



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TRANSITION COMMITTEE PERMITTING

Date: Tuesday, August 8, 2023

Time: 1:30 p.m. 5:00 p.m.

City of Jacksonville Public Library-Main Library/Downtown  
303 North Main Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202  
Multipurpose Room (located in the Conference Center)

### **MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2023 – 1:30 P.M.**

**Location:** City of Jacksonville Public Library-Main Library/Downtown, 303 North Main Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202 - Multipurpose Room (located in the Conference Center)

**Economic Development Transition Committee Members Present:** Ed Randolph, Pat Gillum Sams, Allan Iosue, Monica Hernandez, Anna Lebesch, Dr. Carlton Robinson

**Economic Development Transition Committee Members Excused:** Tony Allegretti, Shannon Denson, E. Shawn Ashley and Jake Gordon

**Representing the Office of General Counsel:** John Sawyer

**OED Staff Present:** Ella Sherrod, Small Business Project Manager and Michelle Stephens, Executive Assistant

#### **CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME**

Mr. Ed Randolph, Committee Chair of the Economic Development Transition Committee Downtown Development called the meeting to order at approximately 1:34 p.m. A quorum was confirmed.

Mr. Randolph commented that we will hear from a cross section of stakeholders within our design, engineering and development communities as well as city staff. Mayor Deegan is very interested in improving the city permitting processes as it relates to different kinds of development and specifics such as the Certificate of Use (COU) procedures, which impact a lot of small business owners especially when in a critical stage of getting their businesses off the ground in their first brick and mortar locations. downtown ecosystem.

Mr. Randolph worked with individual members of the ED Transition Committee to help identify and assemble the professional experts needed to help explore the specific topics of interest put forth by Mayor Deegan.

- 1) Ed Randolph - Chair, Economic Development Transition Committee and ED Projects lead
- 2) Dr. Carlton Robinson - Chief Innovation Officer, JAX Bridges (Downtown Development Ladders lead)
- 3) Tony Allegretti - Entrepreneur/Past CEO of Jacksonville Cultural Council (Downtown Development lead)

- 4) Jake Gordon – CEO, Downtown Vision, Inc. (Downtown Development)
- 5) Allan Iosue - Director of Strategic Accounts, Haskell (Permitting lead)
- 6) Anna Lebesch - Senior Vice President of Strategy and Talent Development, JAXUSA (Talent Development lead)
- 7) Monica Hernandez - President, First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- 8) Shannon Denson - President, Jacksonville Black Chamber of Commerce
- 9) Pat Gillum Sams - Founder/CEO, The Sistah Covenant
- 10) E. Shawn Ashley - Broadline Distributor & 3rd Party Logistics Provider, EDC3

Around the table introductions were made by the Economic Development (ED) Transition Committee Members that were present.

### **PERMITTING INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Iosue commented that the city is at a momentous time in our evolution. There has been a lot more engine to Jacksonville in the past five years and with that the topic of permitting is an interesting and important one so we can continue to grow in the right way.

Subject Matter Experts included:

- Ellyn Cavin, Chief of Development Services, Planning & Development Dept.
- Josh Gideon, Chief of Building Inspection, Planning & Development Dept.
- Hugh Matthews, CEO England-Thims & Miller
- Curtis Hart, owner of Hart Resources LLC
- Steve Diebenow, Driver, McAfee, Hawthorne & Diebenow
- Council Member Arias, City Council District 11
- Bill Spinner, Licensed General Contractor and Developer
- Tamara Baker, Baker Design Build
- Erik Kasper, President and Principal Architect of Kasper Architects & Assoc.
- Nick Mousa, Assistant VP & Director of Civil Engineering, Community Infrastructure, Gai Consulting
- Jessie Spradley, Executive Officer, Northeast Florida Builders Association
- Austin Nicklas, Director of Governmental Affairs, Northeast Florida Builders Association
- Jeff Robbins, Vice President of Development, Related Group
- David Smith, President McKee Construction, LLC and past President of NAIOP Commercial Real Estate Development Association NE FL Chapter
- Kim Bryan, VP The Hutson Companies

### **COJ, Development Services Division of the Planning and Development Dept.**

Ms. Cavin provided an overview (PowerPoint Presentation attached) of the Development Services Division of the City of Jacksonville and encompasses four sections involved in regulation local and land development.

