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Cities see boost in building permits in 2018, major growth in residential development

By ERIN BAMER ebamer@idahopress.com Mar 2, 2019



Permit techs Kacy Reynolds and Jeny Lind Johnson, with the City of Nampa, look through a stack of plans waiting for building permits, Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2019.

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NAMPA — As Idaho continues to experience growth, Nampa saw a jump in the number of building permits pulled in 2018, with much of that spike attributed to residential permits.

Nampa's permit growth falls just behind Meridian's, another rapidly growing city in the Treasure Valley, and is largely due to the influx of new subdivisions and other housing developments. It also comes at a time when city officials are reworking Nampa's comprehensive plan, trying to figure out how to limit the strain the growth will cause on the surrounding infrastructure.

Nampa developers pulled 1,429 permits for residential development in fiscal year 2018, compared to 903 in fiscal year 2017, a 58 percent increase. Commercial permits also increased slightly from 274 in 2017 to 326 in 2018, a 19 percent increase.

This is a faster growth rate than what Nampa had seen previously. From FY16 to FY17, residential permits only increased by about 70. Commercial permits fell during that time, from 291 in 2016 to 274 in 2017.

Carl Miller, demographer for the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, said home construction has increased across the Treasure Valley in the last five years. That trend is expected to continue, as he said COMPASS research predicts more rapid growth over the next several decades.

A large portion of Nampa's residential permits came from single-family developments, such as subdivisions. Nampa had 763 single-family residential permits in 2018 alone. Nampa building director Patrick Sullivan said residential growth is typical for the city. In 2017, there were 512 permits pulled for single-family residential development, and 434 in 2016.

Permits are designated per lot, rather than by the overall project, so each one represents a house. With multifamily development, one permit indicates multiple units.

Sullivan said Nampa sees growth in multifamily housing each year. In 2017, Nampa saw 82 permits pulled for a duplex, townhouse or other multifamily development, while in 2018 Nampa saw 146 permits pulled. Sullivan said each of those permits represents multiple housing units coming to Nampa, but he couldn't say exactly how many.

"The majority of things we get are for (four-plexes), but we have had up to 16-plexes," Sullivan said.

Miller said single-family development is more popular across the Treasure Valley, making up about two-thirds of all new housing units built. However, he expects that might change in the future. He said he has observed a steady growth in the demand for multifamily housing, particularly among seniors and millennials, which developers are steadily beginning to follow.

HOW OTHER CITIES COMPARE

Meridian also saw substantial growth in FY18, particularly in residential with nearly 1,000 additional permits pulled. Residential development made up a sizable chunk of Meridian's overall permits. In 2018, developers pulled 3,044 permits for residential use. In 2017, the city saw 2,182 residential permits pulled.

According to a previous [Meridian Press report](#), most permits issued in 2018 were for new houses in north and southeast Meridian, according to an activity map from Meridian's comprehensive associate planner Brian McClure.

Commercial permits also increased but were low compared to Nampa. Meridian saw just 79 commercial permits pulled in 2017 and 84 in 2018. Miller said Meridian has a lot of pent-up demand in the commercial market, with [Costco Wholesale](#) and other companies going through the approval process.

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Multifamily units made up almost half of Meridian's housing growth for FY18. The city permitted 1,232 new multifamily units in FY18, McClure said. That's up from 754 multifamily permits the year before.

For the past three years, Meridian has exceeded the number of new residential units issued in any city in Ada or Canyon counties. In 2017, the number of residential unit permits issued in Meridian was more than double that of Boise — and almost double the total number of residential units approved in all of Canyon County.

Boise also saw an increase in construction permits in FY18, though the net increase wasn't as large as Nampa's or Meridian's. According to Boise's monthly construction reports, the city saw about 300 more residential permits from 2017 to 2018, from 2,939 to 3,295.

Compared to Nampa and Meridian, commercial use makes up a much larger portion of Boise's building permits, but the city didn't see a huge increase in commercial permits for 2018. In 2017, Boise developers pulled 988 commercial permits and in 2018, they pulled 1,068.

Boise also processed a record-high number of building permits overall in 2018, at 22,486, according to a previous [Idaho Press report](#). These included other permits outside new commercial and residential construction, such as electrical and plumbing permits.

To deal with the high volumes of applications, Boise added three full-time employees to the department this fiscal year. With several large housing projects and upgrades at St. Luke's Health System on the horizon, Boise's interim planning director Jason Blais said he expects 2019 to be another steady year for projects in Boise.

"We're seeing projects across every spectrum really go up," Blais said. "We do sometimes wonder how long it's going to last, but it shows that people want to be here."

HOW IT IMPACTS NAMPA

With more construction expected in the coming years, Miller said the growth will put more pressure on Idaho's traffic system with additional cars on the roads. He said the state's school districts may also be impacted, with several already fighting for more classroom space.

Sullivan said the growth Nampa is experiencing likely will put a strain on the city's streets and infrastructure. Nampa City Council is slated to approve major increases to the city's impact fees, which developers pay when they pull building permits to help cover a city's growth-related capital expenses.

Nampa officials are also working to update the city's comprehensive plan, which Mayor Debbie Kling said will include measures to account for the growth rate. In the plan, Kling said she hopes to identify ground for industrial and business use, as she wants to incentivize more of that development within Nampa.

Kling said the growth Nampa is seeing is neither scary nor awesome. At several points, Kling has expressed the value she places in maintaining Nampa's small-town culture, and she said she is not interested in competing with Meridian to have a higher population, although Nampa likely will surpass 100,000 residents soon. Meridian surpassed 100,000 last year.

"Other big cities have done this, where all of a sudden everybody is going there ... we can't afford to do that," Kling said.

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