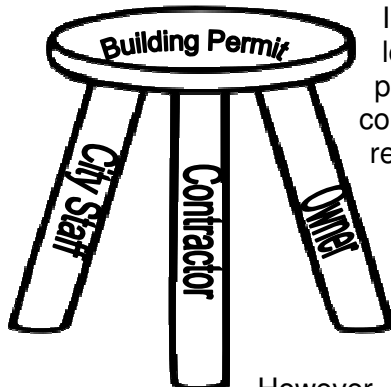


The Building Permit: A Balancing Act

By Heidi Shafran, AICP, City of Wilton Manors Director of Community Development Services



I firmly believe that a building permit is the proverbial three-legged stool. The three legs that make up the building permit stool are: the City Staff, the property owner and contractor/service provider. We each have an equal responsibility in the process of getting a building permit issued.

I am committed to enhance the level of services we provide. We are continuously modernizing and improving our internal operations and communications in order to meet the expectations of our customers.

However, almost on a daily basis the staff in the Community Development Services Department runs into a reoccurring theme...permits submitted by service providers or contractors that do not meet code. This puts us in the uncomfortable position of having to reject the permit application simply because it is not to the existing Zoning or Building Code. Unfortunately, many times this is at the last minute when a business is ready to open or after many weeks delay on the contractor's part in submitting the permit. Frustration abounds!

A lot of this frustration can be avoided if your service provider had called the City to confirm what is allowed by Code. The old saying about assumptions applies to zoning and building codes too. Just because another property has a certain type of sign or a fence, for example, does not mean that it is allowed today by Code.

I can not stress enough: *Always err on the side of caution and check the Code instead of assuming the Code allows a certain type of work.*

Additionally, I have begun advising business owners and homeowners to not sign a contract for work until they have confirmed their contractor has reviewed the City Code. I would suggest going as far as requiring the contractor to include the appropriate Code section as an attachment to the contract.

A related issue we see often is that service providers sometimes do not finalize their permits with our department by calling in their final inspection. This leaves the permit "open" and becomes the problem of the homeowner or next homeowner in the future when they want to do more work to their property. An open/expired permit will also result in extra fees being assessed. My advice is to request a copy of the permit card where the "final inspection" is documented before you pay your last payment to your service provider. This is something that should also be indicated in your contract – *final payment at the time of a passed final inspection and not at the completion of work.* Ultimately, as the business owner and/or property owner you are responsible for the work done on your property.

I am confident that if everyone does their part building and during the building permit process we will, together, achieve the balance and efficiency we are all striving for.

For Zoning and Building Code questions please call (954) 390-2180 or visit us at City Hall on the second floor.