

Expedited Permitting Best Practices	Middlesex 3 Communities								
	Bedford	Billerica	Burlington	Chelmsford	Lexington	Lowell	Tewksbury	Tyngsboro	Westford
<i>Improving Communication with Permit Applicants</i>									
1. A single point of contact improves clarity and productivity for both the applicants and regulators.	No; Combination of Planning Board and Code Enforcement Dept. (Building/Zoning)	Yes	No	Yes, CD Director Land use regulatory Boards	No	Yes; Department of Developmental Services	Yes	No	Yes; Director of Land Use Management
2. A User's Guide to Local Planning provides a "quick reference" for applicants as they navigate the permitting process.	Not comprehensively, but we have developed a small business guide	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes, aimed at small businesses
3. Permitting flow charts and checklists guide applicants through the permitting process and make it transparent and uniform.	Yes, we have a business permitting checklist.	Yes	Yes (checklist outlining what needs to be filed)	No	No	Yes, checklists for ZBA, PLBD and Con Comm, plus Bldg permits	No	Yes (applicant requirements and process)	Yes, in permitting guide
4. Clear submittal requirements help to encourage uniformity in the review process.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, available online. Includes timeframe for action.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (on website and addresses review and modification process)	Yes, but needs improvement. Available at the counter, by phone or on web pages.
5. Concurrent application submissions save review time and encourages greater collaboration among municipal officials.	Not always done, however, having concurrent application submissions is not always optimal	Yes	Yes	Yes, as needed	Yes	Yes for projects that need ZBA and PB approval	Yes	Yes (flexible and no criteria)	Not across boards, but yes for each board
6. Combined public hearings speeds up the permitting process by significantly reducing the number of meetings the applicant needs to attend.	Not always done,, we have explored the idea but not implemented yet	No	Yes (by request)	Yes, as needed	Yes (rare)	No	Can be done	No	Rarely
7. A pre-application process promotes better communication between municipal boards and the applicant.	Yes, we hold informal meetings with Town staff as well as the Planning Board	Yes	Yes (pertinent town staff and applicant team)	Yes, with staff	Yes	Yes, various departments attend depending on the application	Yes, both staff and Board level	Yes (town staff)	Yes, at applicant's option
8. Project technical review team coordinates permit application review to increase efficient use of staff, board, and proponents' time and efforts.	Yes, meets as needed	Yes; meets as needed	Yes; meets 2x/month	Yes; meets as needed	Yes; 2x/mo	Yes; meets as needed	Yes; meets weekly	Yes; meets as needed No	Yes; meets as needed
9. Regularly scheduled inter-departmental meetings provide an opportunity for all regulatory agencies to coordinate on matters affecting each of them beyond specific projects.	No (but we have meetings of all departments)	Yes	Yes (Core Project Team meets 2x/month)	No	Yes; 2x/mo	Yes, police, fire, historic, Engineering, water, sewer, recycling usually attend	Yes	No	Yes, at technical review meetings
10. Physical proximity of professional staff leads to increased communication and efficiency.	Yes (Planning, building, ZBA,conservation, historic, assessors; not DPW)	No	Spread out in four buildings, but Planning, Building and Conservation are together.	Yes	Yes	All permitting departments are in City Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes, but Engineering is remote

Expedited Permitting Best Practices	Middlesex 3 Communities								
	Bedford	Billerica	Burlington	Chelmsford	Lexington	Lowell	Tewksbury	Tyngsboro	Westford
11. Development agreements allow developers to protect their investment and provide certainty that public facilities and infrastructure necessary to support new growth will be built without delay.	Yes, as needed and appropriate	No	Yes, as needed and appropriate	No	Used for most rezonings.	Yes, for LDAs such as Hamilton Canal District	Rarely done	No	Yes, larger projects generally
12. Encouraging the use of third-party consultants provides needed expertise to the community, identifies significant impacts, and creates a more efficient process	No; in-house DPW Engineering is able to do technical review in most development cases	Yes; all applications	Sometimes, when the scope of the project exceeds Town staff capacity.	Not needed, in house review is adequate	Yes, based on size, type, and complexity of the project (rare)	Yes; traffic studies, cellular towers, economic impact studies	In house project reviews leading to consistent Town and Board outcome. 3 rd for specialized needs (raffic)	Yes; based on size, type of project	Yes; if no in-house Engineering capacity or expertise, for large, complex projects, construction monitoring
Standardizing the Permitting Process									
13. Objective criteria for special permits, by-right zoning, and master plans will help to ensure that developments proposed will meet the community's goals for the development of a specific zone.	Yes; special permits with criteria for industrial mixed use and 3 mixed use overlay districts. By right zoning with site plan review for most industrial/office developments. The Town also has a recent Master Plan	Yes; SP for buildings over 5,000 sq. ft.	Yes Office in industrial districts and retail in business districts are allowed by right. Special permits are used in those cases that represent potential threat.	Yes; SP for buildings over 20,000 sq. ft, major business complex, drive thru	Yes	Yes; requirements for SP are governed by specific criteria in Zoning Ordinance	Yes; SP for externally enlarged by 800 sq. ft. or expansion in ground area	Yes; SP for buildings with gross floor area increased by 1,200 sq. ft. or more for uses requiring SP in commercial districts	Yes; SP for any building over 15,000 sq. ft. (major commercial project); other SPs as well
14. Effective use of site plan approval allows for detailed evaluation and mitigation of development project impacts by reviewing authorities.	Yes; we have an effective site plan review process	Yes	Yes; multi-family and all commercial. Public hearing similar to special permit. Design guidelines in overlay and PDD districts. Traffic, drainage, parking, landscaping, etc.	Yes; building over 500 sq. ft, new paving	Yes	Yes; buildings over 10,000 sq. ft., 3 or more units of housing, self service gas stations or drive thru establishments	No	Yes; typically larger projects	Yes; all new construction except single- or two-family Usually concurrent with special permit
15. A two-tier assessment process allows any regulatory agency to provide for different levels of review depending on clear thresholds of scale or impacts of a project.	Major vs. minor amendments to special permits. We also have a two-tier assessment under our Industrial Mixed Use Overlay District that allows for approval of a conceptual master plan followed by approval of specific phases of the plan	No	Yes, alteration versus new construction.	Yes, minor site plan	Lexington has a major/minor site plan review process	No	No	No	Working on zoning bylaw revisions to allow tiered site plan review

