

June 2018



ST. LUCIE COUNTY
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
TASK FORCE



CITY OF FORT PIERCE REPORT



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I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, St. Lucie County's Economic Development Council and its Chamber of Commerce were asked by St. Lucie County's Administrator and Planning Director to evaluate the county's permitting and development processes for business. At that time, the Development Review Task Force was formed and in May of 2011, the task force shared their findings.

In August 2016, the Economic Development Council (EDC) discovered through meetings with their investors, regulatory processes in the City of Port St. Lucie were often called into question indicating there may be a need to establish a similar group to evaluate the City's permitting process. As a result, the EDC, the Chamber and the Treasure Coast Builders Association (TCBA) reestablished the Development Review Task Force.

Upon hearing of the reassembling of the group, Assistant City Manager Linda Cox, reached out to the Task Force to request an evaluation of the City of Fort Pierce's regulatory/permitting process.

The goal of the Task Force was identified as follows:

Establish easily recognizable expectations for the benefit of both the applicant and the City's departments; eliminate any misconception, confusion, duplication, or unessential items in an effort to streamline regulatory processes; improve upon the experience for all parties in order to establish a pro-business atmosphere.

The Task Force subsequently met with Ms. Cox and several department heads from the City of Fort Pierce. A monthly meeting time was established and the group would convene to discuss each department individually to go over concerns held by either staff or members of the Task Force. The order was as follows; Planning & Zoning, Building, Fort Pierce Utility Authority, Public Works/Engineering.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. As meetings progressed, several recommendations universal to the process independent of department were identified. The items listed below are those established by the Task Force to be of upmost importance for all parties and should be deemed imperative to the process.

1. All department policies should be available online to allow applicants the best chance to prepare applications that meet policy and reduce staff review/comment time.
2. All departments must have a defined, mapped and time-lined process for any type of application and these time-lines should be made available online.
3. A centralized system should be established allowing all departments and applicants the ability to track processes and progression in all departments.
4. Design standards must be clearly set forth and available online for all types of projects. Including projects in the CRA and Historic District
5. A position should be established within the city to help applicants navigate the various approval processes in order to better serve the public.
6. Additionally, a similar position at the Fort Pierce Utility Authority should be similarly maintained.
7. The Technical Review Committee (TRC) should serve as the project overview meeting and all departments should have representation at TRC. Input from the county should be submitted in a timeframe that closely matches the city's and their comments should be restricted to matters within their jurisdiction.

III. PLANNING AND ZONING

- A. The Task Force recommends thresholds comparable to St. Lucie County thresholds for staff approval of projects be established.
1. Non-Residential site plan projects under 50,000 square feet should be approved by staff without requiring City Commission approval.
 2. Residential site plans of 50 units or less should also be approved by staff without requiring City Commission approval..
- B. The ability to fast track targeted industries or job creating projects should be established and relevant to the process.
- C. The city should establish a voluntary, paid for, pre-application process with fees credited toward any future application fees.
- D. A table of allowed uses within each zoning category should be available to the public and online with ITE codes.
- E. The preliminary plat approval should be optional.
- F. Platting requirements should follow state statute and local requirements eliminated.
- G. Under the various zoning categories, an increase of permitted uses should be made in order to reduce the need for conditional use approvals.

IV. BUILDING DEPARTMENT

- A. The ability to track the status of all projects among all departments online should be established.
- B. The Task Force supports the hiring of a Licensing Investigator.
- C. The approximate timeline for all permits should be made public.
- D. The ability to apply for and receive a “foundation only” permit is vital to the congruency and timeframe of a project and should be available.
- E. The Task Force recommends the hiring of a full-time inspector to increase service capabilities.
- F. The availability of fast-tracking and after-hours inspections should be established.
- G. A checklist for submittals should be established and available online.
- H. Electronic submittal for certain projects should be available.
- I. Update per CSR annually.
- J. Allow the submittal of civil construction plan separate from the building permit process. These plans can be submitted to the building department, but should be reviewed by the engineering department. This will allow for applicants to begin civil construction while building plans are being developed and/or approved.

V. UTILITIES DEPARTMENT

- 1. A database that provides services available by address should be established.
- 2. A map of future use should be established.
- 3. Concessions for the initiation of economically viable corridors should be established.
- 4. Establish and maintain an economic development liaison.

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