



July 24, 2009

Mayor and City Commissioners
P.O. Box 1480
Fort Pierce, Florida 34954

Dear Mayor Benton and Commissioners:

For the past several months, the Fort Pierce Area Council of the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce has focused on the City of Fort Pierce Building Permit Process. We had several speakers address the council on this issue. Marc Meyers from the City addressed the Council in February about the permit process. Ramon Trias and Leslie Olson on behalf of the Fort Pierce Historical Preservation Board spoke to us in May.

In other months, we discussed the permitting issues and heard from several community business owners and property owners, who had actual experiences with the City of Fort Pierce permitting process in recent years and months. We want to share with you results of our findings and make some recommendations that we feel would improve the overall permitting process.

From a "consumer standpoint", it appears that the building permit process has improved recently. However, we feel that there are several areas that need to be addressed by the city to help the overall process to become more user-friendly to business owners and property owners who desire to relocate, expand or improve their structures and facilities in the City of Fort Pierce.

The first area that needs attention is the actual oversight of the permitting process from beginning to end. It appears that the onus of tracking during the permitting process seems to be on the business or property owner instead of the city resulting in an owner having to physically locate a permit making its way through the process to find out why certain items had not been performed or completed during the permitting process. We would recommend that someone at the city level be tasked with tracking projects as they move through the process and that deadlines are imposed upon the various departments for moving a permit along. Utilizing an internet based tracking solution much like what other area municipalities are doing or are putting in place would be very beneficial to everyone.

Secondly, it seems that the new construction process may have less red tape than a rehab or remodel project. While we realize that there are a host of new codes and standards following the recent hurricanes, it would seem that trying to bring all properties into compliance with the new codes may have an opposite effect on many of the business and property owners who have a desire to upgrade their property. We found that many of the owners found that the time, cost and hassle from trying to upgrade their property forced them to do nothing and actually resulted in some structures and properties deteriorating in condition instead of being improved.

While we commend the city in trying to improve codes and safety standards, it would seem that trying to force all property and business owners to make all needed upgrades at one time may be prohibitively expensive and actually discourage upgrades instead of promoting improvements. For example, a property owner seeking a permit to replace deteriorating siding was required to make significant parking lot improvements. We feel that a more common sense approach in working

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with business and property owners to upgrade over a period of time could achieve a better result. We encourage the city to try and work with business and property owners to obtain needed updates and improvements.

We also have some concerns about the permit process as it relates to historic properties in the City of Fort Pierce. Once again, we feel that it is commendable that the city recognizes the importance of historic structures within the city and has tried to take steps to reserve the unique historic quality of those structures. We have found that in recent years, business and property owners did not realize that they were in a historic district at the time the property was purchased. We would recommend that the city file some type of legal document within the public record or work with the property appraiser's office to identify all properties located within a designated historic district that has special conditions.

We encourage the city to continue its efforts to streamline the process of obtaining historic preservation board and departmental approvals. We have received reports of significant improvements since Ms. Olsen has joined the City and hope that she is able to continue with her efforts. There must be a common sense balance between historic preservation and the operation of a business.

We appreciate your efforts to continually improve the City of Fort Pierce and work towards maintaining a business-friendly environment. Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please accept this standing invitation to attend our monthly Fort Pierce Area Council meetings. We meet in the City's Engineering Conference Room on the second Monday of each month at 4:00 pm. An update from the City would be beneficial to our members.

Very truly yours,

Steve Hoskins

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cc: David Recor, City Manager
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