BEACH

# ASKING THE CITY FOR PERMISSION SHOULDN'T FEEL LIKE AN OBSTACLE COURSE – BUT FOR TOO MANY PEOPLE, IT DOES.

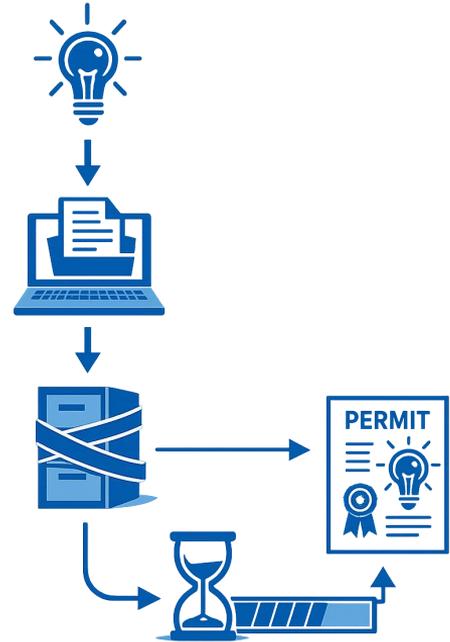
## A Shared Vision

As a city, we've heard from our customers and staff that the permitting process can often feel confusing and frustrating.

That's why we're reimagining the experience to be more transparent and efficient by building pathways for success.



- Clearwater has over 20+ types of permitted services, each with unique systems, deadlines, and requirements for completion.
- The variety of city permits, often overseen by several departments, can create unexpected hurdles for our customers and staff alike.
- Each permitting process extends beyond regulation; it carries a real-life impact—shaping how people experience our service.



# OUR CHALLENGE TODAY



“It **impacts residents** because they **look at other communities** who have thriving business communities...

...Businesses **look for places** where they’ll **experience less hindrance.**”

- Clearwater Resident Interview (October 2025)

“The transparency can be a problem. For example, **the timelines or process in which items are due is not clear.**”

- Clearwater Resident Interview (December 2025)

- Clearwater continues to observe an **increased demand**<sup>1</sup> for permit services, resulting in greater resident demand for a solution that **improves the experience** of asking the city for permission.
- Despite improvements in performance,<sup>2</sup> **residents have experienced frustration**<sup>3</sup> with the lack of clarity with requirements, timelines, or when asking for assistance.

<sup>1, 2</sup> Fiscal Year 2024/2025 City of Clearwater Planning & Development Department Key Performance Indicator Data.

<sup>3</sup> 2023 Business Process Study Survey.

## Takeaway

When Permitting Fails To Deliver, It Costs Everyone— Time, Trust, and Progress.

# OUR INNOVATIVE APPROACH



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL • BAY TO BEACH

# A NEW WAY OF WORKING: DEFINING THE TARGET

## Ambitious Impactful Mission

***By 2030, the city of Clearwater will demonstrate ongoing excellence in service delivery through measurable improvements that reduce costs, increase efficiency, and inspire public confidence in local government.***



## Design

- Our core team reviewed more than 60 potential topics to prioritize research that reflects the values of our AIM.
- We utilized an iterative approach to ensure a common understanding and framing of the problem, including its impacts on people, and why it requires action.
- We created guiding questions to explore the identified problem and focus our research where it matters most.
- We engaged diverse voices—those with varying levels of resources or access who are affected by our project.

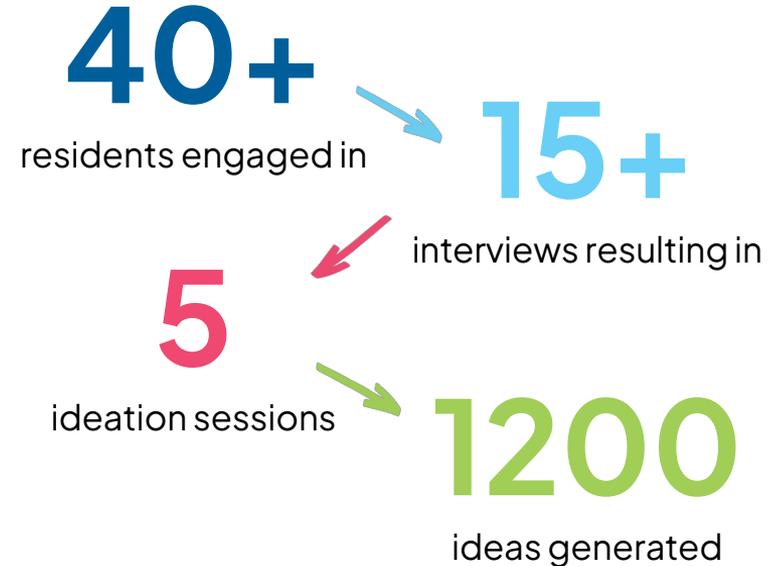
**40+** interested parties engaged

**15+** residents interviewed

# WHAT MADE IT DIFFERENT



## DESIGNING BETTER, TOGETHER



# FROM TRADITIONAL PLANNING TO ADAPTIVE STRATEGY

*"This experience has shifted how I approach our work, blending data and technology with the emotional realities residents bring to every interaction. It challenged me to integrate this lens into daily problem-solving and share it with my peers."*

## Innovation as an Infrastructure

During the synthesis phase, a team member asked if the design co-creation process could be scaled-up and used for the city's annual budget strategic planning process.

In February 2026, the city hosted our first strategy workshop with the City Council and our Executive Leadership Team, redefining how the city of Clearwater innovates.



# IMPACT & SPARKS



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL • BAY TO BEACH

# INSIGHT: INCONSISTENT PATHS ERODE CONFIDENCE

## Voices That Shape Our Understanding

Throughout our research and stakeholder interviews, individual stories came to life—generating insights into the remarkable needs, desires, and behaviors of each resident, business owner, and community leader.

## Decoding the Puzzle: Resident Stories

During stakeholder interviews, two residents shared how navigating the city’s permitting process for their renovation felt difficult, noting that while staff remain helpful, it can be unclear which rules apply to a project.



***“If You Think About It From the Customer’s Perspective, You Can Be Walking Into the Process Blind.”***

- Internal Employee Interview (October 2025)

# CHANGING THE QUESTION. CHANGING THE POSSIBILITIES.

## Process vs. Experience

We challenged ourselves to ask a better question:  
*Which is more important: **process** or **individual experience**?*

## Moments of Reflection

By changing the question, we changed our perspective — and focused on those who feel the impact most.

## Desired Pathways

During our research synthesis and the problem reframing, a consistent theme appeared:

Each customer has a **desired pathway** forward to success.

*“The best processes don’t require a guide to succeed, they just make sense.”*



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL · BAY TO BEACH



# WHAT'S NEXT



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL • BAY TO BEACH

# NEXT STEPS: BUILDING OUR MOMENTUM

## 1 Finalize Ideation Phase

By March 2026, the team will complete the ideation phase; transforming over 1,200 ideas into a set of robust prototypes, based on potential impact and implementability.

## 2 Start Prototyping Phase

From March to June 2026, the team will create and prototype two innovative solutions with city staff and residents, designed to drive tangible improvements for our community.

## 3 Scaling of Portfolio

Following the prototyping phase, our core team will create a portfolio of 8 to 10 recommendations that offer a measurable impact to improve how the city delivers permit services.

*Our next leadership briefing will be after the prototyping phase in June 2026*

# THANK YOU



**CLEARWATER**  
BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL · BAY TO BEACH