1. Addressing
2. Concurrency and Mobility Management System Office
3. Zoning
4. Review Group

Ms. Cavin advised that she matched some questions that are typical questions they hear on a daily basis. The PowerPoint Presentation includes the responses to each question.

1. Will my project require Civil Plan Review (formerly "10-set")?
2. How long will my review take?
3. Why is it taking so long for plat review?
4. Do I have to put in sidewalks?
5. Do I have to put in cross-access?

Recommendations:

1. Cohesive, integrated electronic permitting system which encompasses both building permits and civil plan review.
2. Increase and retain staff to allow for cross-training of critical disciplines. Salaries difficult to compete with the private sector.
3. Retention of staff. Salaries difficult to compete with private sector.
4. Customer service training for staff. Difficult and thankless job. Training would help both the public and city staff to be better equipped to handle certain situations.
5. Redesigned web-site featuring:
  - Streamlined design
  - Easy to find links to all relevant documents
  - User-friendly interface
  - Step-by-step interactive instructions for all submittals

### **COJ, Building Inspection Division**

Mr. Gideon provided an overview (PowerPoint Presentation attached) of the COJ Planning Inspection Division what they do, why they do what they do, challenges and successes and present potential solutions. The Inspection Division is the part of the Planning and Development Department that enforces the FL Building Code. They have a wide variety of staff and functions while their primary focus is the enforcement of the FL Building Code and the issuance of permits.

- Office personnel are the first line of contact people often make with the Inspection Division.
- Field Inspectors do not report to the office.
- Plans Examiners and Building Inspectors are licensed through the state of FL and are required to maintain state licensing every two years, they have to maintain training and certification through continuing education.

- In addition to the licenses they hold, 27 of the Planning Inspectors and Examiners maintain current contractor's licenses.

Challenges:

1. With increased resubmission (two-thirds of our plan review queue) how do we partner with the private sector to produce successful permit application packages?
  - Monthly Northeast FL Builders Association (NEFBA) Meetings
  - First Coast Chapter of the Building Official Association of FL
  - NEFBA-hosted Training Sessions (to come)
2. Additional Staff
  - Hard to compete with the private sector for candidates
3. Certificates of Use

Solutions:

1. Certificates of Use
  - Improve on the success of the Small Business Help Sessions and establish a Small Business Help Office
  - Provide small business specialist that will work alongside the emerging small business owners that may not be familiar with the many federal, state, and local requirements they may need to meet
2. JaxEPICS – A completely revamped permitting system designed to improve the user experience and reduce the time a permit is in the city's hands
3. Hire a national consulting services company with the experience in evaluating large building departments comparing what we do with other jurisdictions of the city's size. This would help to implement some processes that can make a better customer experience for our contractors and improve review times.

## **Economic Development Permitting – Architecture and Engineering**

Hugh Matthews with England-Thims & Miller introduced the team who worked together on the Architecture and Engineering presentation (attached); Tamara Bake, Baker with Baker Design Build; Erik Kasper, President and Principal Architect of Kasper Architects & Assoc.; and Nick Mousa, Assistant VP & Director of Civil Engineering, Community Infrastructure, Gai Consulting,

Mr. Hughes commented that the point that gets missed is the size of the city's system. He referenced that Ellyn and Josh talked about the number of plan reviews, certificate of use, certificates of occupancy, permits issued, etc. Based on population Jacksonville is the eleventh largest municipal government system in the country. Goal is to become the best system in the country.

Existing System:

- Currently seven processes that every project has to go through for a new build and if you are downtown, add the DIA process for seven processes one has to go through to get approval to build.

- He has grouped the seven into two - Vertical Improvements and Horizontal Improvements. These are science based very codified systems that we have to deal with some of them city ordinance and some of them national regulations, etc.
- The Current Planning, Community Planning, Transportation Planning, Concurrency and Mobility and DIA are planning functions that deal with local code, zoning ordinances, etc. and DIA.
- We have a technical section and a very planning section function all working in the same group.

Mr. Hughes introduced Nick Mousa with GAI who talked about what is and is not working and the current problems they experience as well as their clients with the system as it is today.

