

PERMITS TO PROGRESS

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



CONTEXT & CHALLENGE



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

A Shared Vision

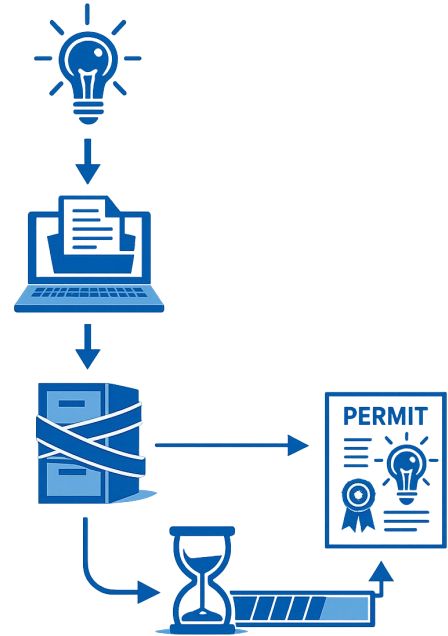
As a city, we've heard from our customers and staff that the permitting process can often feel confusing and frustrating.

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



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- 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**¹ 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,² **residents have experienced frustration**³ with the lack of clarity with requirements, timelines, or when asking for assistance.

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

3 2023 Business Process Study Survey.

Takeaway

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

OUR INNOVATIVE APPROACH



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A NEW WAY OF WORKING: DEFINING THE TARGET

AIM

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

Using design research, we seek to ensure a common understanding of the problem, including its impacts on people, and why it requires action to focus our research where it matters most.



Ideate

We engaged diverse voices — those with varying levels of access or resources who are affected by our project to share our research findings and explore possible solutions.



Prototype

Our team created models of select ideas for testing with residents and staff to gather feedback, and refine our approach prior to committing significant time and resources.



DESIGNING BETTER, TOGETHER



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40+ → 15+
residents engaged in interviews resulting in

5 → 1200
ideation sessions ideas generated

5 →
prototype sessions



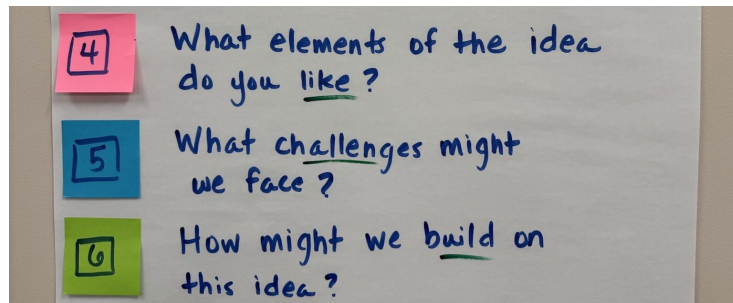
A SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL PLANNING TO STRATEGY

"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

Over 40+ Staff, including senior leadership, participated in multi-day internal ideation and prototyping sessions, scaling innovation techniques and refining our approach to how we address complex challenges.

Following the BH9 program, we have seen innovation strategies learned throughout the program being implemented in various departments across the city.



IMPACT & SPARKS



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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, They 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.



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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.”***



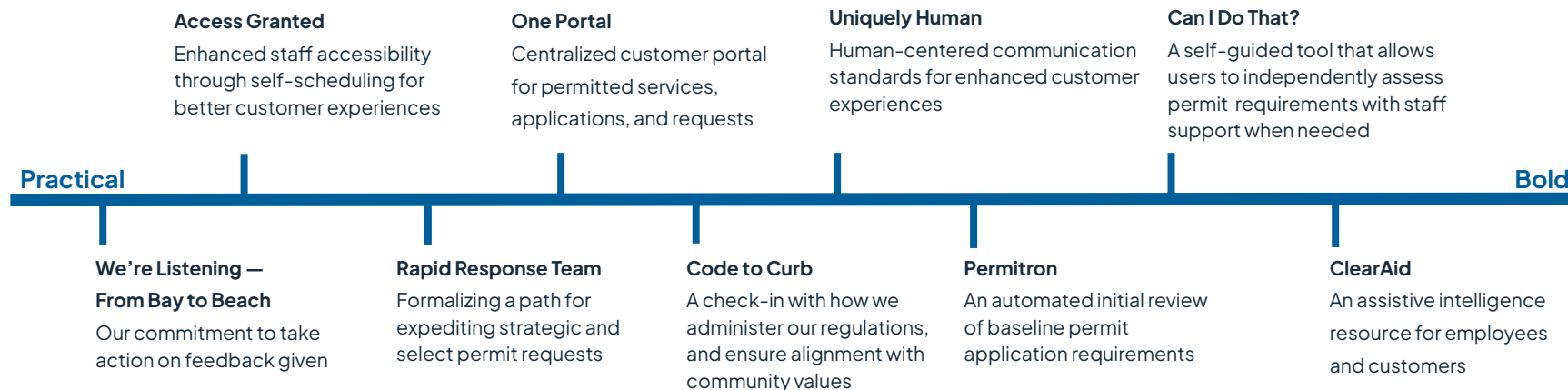
MOMENTUM & FUTURE



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TURNING COMMUNITY IDEAS INTO ACTION

With residents, we created **1,200+ ideas** to enhance the permitting experience. Together, we narrowed them to nine initiatives to bring the most promising ideas to life.



TURNING COMMUNITY IDEAS INTO ACTION



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With residents, we created **1,200+ ideas** to enhance the permitting experience. Together, we co-designed two prototypes to test these ideas with our staff and community.

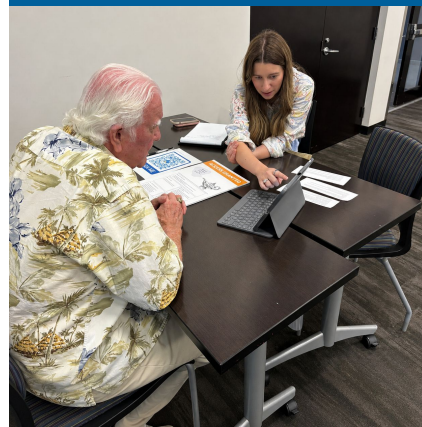
Spotlight Idea #1: “Can I do That?”



A self-guided tool that allows our customers to independently assess regulatory requirements.

Prototyping Feedback: Users value a simplified means for understanding complex requirements, while being able to reliably seek assistance if needed.

Spotlight Idea #2: Access Granted



Enhancing access with our staff to create better user experiences.

Prototyping Feedback: Successful experiences are built through visible and accessible pathways that empowers customers to engage with the city.

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING OUR FUTURE



1 Implementation Planning

From June to July 2026, the team will create a final plan of the portfolio, including the implementation schedule and assignment of project managers across departments.

2 Initiate Project Transition

By October 2026, the team will brief implementation teams on the solution portfolio, providing research insights, prototyping feedback, and learned innovation methods.

3 Scaling of Initiatives

Over the next three years, the city's implementation teams will execute all nine initiatives contained in the solution portfolio, in advance of Clearwater's 2030 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.

THANK YOU



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