

August 2017



ST. LUCIE COUNTY
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
TASK FORCE



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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.

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 first met with a representative from Port St. Lucie City Management as well as each department involved in the processes to present the goals, parameters and course the Task Force had charted. This meeting also established the intention of the Task Force to incorporate the concerns and suggestions of city staff into the report. Mutual cooperation was established.

The Task Force subsequently began meeting with each department individually to go over concerns held by either staff or members of the Task Force. The meeting order was established to closely reflect the progression of an application. The order was as follows; Planning & Zoning, Building, Utilities, Public Works/Engineering. The group later asked to meet with the Legal Department.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I. 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.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.

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.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.

3. A flowchart of expectations of next steps and reasonable time allowances for completion of project barring any unforeseen delays should be available to applicants and online.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.

4. Design standards must be clearly set forth and available online for all types of projects.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.

5. A centralized system should be established allowing all departments and applicants the ability to track processes and progression in all departments.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.

6. An atmosphere of “customer service” should be reiterated throughout the departments. Processing times should be shortened wherever possible and a primary focus of staff. Everyone should be working towards getting the job done right, as quickly as possible.

All parties have agreed this has improved with the help of new City Manager, Russ Blackburn and the changes he has instituted.

7. Staff should be working independently of City Council as required by the City’s Charter without fear of consequence. Council should work through the City Manager’s office when fielding questions and concerns raised by citizens and applicants. Otherwise the process encourages applicants and citizens to end-run established staff processes in an effort to seek “high priority” status by political means. This creates an atmosphere of second-guessing by staff resulting in paralysis in decision making further exasperating delays.

8. A position should be established within the city to help applicants navigate the various approval processes in order to better serve the public.

The Task Force’s, Terissa Aronson was extended an invitation to interview candidates for this position. One was chosen and is now employed with the city.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS CONT'D

9. Any changes to processes and forms should be publicly announced and efforts made to contact frequent providers and users of said forms and processes. These processes should take effect only on pre-determined dates to avoid constant changes to policies.
10. The Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) should serve as the project overview meeting and all departments should have representation at SPRC. The Surveyor and legal representation will be present when requested or otherwise deemed necessary.
11. All departments should return any comments to applicants no less than 5 days before the SPRC meeting. The SPRC meeting should maintain its 3 week scheduling process.
12. Each department should track the established time-lines within its department and by individual reviewer or preparer.

III. PLANNING AND ZONING

1. The Task Force recommends thresholds comparable to St. Lucie County thresholds for staff approval of projects be established.
 - A. Non-Residential site plan projects under 50,000 square feet should be approved by staff without moving on to council.
 - B. Residential site plans of 50 units or less should also be approved by staff without moving on to council.
2. Cul-de-sac length regulations should be eliminated or at the very least adjusted to 1,500 feet in length to avoid any further need for Planning and Zoning Board Approval.
3. Sufficiency Forms should no longer require the signatures of applicants or staff.
4. Pre-application fees should be credited toward any future application fees.
5. Dumpster size should be established or indicated by the waste provider and determined by use as well as state statutes.

IV. BUILDING DEPARTMENT

1. The Task Force recommends the department’s “customer service” continue as a priority for all staff, especially for those employees in the field.
 - A. Inspectors should be very specific and clear.
 - B. Failures not recognized at initial inspections then identified on subsequent visits often result in further project delays. This failure to identify should also result in consequences for inspectors. *Review proceedings recently instituted by the department should aide in the progress of this issue.*
2. A policy of communication should be established for staff and applicants. This policy should state concerns and questions from non-contractors be directed to the Business Navigator, not staff or Council.
3. A list of all “additional” permits that can be required should be available online with fees. This will allow applicants to better anticipate total cost and expectations.
4. A Compliance Review for interior build out should only be required for change in use.

V. UTILITIES DEPARTMENT

1. There should be an immediate allowance for the coring of manholes.
2. Station off-sets should not be required as part of the as-built plans. Instead the use of GPS coordinates to locate infrastructure should suffice.

Technology to accomplish this has been acquired on a limited basis by the city and is currently being tested.
3. Utilities should acquire the appropriate GPS locating equipment to establish agreeable locations of equipment at the time of inspection.

As of 6/2017 In Progress.
4. Options for all aspects, materials and equipment for utility projects must be established immediately. More than one supplier must be pre-approved and a supplier option from within the United States should be identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A review of all policies should be completed immediately. Some policies that may be considered for change include the following:
 - A. Valves within sidewalks.
 - B. Separation thresholds for utilities .
 - C. Pressurized lines under asphalt within a private road.
 - D. Size of right-of-ways.

VI. PUBLIC WORKS/ENGINEERING

1. We recommend the Survey reviewer be included in the SPRC review process and meetings. This is in an effort to avoid survey review being a separate process causing further time delays and potentially disclosing issues which could affect the site plan.
2. We understand the Public Works/Engineering Department is in the process of updating and publishing design standards that will be available online. We recommend these efforts be expedited. This will give applicants and staff clear and defined understanding of expectations. The Task Force would like to request the opportunity to review and provide comment before these changes are approved.

Task Force members have reviewed and this is in Progress as of 06/2017.

3. We recommend the Completeness Review be eliminated immediately.
4. We recommend a threshold for variances on the second access for Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) be established.

Further research to be done into the Fire District's role in this requirement.

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