#### What is not working: City Processes

- Review times are 2x – 3x longer than it should compared to what they were accustomed to several years ago.
- Staffing shortages have resulted in a lack of technical knowledge or lack of technical support often results in a literal application of applying Code to the real world situation or looking at some other alternative that meets the intent of the Code but does not meet the literal definition in the Code.
- Lack of communication/Organizational Structure for Decision Making – There was a time when the scientific process of horizontal and vertical review was housed in Public Works. It is the consensus of the team that there be consideration moving those functions back into Public Works. Often times when you are going through the permitting process and there is a technical issue that needs a decision made on it from the city's perspective, the Planning Dept. has to defer to staff that are housed within the Public Works Dept. to make some of the decisions, yet the permitting process is through the Planning Dept. Aligning the two would go a long way to improving the overall process.
- The JaxEPICS system that sounds like it is in the process is coming to unite the horizontal and vertical. Great solution that should move forward as expeditiously as possible. – A Duplicative processes
- Outdated Land Development Procedures Manual
- Impact on CIP projects

#### What is not working: Consultant Perspective

- Too many incomplete submittals being made by consultants.
- Lack of responsiveness and thoroughness of resubmittals
- Lack of experience. Need more education for new consultants and/or developers.

Mr. Nick Mousa introduced Tamara Baker and Eric Kasper who provided additional feedback for improvement:

- City is available to meet with developers, etc. and review plans. Would prefer to have the same planner to review the plans from beginning to end.
- Develop a better check list/code review submittal. A standardized review template that everyone in the city uses that would provide an expedited or preferred status that would move projects through and easier for the reviewers.

#### Permitting Proposed Solutions:

1. Organizational restructure to move the scientific side of the permitting process back to Public Works (Building Permit Section and Civil Plan Review Section) and leave the planning functions with the Planning Dept. (zoning, current planning, community planning, transportation planning, and concurrency and mobility planning) and leave DIA with their current responsibilities.
2. Streamline Permitting Process - Hire a consultant to look at the system with the charge to take time out of the system
3. Application in-take process /sufficiency reviews. Submittals are not completed; drainage calculations are not submitted. You cannot review plans without drainage calculations. Gatekeeper to identify if a submission is complete and reject if it is an incomplete submission.
4. Permit Questionnaire – Verifying that you have taken into account certain things, completed certain things or have included certain things.
5. Evaluate Permitting thresholds/documentation. Look at the requirements based on the scale of the project. Larger projects need more documentation, more proof and the smaller ones could get through with one stop permitting.
6. Staffing issues, as previously mentioned.
7. Allow for “Approved as Noted” options
8. Process to allow more field changes without re-permitting of plans
9. Submittal grading system. Grade consultants on the quality of their plans and the quality of their submissions.

#### Most important recommendations:

1. Realignment of departments – Planning and Public Works
2. Hire an outside consultant that can objectively look at the current system.
3. Look at the Q-Team System used in Dallas, TX – Outstanding system

#### **Northeast FL Builders Association (NEFBA)**

- Mr. Curtis Hart, longtime NEFBA Member and Jessie Spradley, Executive Officer, Northeast Florida Builders Association provided an overview (PowerPoint Presentation attached) of ways to streamline the permitting process, improve outcomes, improving customer service and unnecessary roadblocks and suggestions.

#### **Streamline Permitting Process**

- Separate landscape review from building permit review
- Allow concurrent review for each office at the same time

- Issue site-clearing permit when 10-set (Civil Plan Review) is issued
- Have system automatically advance applications when each review is finished
- Make streetlight design part of 10-set and allow submission of designs for approval

### **Improving Outcomes/Customer Service**

- Allow return of in-person small plan review, host in-person, Prep-Con meetings with all departments present (including Fire)
- Work with the Fire Department to reduce delays in reviews
- Separate private-plan review. Separate infill review from master-planned communities
- Identify permit reviewer so applicants can discuss directly (agency review)

### **Unnecessary Roadblocks**

- Stop reviewing private provider permits
- Remove requirement for redundant site plans on master-planned community lots
- Repeated comments/rejections that are not applicable or part of Code
- Allow flexibility in reviews, including using photos and other technology

### **Other Suggestions**

- Add system to aggregate complaints or ombudsman
- Pay permitting-related staff higher wages to attract/keep employees
- Empower Planning Dept. to support projects it deems a community good
- Refocusing CPACs on original mission, training, term limits.