Expedited Permitting Best Practices	Middlesex 3 Communities								
	Bedford	Billerica	Burlington	Chelmsford	Lexington	Lowell	Tewksbury	Tyngsboro	Westford
16. Delegating minor decisions to staff allows the approval-granting board or department to focus on projects, or aspects of projects, with greater complexity and potential community impacts.	Yes, in selected instances only	No	Yes, in selected instances	No	Yes	Staff approves minor changes to PB and ZBA decisions	No	No	Yes
17. Uniform timelines, notifications, and appeals provide a "road map" for municipal offices and the permit applicant and enables projects to be executed in a rational, consistent, and transparent manner.	No, refer to answer on permitting guide. We do not have a clear "road map." We follow MGL and bylaws	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Meeting Schedules, submission deadlines are made public	No	Yes to making application and forms available. No to Master Permit Application, uniform timeframes and publicizing the location of municipal rules and regulations.	Yes, per Mass General Laws
Resources for Improving Local Permitting Performance									
18. Adequate staffing increases applicant satisfaction with the process and effectively speeds up the permitting process.	Staff is sometimes strained to keep up with workload under development booms, when it is more difficult to devote time to long-term planning objectives	No	Yes. However would be helpful to have a liaison staff member to coordinate planning between boards.	Yes	Yes	I don't know of any permitting department that would say they have enough staff	Yes	No planner or town engineer	No
19. Creating a culture of training increases clarity, timeliness, competence, and defensible decisions among the reviewing authorities.	Wouldn't characterize as having a culture of training across all boards and staff	Yes	Yes, Training is encouraged, but not mandatory.	Yes, under 10%	Yes)	Yes	No	Yes for 15% of board members and staff	Staff attends training, hit and miss with boards
20. Maximizing the reach of a municipal website allows users to access a "one-stop shop" of information without having to physically walk from one department to another.	Yes, meeting agendas, forms, subscription services for meeting notices/updates, Facebook Planning page.	Yes	Yes; applications, bylaws, plans and related documents on Planning Department webpage. Permit applications are posted online. Also use Facebook and Twitter.	Yes; will do with ViewPermit; only projects with significant public interest right now	Yes; most application materials, regular updates to information and features	Yes; applications, narratives from applicants, plans for applications, department comments	Yes; permit application forms; no posting of applications online	Yes; meeting materials	Yes; PDF forms for PB, ZBA; minutes and agendas, applications of high controversy Can do better

Expedited Permitting Best Practices	Middlesex 3 Communities								
	Bedford	Billerica	Burlington	Chelmsford	Lexington	Lowell	Tewksbury	Tyngsborough	Westford
21. Electronic permit tracking systems have the potential to streamline permitting from application intake through project completion.	No, some departments have electronic storage of case materials. Some use PeopleForms as a simple database. Planning shares material via Dropbox.	Yes; GeoTMS	Access database used moving to Accela in 2017	No	ViewPermit in use in the Building Office, other offices rolling out soon.	No; no software for land use, but uses MUNIS for building permits	Yes; PeopleGIS	Yes; GeoTMS Upgrading newer version	Yes; Westford Building Permit Tracker; formerly Opal
22. Creating an electronic filing process for permit applicants reduces the risk of filing and administrative error or oversight and facilitates electronic transmission of permit applications from board to board.	No. Planning requires electronic copies	No	Not yet; all application materials required to be submitted electronically and hard copy	Not yet	ViewPermit expansion in process.	Yes; accepts PDF format but does not have online applications that can be filled out	No	No	Yes; all building permits; no land use online although want to develop PDF forms
Planning									
23. Selecting preferred sites for commercial or industrial development allows for a proactive rather than a reactive development process.	No, Town is in era of redevelopment of existing properties so there are few land development sites left. Redevelopment is dictated by market.		Yes. Master Plan identifies preferred sites. Industrial districts near highways.	Yes, in commercial and industrial zoning districts	No	NA	NA	NA	No formal list
24. Designating priority development sites under Chapter 43D guarantees that conforming development proposals will receive municipal permitting decisions within 180 days of the date of application.	No	Yes; EMD Serono campus only	Yes One site (150 acre office and mixed-use campus) along Route 3	Yes; 43D approved for one site	Yes; Hartwell Ave area	Yes	Yes; 43D approved sites only	Yes, approved at Town Meeting for one site	No
25. Pre-permitting makes selected sites very attractive investments for potential developers interested in avoiding a prolonged permitting process.	Yes, MassBioReady Platinum	Yes; Mass BioReady Gold	Yes; Mass BioReady Bronze	Yes; Mass BioReady Silver N/A	Yes; Mass BioReady Platinum	Yes, Mass BioReady Platinum, plus pre-permitting in form-based code HCD	Yes; Mass BioReady Gold	No	No
Bonus Question: Do you have Green Community status? If so, when was it approved?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes