



ProjectDox Case Study Carmel, IN



Carmel, Indiana, a rapidly developing city north of Indianapolis, has established itself as a corporate hub with one of the largest business corridors in the region along U.S. 31. With approximately 4,200 building permits and over 240 planning applications processed annually, the city manages a diverse range of projects from large corporate headquarters to mixed-use redevelopment initiatives.

Paper-Based Reviews Created Inefficiencies and Communication Gaps

Prior to implementing ProjectDox in 2017, Carmel's plan review process was entirely paper-based. Applicants submitted physical copies of plans, which were manually reviewed and marked up by staff. The process created several challenges for the city.

"We would receive plans on large 24-by-36-inch sheet rolls. We would review and mark them up, and then we'd have to transfer all our comments into an email format," said Alexia Lopez, Urban Planner with the City of Carmel. This manual transcription process was time-consuming and introduced the potential for errors.

Communication between departments was also a hurdle. "We would ask for copies of all the letters from the other departments so that we knew if there were any big issues or red flags, but we didn't always get them or we didn't know if those comments had been addressed," Lopez explains. This departmental siloing made it difficult to maintain a cohesive review process.

Version control presented another significant challenge. When revisions were submitted, staff had to carefully examine changes without always knowing what had been modified. "There would be times where you'd say, 'OK, they made the change I asked for. That's great.' And then you might find that they changed something you didn't ask for," said Lopez.

The environmental impact was also a concern. Lopez noted that her initial interest in digital plan review was partly driven by seeing "all these paper plans just being recycled or trashed," which seemed like a waste of resources.

Integrating with Cityworks for a Comprehensive Solution

Carmel first implemented ProjectDox in 2017, with the system going live in 2018. The implementation was managed directly through Avolve, with the initial focus to address the inefficient paper-based process. A few years later, when the city adopted Cityworks for permitting, they worked to create an integration between the two systems.



“Carmel was the first organization to do that worldwide,” Burnham noted with pride. “A few of us had the bright idea, ‘Why don’t we make these two solutions work together so we’re not copying and pasting data out of one software into another?’” This pioneering integration eliminated redundant data entry and streamlined the entire permitting and review process.

The timing of these implementations proved particularly fortunate. “We were using ProjectDox already, but then right before COVID we got Cityworks as well. So, all our permitting and applications were set up through that,” Lopez explains. “That really helped us to smoothly keep moving forward during COVID when everybody was at home. We didn’t have to try to get the plans to the office or get them from the office and work on them at home. It was all digital.”

“ProjectDox does a very good job of having every department on the same page, knowing where that review process is. Siloing was a problem prior to ProjectDox, with departments doing their own thing and not always having visibility of where the review process is, and ProjectDox broke down that barrier”

Shane Burnham, AMS Coordinator, City of Carmel

Breaking Down Silos and Improving Visibility

Since implementing ProjectDox, Carmel has expanded adoption across virtually all departments involved in plan review. Avolve is now used by building, planning and zoning, engineering, parks, water and sewer utilities, fire, IT, addressing, GIS, the redevelopment commission, street department, police, urban forestry, transportation systems, and even external organizations that support the local government.

This broad adoption has significantly improved interdepartmental collaboration. “Siloing was a problem prior to ProjectDox, with departments doing their own thing and not always having visibility of where the review process is,” noted Burnham. “ProjectDox does a very good job of keeping all departments on the same page.”

The ability to track changes and control version submissions has been particularly valuable. “It’s easier for us to help manage the process and say, ‘No, we’re not letting you move forward because you still have these items to address,’” Lopez explains. “It’s maybe helped with some quality control too, to catch things sooner and not let some things slip through the cracks.”

While the city strives for a seven to ten-day review turnaround for building permits, the digital system has made the entire process more transparent and accountable. Departments can now see each other’s comments and ensure all issues are addressed before a project moves forward.

ProjectDox Helps Carmel Manage Transition from Development to Redevelopment

As the Carmel community continues to evolve in both new developments and redevelopments, particularly in its central core area with mixed-use projects, the integrated digital review system provides a foundation for efficient, transparent plan review operations. The pioneering integration between ProjectDox and Cityworks has eliminated redundancies and created a streamlined process for both staff and applicants.

Lopez appreciates the robustness of the system: “I like the fullness of the system. It’s not just plan review, it’s got the workflow in there too. And I like how it can highlight changes and that I am able to see everyone’s comments,” she said.

For a fast-growing community that has attracted major corporate headquarters like OPENLANE and Zotech, as well as numerous mixed-use developments, the digital transformation has helped maintain Carmel’s reputation as an innovative, business-friendly city. By breaking down departmental silos and creating a more efficient review process, ProjectDox has helped Carmel manage its transition from expanding suburb to mature, redeveloping community.

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