5 Ways AI Can Save Cities Time and Money

Artificial intelligence (AI) is already helping cities do more with limited staff and budgets. When used responsibly, AI can reduce manual workloads, shorten timelines, and improve service delivery. Below are five proven, practical ways AI can save cities time and money.

1. Automating Meeting Transcription and Minutes

Preparing accurate meeting minutes is time-consuming and labor-intensive for clerks and administrative staff. AI transcription tools generate near-instant transcripts and draft summaries from recorded meetings. Staff then review, edit, and approve final minutes.

How This Helps Your City:

- Reduces hours spent on manual note-taking and transcription
- Improves transparency and accessibility for residents
- Creates searchable records that support public records requests

2. Speeding Up Permitting Reviews

Building and zoning permits often face backlogs due to manual plan reviews and incomplete submissions. AI tools can pre-screen permit applications, flag missing information, and check plans against code requirements before staff review.

How This Helps Your City:

- Cuts initial review times from days or weeks to hours or minutes
- Reduces resubmittals caused by overlooked errors
- Allows staff to focus on complex or discretionary decisions

3. Providing 24/7 Answers to Residents

City staff spend significant time responding to repetitive questions about services, permits, and schedules. AI chatbots can answer common questions on city websites or via text, in multiple languages, and escalate complex issues to staff.

How This Helps Your City:

- Reduces call volume and inbox overload

- Improves response times for residents' basic questions

- Expands access beyond normal business hours

4. Drafting and Summarizing Routine Documents

Staff spend hours drafting agendas, newsletters, reports, and policy summaries. Generative AI creates first drafts and plain-language summaries that staff can quickly review and refine.

How This Helps Your City:

- Shortens drafting time for routine materials

- Helps non-technical staff summarize long or complex documents

- Improves consistency across departments

5. Improving Public Engagement and Communications

Traditional public meetings and surveys can sometimes capture only a small, vocal segment of the community. AI can analyze large volumes of resident feedback from surveys, comments, and online sources to identify trends, concerns, and sentiment.

How This Helps Your City:

- Reduces staff time spent manually reviewing comments

- Helps cities communicate more accurately and stay ahead of issues

- Ensures outreach reflects the full community, not just the loudest voices

When paired with clear policies, transparency, and human oversight, AI can help cities deliver services faster, reduce costs, and better serve residents.

Any new tool needs thoughtful guardrails. Cities should ensure proper oversight, such as appointing an AI point person or team. Cities should also consider potential risks, such as data privacy, legal liability, and the accuracy of AI outputs. Responsible use starts with clear goals and ongoing reviews. When used as intended, AI will help cities save time and money.