

County Building Permit Slowdown Is Coming

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

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The workload on county building inspectors—which allowed an average of only 11.5 minutes per inspection in 1977—could slow the home building permit process from two weeks to as much as six weeks, according to a directive issued by county supervisors Tuesday afternoon.

"The building code is to be enforced," Supervisors' Chairman Ed Borovatz told county Community Resource Agency Director Henry Baker, adding, "and I know it is totally impossible for 100 people (11 of them inspectors) to do the work your department has been directed to do."

Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, a strong property rights advocate, agreed with Borovatz that the primary responsibility of the 11-man inspection team is to enforce the codes, and if necessary, at the cost of extending time for building permit issuance.

She urged, however, that "permits in process" not be slowed which would cause scheduling difficulties between contractors and subcontractors. Borovatz said he knew he was taking "an unpopular political position" in stating that either the public support more inspection service personnel, or accept delays so that quality inspections can be done, "but permits must be enforced and adhered to."

Supervisor Gary Patton gave strong support, commenting, "There is a firestorm of people wanting permits and county taxpayers are not willing to provide staff people to fuel that firestorm." He and Borovatz agreed the public had a right to rely on county inspections.

According to a progress report from the CRA formerly the county planning, parks and watershed departments — demands on inspections have been increased both by the numbers of requests and the need to enforce new county ordinances.

Tuesday, the board heard a request for an three additional employees—two inspectors and a clerk—to enforce the county's amended grading ordinance.

While the board agreed to the staffing on a 3-2 vote, the resistance of Supervisors Liddicoat and Cecil Smith prevented the funding of the positions from the county contingency fund—a funding that requires a support of four members (see story Page 3).

Planners told the board that under the existing workload, the department was able to provide "marginal" inspections for foundation work, framing and the final inspection.

However, when the workload was the greatest, inspectors were unable to inspect masonry work, roof covering and insulation, Inspection Services Director Phil Sanfilippo said.

Staff recommended that inspectors in the field do an optimum 14 inspections a day, noting that during 1977 there were an average of 22 inspections.

In a chart based on 1976 figures, when 18.2 inspections were required per inspector a day, the average time spent at the building site per inspection

was 13.9 minutes. Based on 1977 figures of 22 inspections a day, that would allow 11.5 minutes per inspection.

Staff computed the 1976 work day was divided into 90 minutes office time, 30 minutes coffee breaks, 106.8 minutes on the road to drive 53.4 miles, and 253 minutes left for inspections.

At 14 inspections a day, it would allow inspectors to be at the building site an average 18.1 minutes.

The inspections staff has 11 field inspectors and 13 persons in-house to handle issuance of permits. The latter number includes the department chief, counter workers, clerical workers, plan checkers, grading inspectors, timber harvest forester, the abandoned vehicle abatement officer and zoning violation workers (2).

Consideration of re-assigning personnel from other planning tasks to inspections was nil, as the agency's report pointed out the tasks on the shoulders of other planners included the following:

Revision and completion of the county general plan that is mandated by the state, restructuring the permit process, revision of the county conservation and development code, reorganization of the department, completion of the coastal program (mandated by the state), the growth management program, and the Live Oak area general plan. Also, the department has the task of processing the timberland preserve zoning list of more than 1,000 parcels, a task that is requiring four planning commission meetings and two or more county board meetings.

Timberland preserve was also a state mandate.

Borovatz said, "The board does not provide staff and the

workload increases—it's impossible for 100 people (total in planning) to do all this work.

"If we have to reduce the volume of permits to meet standards, it's most appropriate for the board to direct the county administrative officer and director of CRA to reduce the volume if necessary."

He recommended the load be at 14 inspections per day.

"The permit issuance time is now approximately two weeks and if we don't want to pay

more and people have to wait six weeks, then they can tell the board," Borovatz said.

He told Baker that his department should not react to the "political" ramifications of delaying permits to allow inspections, "but leave the politics up to the board."

Supervisor Phil Baldwin also gave strong support to allowing more time for inspections, and also urged the planning staff to meet with reporters and editors—"those who write the headlines," Baldwin said—to explain that the planning report documented that the staff was overloaded with work "and not goofing off."

Liddicoat placed part of the problem at the doorstep of her more ecologically-minded colleagues, telling them they

shouldn't burden staff with having to enforce such ordinances as those that protect "salamanders and tarweed."

Supervisor Cecil Smith called for a "reasonable" approach to the problem and less "speechmaking."

The board unanimously directed Baker to take such steps as were necessary—including the possible delay of permits to allow inspections—during the next two weeks to give the board time to review the planning report.



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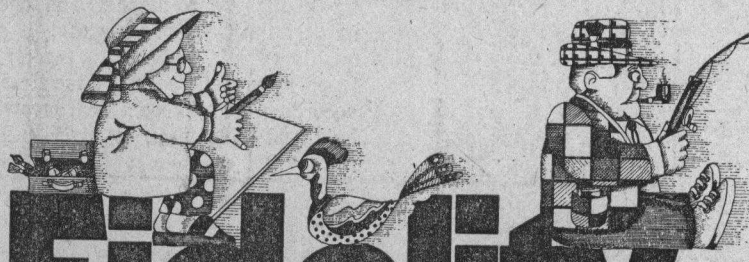
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