



**A CITY OF MOBILE
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SERVING OUR CUSTOMERS - WHERE WE ARE GOING ?

By Christopher L. Lee, Executive Director of Administrative Services

In 2003 the City of Mobile continued its emphasis on delivering quality customer service by not only measuring and reducing the amount of time required to issue permits, but also by analyzing the root causes of plan review failures. We carefully examined the steps in the permitting process in order to determine the points experiencing high failure rates. For example, we wanted to know why there was a high failure rate on Building Plan Reviews in comparison to other reviews. We then focused on communication with core groups to disseminate the information that would help resolve areas of confusion. We clearly understand that time is money and we want to ensure the success of our customers.

We have reduced the average days passed between the time application is made and reviews performed from 28 days in 2002 to 5 days in 2003. Our failure rates in problem areas are being reduced but there is still room for improvement. It will require a joint effort between the City of Mobile and the development community to clear up areas of ambiguity and further streamline the process. Technology provides us with the tools to measure ourselves and install performance metrics but we firmly believe that personal communication is essential in accomplishing our mission.

Where are we going? The establishment of the Technical Review Committee to review our processes and conduct meetings at the front end of major projects was an experiment. Based on the positive feedback we have received, it will now be the new stan-

dard. We have raised the bar considerably in key areas of service. We will continue to emphasize customer service training with our front line employees, both in the field and behind the counter. We are looking at ways to reduce the number of phone calls the staff receives from our own field personnel by expanding the use of wireless devices. These laptops allow inspectors to access data that was still being verified via phone calls to the office. Our challenge is refining the business argument for the purchase of this equipment.

We will continue to expand the on line services available through our web site, www.cityofmobile.org. In 2004 we will have the security in place to accept on line credit card payments for a number of transactions, further saving our customers a trip to City Hall. Even with the increased use of technology, we will not lose our focus on the core responsibility of performing our regulatory mission. However, we will continue to enhance customer service and the way in which we deliver value to our customers.

Technology allows us to conduct business 24/7 in certain areas. We are well aware that we are competing for investment dollars and we are committed to making the City of Mobile the fastest and friendliest place to do business. That is our promise and our goal. It has been said that a vision without data is a hallucination, so we will rigorously measure ourselves to ensure progress.

NEWS BRIEF

PRESSURE TREATED WOOD ALTERNATIVES

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Wood Industry mutually consented to stop the use of pressure treated wood that contained arsenic by December 31, 2003. It was agreed that alternative pressure treated wood be used in practically all of the residential uses (play structures, decks, picnic tables, landscaping timbers, fencing, patios, walkways, boardwalks, etc.) where wood is treated with an arsenic preservative such as Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA). The EPA has not concluded that wood treated with CCA poses unreasonable risks to the public and does not believe there is a reason to remove or replace existing installations.

The agreement stipulated that, by January 2004, no wood treated with CCA will be allowed for residential use. Alternatives will be woods treated with non-arsenic preservatives such as Copper Boron Azole (CBA), Alkaline Copper Quaternary (ACQ), and Sodium Borax (SBX). Some construction industry suppliers and contractors anticipate an increase in the cost of materials—both for the wood as well as fasteners and connectors. For more information, please visit www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizen.

For submissions or suggestions, e-mail us at permitgram@cityofmobile.org

DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Somerby of West Mobile

The Daniels Corporation, a developer that is located in Birmingham, Alabama, has purchased 40 acres of property in West Mobile off Girby and Cody Roads. Their plans are to develop a \$35 million gated senior residential community that will include 56 garden homes, 136 independent living apartments, 16 independent villas, 20 assisted living apartments and 24 Alzheimer care apartments.

Other amenities will include fitness, recreational, social and dining facilities. Their concept is to make it attractive for more seniors to remain in the area and not relocate other states.

The architect for the development is Thompson, Hancock, Witte & Assoc., Inc. of Atlanta and the general contractor is Brasfield & Gorrie of Birmingham. Some of the garden homes are scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2004 while the community amenities will open in the spring of 2005. JBL Homes in Mobile will build the garden homes that will range from 1,500 square feet to 2,500 square feet.

The Daniel Corporation has developed similar senior residential communities in Birmingham and Huntsville. The Retirement Systems of Alabama financed these 2 developments and are in negotiation with the Daniel Corporation to fund Somerby of West Mobile.

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PLAN REVIEW APPROVALS—DEC 2003

TYPE	BUILDING	MECHANICAL	ELECTRICAL	PLUMBING	LAND USE	ENGINEERING	FIRE RESCUE	FORESTRY	RIGHT-OF-WAY	TRAFFIC	HISTORIC
# OF PLAN REVIEWS	42	30	38	28	44	9	36	27	72	17	1
AVERAGE DAYS	5	5	4	5	2	11	6	6	4	7	1
# PASSED	31	21	20	22	34	4	11	16	71	17	1
% PASSED	74	70	53	79	77	44	31	59	99	99	99

FLOOD PLAIN CORNER

Areas below the minimum finished floor elevation (MFFE) may be enclosed as long as they are used for only limited storage, parking of vehicles and access to the building. Any other use, including a small bathroom, workshop, utility room or extra bedroom, is a violation of the ordinance. If not designed and constructed in accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) standards, this enclosed floor area becomes the lowest floor for insurance purposes and will result in high insurance rates.

Label

TYD-BYTS FOR PERMITTING

Effective March 1, 2004, any General Contractor making application to Urban Development for a commercial permit shall submit a list of subcontractors within 15 days of issuance of permits. The form will be available in Central Permitting and must be completely filled out. Where no work is to be performed on the job, the item shall be marked *not applicable*. The General Contractor, prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, shall furnish both an updated subcontractors list and contract amount that will be forwarded to the Revenue Department. For any questions, please call 251.208.7601.