

## **Recent Enhancements to the Leon County Building Permit Review and Approval Process**

During the recent economic downturn, Building Plans Review and Inspection Division staff initiated a comprehensive review of the County's presence on, as well as utilization of, the internet with the primary goal of expanding the utilization and integration of the internet into the County's building permitting process. As a result of the review, the following enhancements were identified and implemented:

- The majority of the County's building permit-related applications and forms were made available in interactive format on the Department of Development Support and Environmental Management's (DSEM) website.
- The County initiated the sunseting of telephone permitting which is predicated on the requirement that the applicant establish and maintain a non-interest bearing trust account with the County prior to requesting telephone permits. Telephone permitting is being phased out and being replaced with online credit card permitting utilizing the County's Velocity Hall software.

The County has also implemented Simplifile, an electronic recording program that provides the ability to record building permitting related documents with the Leon County Clerk of Courts from the DSEM office. This process enhancement allows for the recording of notice of commencements, notice of completions, and other legal documents remotely, resulting in a savings of time and money for the applicant, and also serves to expedite the review and approval of building permit applications. The implementation of the Simplifile process enhancement has been received extremely well by the building industry.

The most substantive enhancement over the past two years to the County's building permit submittal, review and approval process has been the implementation of ProjectDox. ProjectDox is an internet-based, electronic application review and document management program that has been utilized by DSEM for the past five years. Initially, ProjectDox was utilized by the County solely for site plan, subdivision, and environmental permit applications. In early 2014, based on process enhancements being realized by ProjectDox, specifically in reducing overall application review times associated with proposed developments, DSEM initiated a one year phase-in of ProjectDox for building permit applications. Prior to the initiation of implementation in early 2014, the County beta tested the software with several frequent users of the County's building permitting process, including two single family contractors and a pool contractor. The feedback from these preliminary tests was positive.

Full implementation of ProjectDox for all building permit application types (new homes, additions, non-residential, pools, etc.) was completed in February of 2015. During the implementation phase-in period, the County hosted two (2) "Lunch and Learn" sessions with representatives from the building industry to provide updates on ProjectDox implementation and instruction on the utilization of the software for the County's building permit submittal, review and approval process. Additionally, the County provided a presentation regarding ProjectDox at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Tallahassee Builders Association (TBA). Feedback from the building industry has been very supportive of the County's

implementation of ProjectDox as a building permitting enhancement tool. Also, the industry has provided the County with valuable feedback concerning the program, which has been utilized to further enhance the utilization of ProjectDox for the building permit application submittal, review and approval process.

Following is a summary of the building permit review and approval enhancements that have been realized based on the utilization of ProjectDox for the electronic submittal, review and approval of County building permit application requests.

- With the implementation of ProjectDox, County building permit applications can be submitted electronically which reduces applicant trips to the DSEM offices, thereby saving the applicant both time and money.
- The ProjectDox software provides the County the ability to review building permit applications both multi-directional and concurrent. This enhanced functionality allows building permit applications to be forwarded electronically to several review stations concurrently; thereby, reducing the overall review and approval time frames associated with building permit applications.
- Under the County's previous sequential building permit application review process, the average review and approval time frame for a new single family home averaged nine (9) business days. With the implementation of the County's ProjectDox electronic review and approval software, the average review and approval time for a new single family home have been reduced by a third to an average of six (6) business days.
- The County has also implemented an organizational change in the Building Plans Review and Inspection Division to effectively utilize the full capabilities of the ProjectDox electronic application submittal, review and approval software. This process enhancement includes the establishment and implementation of a Project Manager Model consistent with the other divisions at DSEM. The Project Manager's role is to assist the applicant with ProjectDox-related issues as well as other issues that may impact the timely review and approval of the applicant's building permit application. The feedback from this organizational enhancement had been positive.

Planned and ongoing activities by the County to further enhance the building plan application submittal, review and approval process include the following:

- Staff plans to host additional "Lunch and Learn" events with representatives from the building industry in order to provide updates on the implementation of ProjectDox, and to receive feedback and recommendations from the industry regarding procedural enhancements and process improvements.
- In conjunction with the County's Community and Media Relations Office, staff plans to produce a series of instructional YouTube videos covering the building permit application submittal, review and process. Once completed the ProjectDox instructional videos will be made available for viewing by the public via links on the DSEM website.