



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

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Governor Shapiro Visits Major Hazle Township Development Project to Announce PA Permit Fast Track Program to Speed Up Government — Streamlining Approvals, Fueling Economic Growth, and Making Pennsylvania More Competitive

Pennsylvania is the first state to establish a project-based permitting fast track program for complex, high-impact economic development and infrastructure projects — advancing Governor Shapiro's efforts to streamline wait times and enhance permitting, licensing, and certification processes across the Commonwealth.

Project Hazelnut – a transformative technology campus that will drive future innovation and economic development and create over 900 permanent jobs in Northeastern Pennsylvania – is one of three projects initially enrolled in Fast Track.





Hazleton, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** highlighted **Project Hazelnut** in Luzerne County as he hosted an event to ceremonially sign **Executive Order 2024-04**, launching the **Pennsylvania (PA) Permit Fast Track Program** to streamline the Commonwealth’s permitting process for critical economic development and infrastructure projects, boost transparency, cut timelines, and ensure government delivers results efficiently.

Project Hazelnut — a transformative technology campus in Northeastern Pennsylvania — exemplifies **Governor Shapiro’s** commitment to growing Pennsylvania’s economy all across the Commonwealth by improving permitting processes, reducing delays, and increasing our competitiveness by ensuring government operates at the speed of business.

The Executive Order directs the **Office of Transformation & Opportunity (OTO)** with leading the PA Permit Fast Track Program (Fast Track) — making OTO responsible for developing, managing, and coordinating the program to support complex and impactful projects across government agencies and private partners — in order to get project sponsors answers in a timely manner. The office will also work closely with project sponsors and oversee updates to the **Fast Track dashboard**, a publicly accessible online tool designed to ensure accountability for both state agencies and project sponsors. You can view the dashboard [here](#).

“When I became Governor, I promised to make state government work better for Pennsylvanians by eliminating obstacles and creating real opportunity for the people of our Commonwealth,” said **Governor Shapiro**. “By simplifying the permitting process and focusing on results, we’re not just driving economic growth and creating jobs — we’re delivering for Pennsylvanians, putting points on the board, and making real progress. The PA Permit Fast Track Program is a game-changer that strengthens both coordination and communication between project sponsors and state agencies, cutting through red tape to fast-track critical projects. This program gives businesses the confidence to invest and create jobs here, proving

that government can keep pace with business. Together, we're building a stronger, more competitive Pennsylvania where people want to live, work, and build their future."

"Governor Shapiro knows that to win the competition to attract and retain companies and jobs, we need a government that moves at the speed of business. That's why he made responsive government a core goal of his economic development strategy," said **OTO's Chief Transformation Officer Ben Kirshner**. "The PA Permit Fast Track program is in line with the Governor's vision and gives us a new tool to deliver coordination, accountability, and transparency for permitting big, complex projects here in the Commonwealth, increasing Pennsylvania's competitiveness."

How Fast Track Works

The Fast Track Program identifies key economic development projects and assists with permitting processes by organizing agency meetings, coordinating key parts of the project, and enhancing transparency and accountability through a public-facing online dashboard. By leveraging interagency collaboration and streamlined processes, the program aims to:

- **Enhance Project Coordination:** OTO will oversee the program, working closely with project sponsors to manage timelines, milestones, and agency cooperation.
- **Support Critical Projects:** Eligible projects include key economic development and infrastructure projects aligned with the Governor's [Economic Development Strategy](#).
- **Create Transparency:** Modeled after the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council's FAST-41 Program, the [dashboard](#) tracks the progress of projects, permitting timelines, feedback from project sponsors, and provides accountability for both state agencies and project sponsors.

The Fast Track Program is designed to help project sponsors better understand and meet permitting requirements, reducing costly delays by coordinating meetings across state agencies and getting sponsors answers to their questions efficiently. Every permit submitted through Fast Track is still subject to the same rigorous review as every other application across the Commonwealth.

This year, OTO piloted Fast Track with three major economic development projects, including **Project Hazelnut** — a technology campus spanning more than 1,300 acres in Hazle Township, near Hazleton. The campus will include multiple buildings designed to support critical infrastructure such as server rooms, power distribution, cooling systems, and network connectivity, all built for high redundancy and scalability at the site. Once completed, this transformative project is expected to create over 900 good-paying, family-sustaining jobs, driving significant economic growth in the region.

