

Case Studies

Wood Partners Leverages Pulley to Save Months On New Apartment Complexes



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Overview

Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, Wood Partners is the fourth largest multi-family developer in the US, with 19 offices across the country. Since its founding in 1998, Wood Partners has developed and delivered over 79,000 homes. The company specializes in building distinctive communities and much-needed housing in major metro areas. With

apartment product type, from garden-style complexes to mid- and high-rise infills, workforce, and student housing. Along the way, they've generated over \$14B in combined value and industry-leading returns for their investors

As the Vice President of Construction for the Central Texas region, Greg Cashen is responsible for ensuring each project is delivered on time and under budget. He works closely with the development team, his construction managers, and his external consultants every step of the way, from feasibility and site selection, to design development and budgeting, through construction and final close out. However, before Greg can hand off a project to his project managers for construction, he must ensure they've received all necessary site and building permits. Greg and his team must deliver permits quickly and reliably for the entire targeted scope of construction.

The Challenge

Permitting a new, 300+ unit multi-family complex is no small feat. Jurisdictions often require platting, a site permit, and related public improvements in order to obtain the proper entitlements. To "go vertical" and start construction, jurisdictions also require over a dozen building permits, plus related permits for demolition, amenity areas, garages, grease traps, and pools. In Central Texas, this

For Greg and Wood Partners, this work was fragmented across their civil engineers, architects, and permit expeditors. There are critical dependencies between these workstreams, but without shared tooling, these consultants tended to work on their pieces of permitting in silos, resulting in inconsistencies, overlooked requirements, and avoidable delays. Greg and his team had limited visibility into any of these permitting swim lanes, and it all too often felt like a black box, hamstringing their ability to drive better outcomes.

Delays in permitting were frequent. Expeditors would miss subtle requirements, not fully address some comments from staff, or their comment responses would be inconsistent across design and engineering disciplines. Sometimes, permitting delays meant they would have to delay closing on the land for their new projects, or worse, close on the land “at risk” — without approval for their proposed project yet. Unexpected delays in permitting also meant construction started behind schedule, making it difficult to staff new and ongoing projects internally and with their subcontractors.

In parallel with permitting, the project team worked through estimating, bidding, and toward a final project budget. As the in-house general contractor, Greg was responsible for determining a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) and ensuring it left enough contingency

substantive changes to the plans during permitting would yield change orders, eating into a limited construction contingency and making it harder to respond to field issues once under construction.

"When you've got people that are finishing up a project and kicking the next one off right away, they're busy enough; they can't be running permits. If any stakeholder gets a permit requirement wrong, it results in delayed permits. Delayed permits could lead to missed deadlines, and missed deadlines could lead to lost deals for the company."

On one project, their plans had simply noted "stucco" at the exterior facades of the buildings. The city reviewer made what seemed to be an innocuous comment, and the note was updated to read "3/4" stucco." Eager to clear the comment, the architect obliged. "I didn't even realize we had made this change until we were in the field. I never saw our proposed comment responses," recalls Greg. "That one change yielded an almost \$300,000 change order due to upgrading the 1/2-inch system to a 3/4-inch system."

The Solution

me, I like organizing things in clean buckets and having technology solutions to fix problems.” Given recent frustrations with permitting and a lack of permitting expertise in that submarket, when he learned about Pulley, it seemed worth trying out. It was perfect timing; they were nearing approval on the site permit for Alta Center Point and would be ready to submit for building permits soon.



Their pilot focused on leveraging Pulley with their architect, landscape architect, structural engineer, and MEP engineer for the building permitting portion of the project. Upfront, Pulley mapped out all the permitting requirements and assigned specific tasks to the design team. Pulley prepared and submitted the applications on their behalf and then guided their team through comment response. With Pulley, they obtained approval with just one round of comments — and Greg was convinced.

“If you’re moving towards a drop-dead closing, which many of our developments are, you're trying to get

additional extensions with the seller, we can lose a deal, which would be devastating. With Pulley, we can be confident that with permitting, we won't miss a day."

For their next project, they leveraged Pulley from start to finish, including the plat, site permit, public improvements permit, and all construction permits. Through Pulley, they could submit for all permits concurrently, significantly shortening the critical path to approval. Wood Partners leveraged the software to ensure they met all requirements for concurrent review and prepared thorough and complete applications. When they received comments, they needed to coordinate effectively across architecture, landscape design, civil engineering, MEP, and structural. Pulley helped ensure their updated plans were consistent and effectively satisfied comments across all five permits.

The Outcome

Across all site and building permits for Alta Blakey, the Wood Partners team received approval in just seven months. Each permit only received one round of comments.

"We have always tried to keep our rounds of review down to two, maybe three rounds, but with Pulley, we're consistently

permitting requirements like Alta Blakey."

Greg's team obtained approval within a few weeks of Pulley's original forecast. His estimate on how much time Pulley helped them save on this project? 3-4 months. Wood Partners was able to get approval for the entire scope of construction they were aiming for, with minimal revisions during plan review and no change orders needed.

Greg and his team at Wood Partners in Central TX now use Pulley portfolio-wide for all new projects, as well as for any revisions and additional submittals for ongoing construction work. They're even looking at leveraging Pulley's software and data early on when looking at new sites and working to understand feasibility, forecasting, and scheduling as they near design kick-off.

The Value

"Pulley gives us the clarity, coordination, and insight we need to drive faster approvals. They saved us three months on our most recent project."

For Wood Partners, the business case for deploying Pulley is clear:

promises to the city. They're now able to address city feedback without incurring change orders.

- **Save time:** With accurate permitting requirements upfront, thorough submittal scrubs from Pulley experts, and precise execution during comment response, Greg's team is getting to approval consistently in one round of comments. They're saving multiple months on the critical path of each project, which reduces carrying costs and helps them start construction on time.
- **Reduce risk:** Controlling costs and getting to approval faster leaves more buffer in both the schedule and the budget, enabling the team to handle unexpected delays or costs from construction without going over budget or delaying the overall project.

But Pulley's value extends beyond the business case. For Greg, trusting Pulley with his permits means his project managers can focus on higher-impact work. They can spend more time with designers and out in the field without context-switching to chase permits. Having a transparent, accessible view into the real-time status of permitting has helped increase trust across the board, from the design team to his colleagues in development and even their capital partners. Ultimately, having complete visibility into the process and keeping every step of permitting organized and moving along quickly has brought peace of mind to Greg's team at Wood Partners.

Video

Permitting: What Went Wrong and How to Fix It

Let's explore the history of permitting, why it has become such a bottleneck, and most importantly: how can we start to reverse the trend of slower permitting with modern tools and technology?

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