### **Economic Development Permitting – Developer Industry**

Steve Diebenow and Jeff Robbins provided feedback from the developer's perspective (PowerPoint Presentation attached)

- Lack of personnel causes delays in permitting process. Coordination of all parties is a lengthy and difficult process. Need quality control – quality assurance team
- Contractor Expertise. Having contractors and hiring the experts that have the expertise. Not enough local professionals in all of the major trades to bid on contracts that also have an understanding of local rules and regulations
- Labor for major trades, construction labor industry. Shorten the learning curve.
- Make city staff part of the process and not just part of the hurdle.
- Team effort Public/Private Partnerships

### **Economic Development Permitting – Small Business**

Mr. Bill Spinner and Council Member Arias provided feedback from their experience as small business owners.

### **Roadblocks:**

- Create a department for larger projects and smaller projects.
- Length of permitting process makes doing business in Jacksonville difficult and undesirable
- Option to pay for private plan review currently undermined by Building Department delays
- Renovations - It takes longer to pull the permit than it does to actually do the work
- Delays cause back up and disruptions in all phases of a project
- Under the table construction. Avoiding the permitting process prevents the city from adjusting property value and increasing property taxes accordingly
- Places disproportionate property tax burden on businesses that are undergoing the permitting process properly
- Onerous process generates unlicensed contracting creating unsafe buildings
- Impact on sales tax revenue – Delayed Certificate of Occupancy for new construction delays the collection of rent and sales tax paid on commercial rental income.

#### **Solutions:**

- Privatization is established, allow it to function.
- Welcome the private providers of plan review as teammates and not adversaries
- Privatization brings efficiency to the Building Department and streamlines their work
- If a private provider has approved a set of plans, there should be nearly immediate permit issuance (very short review process, 1-2 days or walkthrough service)
- More Customer service personnel to help small businesses navigate the Building Department
- Establish COJ Ombudsman to advocate for the construction business community
- Establish a public-private board that oversees the planning and building inspection division
- More training for BID personnel
- Tighten timelines significantly
- Educate small businesses

#### **Goal – Jacksonville should have the most efficient permitting process in Florida**

#### **Economic Development Permitting – Commercial Real Estate Industry**

Mr. Smith, provided from the commercial real estate perspective (PowerPoint Presentation attached)

#### **Concerns:**

- Length of time to process permits – Specifically civil and landscape and release to Building Dept.
- Agency Review Timing – Stated timeframe is two days, but reality is up to two weeks
- Private Review Timing – Initial review period of 20 days following Agency Review

#### **Recommendations:**



- Additional staff – The city needs more staff to process and review plans
- Outsource plan review to third parties and allow ability to issue permits
- Improved communication – The ability to meet in person would provide quicker results
- Shorter required timeframes – Approval of permits with holds. Private plan reviews should require less time (10 days versus 20 days)

Ms. Tamara Baker introduced Kim Bryan and provided a brief summary of recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

- Building Permit. Allow concurrent review of the building permit and 10-set – would speed up the process
- Revisions. Implement a field response process vs resubmittal of plans
- Permit time. Enhance the private provider process for plan review and inspectors
- Submit plans civil and building at the same time
- Provide the engineers, architects, etc. the tools that the city wants to make the permitting processed easier and faster.
- A board to review civil projects that don't necessarily fit into the plan o help with out of the box issues that don't often fit anywhere

**V. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- Oren Mishael – Business Development Executive with Accela in hopes of being a resource for the city's permitting, licensing and Code Enforcement needs.
- Don Fort - retired building official. Bring back the one day inspection process for small remodeling projects.
- Jack Shad – Prepared white paper attached.
- Tom Goldsbury – They had Q team years back. Noted that if you pull the reviewers into meetings is time they cannot be reviewing other plans. City has grown and staffing needs to grow and be competitive with the market.
- Dan Arlington – Thanked the agencies present today.

**VI. APPROVAL OF THE ED TRANSITION COMMITTEE JULY 20, 2023 SMALL BUSINESS LADDERS MEETING MINUTES.**

The Economic Development Transition Committee approved the July 20, 2023 Small Business Ladders Meeting Minutes unanimously 6-0.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Mr. Randolph adjourned the Economic Development Transition Committee Downtown Development meeting at approximately 4:19 p.m.

The written minutes for this meeting are only an overview of what was discussed. For verbatim comments of this meeting, an audio file of the meeting is available in its entirety upon request. Please contact Michelle Stephens at (904) 255-5452, or by email at [msteph@coj.net](mailto:msteph@coj.net).