Two additional projects are underway: **Bellwether District in Philadelphia** — a 1,300-acre logistics and innovation campus on the former Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery site, will undergo extensive remediation and is expected to create 19,000 permanent jobs — and **Martinsburg Community Digester in Blair County** — located at Metzler Farm, the community-scale anaerobic digester will convert manure from over 10 local dairy farms into biogas.

"We proudly stand alongside Governor Shapiro and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in advancing economic growth and opportunity," said **Brian Stahl, Vice President of Development, NorthPoint Development**. "Today's Executive Order strengthens the critical partnership between economic development projects and permitting agencies, fostering a streamlined, transparent, and effective process. This collaboration accelerates investments, creates meaningful jobs, generates vital tax revenue, and further strengthens the economy for all Pennsylvanians."

“Under my leadership, we’ve made critical updates to our code department, issuing thousands of permits and business licenses. I’m glad to see the state also taking action to speed up their permitting processes,” said **Mayor Jeff Cusat, City of Hazleton**. “When we cut down on unnecessary red tape, we attract more businesses, create jobs, and help Pennsylvanians get the licenses and certifications they need to succeed. Governor Shapiro and I are on the same page — government should work for the people and not slow down economic development projects that benefit our communities.”

“Hazle Township is seeing a lot of new investment, and these types of projects can't happen without fast and efficient permitting from the government,” said **Dr. Anthony Grigoli, Chairman of the Township Supervisors Board for Hazle Township**. “It takes everyone working together to get a project like this over the finish line, and the township has worked incredibly hard to make this a successful public-private partnership. The new tech campus being built in Hazle Township will create 900 good-paying tech jobs. And once the project is up and running, the township will see tax revenue that will help support our schools, parks, and roads. Hazle Township is open for business, and we are grateful to have partners at the state who are working with us and businesses like Northpoint.”

“The Fast Track Program is a dynamic tool that highlights the transformational potential of projects like Hazelnut. With the Executive Order, we’re elevating public-private partnerships to a new level,” said **Mary Malone, President & CEO of Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce**. “The next phase is all about the three Cs: connection, collaboration, and community. This program strengthens connections to resources, enhances collaboration between municipalities and local stakeholders, and invests in our community. Hazelnut will bring not only tech jobs but also more teachers in our classrooms, healthcare providers at Lehigh Valley Hospital Hazleton, and new small businesses like salons and barbershops. The common thread? All these businesses depend on professional licensing to thrive. Thank you to Governor Shapiro, the Office of Transformation and Opportunity, and NorthPoint for choosing our area.”

Governor Shapiro’s Work to Improve Commonwealth Permitting

From day one, **Governor Shapiro** has taken significant steps to improve the delivery of government services, streamline the Commonwealth’s permitting, licensing, and certification processes, and attract businesses to Pennsylvania. The **Shapiro Administration** has:

- **Established OTO** within two weeks of **Governor Shapiro** taking office and charged the office with [improving](#) the Commonwealth’s permitting, licensing, and certification (PLC) processes.
- **Created first-ever catalogue** of more than 2,400 PLCs issued by the state, allowing the **Shapiro Administration** to identify and resolve bottlenecks in order to give Pennsylvanians more certainty and deliver answers more efficiently.
- **Launched [PAYback.pa.gov](#)**, a first-in-the-nation online money-back guarantee system, allowing residents, businesses, charities, and schools to hold state agencies accountable when processing PLCs.
- **Reduced processing time** for PLCs for teachers, nurses, realtors, barbers, hair stylists, cosmetologists, and more. For example, when **Governor Shapiro** took office, it took 8 weeks to get a business license. Now, it takes less than 3 days. It used to take nearly a month to get an initial physical therapist license. Now, it takes just 2 days. It took used to take 12 weeks to get an initial teacher certification. Now, it takes less than 2 weeks.

- **Boosted Pennsylvania's competitiveness**, making it more attractive than ever for businesses and workers. Since **Governor Shapiro took office**, corporate filing wait times have dropped from 8 weeks to 2 days, small business certification times are down by 33 percent, and cosmetology and barbershop licenses are now processed the same day instead of nearly 2 weeks. Additionally, the **Department of Human Services** cleared a backlog of 35,000 Medicaid provider enrollment applications, and the **Department of Environmental Protection** reduced its permit backlog by 67 percent, or nearly 1,300 permits.

With the launch of Fast Track, **Governor Shapiro** is furthering his commitment to making the Commonwealth a place where government works to create real opportunities — allowing Pennsylvanians the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed.

Read more about **Executive Order 2024-04**, PA Permit Fast Track Program, [here](#).

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